Blood and Cross

by nishiki

Summary

»When he was four, white men came and burnt down his village. When he was thirteen it burnt again. When it happened, Ratonhnhaké:ton should have been far away already, following the symbol the Spirit had showed him just like his childhood friend had done before him, but he hadn't.«

Slavery AU / Templar Connor AU – After Washington burned down Ratonhnhaké:ton's village, he is forced to stay as one of Washington's many slaves. This is the story of how Ratonhnhaké:ton truly becomes Connor Kenway, fighting against Washington's aim for greatness and leadership. Meanwhile Charles Lee is faced with his own bad consciousness catching up with him for the first time in his life and wonders if he will ever be able to regain the trust he had lost as Haytham Kenway learns the truth about Lee's visit at the Kanien'kehá:ka village all those years ago.

Notes
Please Keep in mind that I do not want to offend anyone with this piece, I just felt tempted to write something like this and I will do my best to do my research as best I can for this topic. Other than this: I will probably Need some help with this so feel free to be critical as fuck
The nights were the worst. Maybe others would say it was the days, but to him, it was the nights most definitely and without a single hint of a doubt. His days were shaped by hard and exhausting labor under the hot burning sun, either plucking the fields or doing all the uncomfortable chores the fine masters were not willing to get their hands onto. The fear of being whipped or beaten again for pausing just a second - if pausing at all that was – was his constant companion, though there was not much to fear for him now anymore, he guessed. He already experienced every pain possible in the world, as it seemed to him now. His days were going by in a constant rush and blur of pain and hard work - though rushing they were not sadly, although sometimes it felt that way. They were working from sunrise to sunset (from can see to can't see, as one black woman once said as he was introduced to this new life of his). It seemed yesterday he had been but a child running around the woods around the village he had been born in, accompanied by his friends and the nature he loved so much, but this morning he awoke a young man, strong in build though not nearly as strong as the men around him in the sleeping quarters.

But no matter how bad his days got, no matter how much he was being yelled at for no particular reason or how many times the overseers lashed out on him during the days, the nights, yes, they definitely were the worst part of everything he needed to endure in his day to day routine. When darkness fell upon the plantation, the screams would start and the screams would then soon be followed by crying and sobbing, while Ratonhnhaké:ton mostly tried to curl into himself and ignore the gnawing feeling as his stomach tried to devour itself in hunger, fearing for the things that might happen in the darkness around him, hoping another person would fall prey to the overseers this time.

Hunger. That was only yet another thing shaping his life by now. When he had been a child he had never quite feared hunger. There had been bad days, of course, bad weeks even for the hunters and fishers of their village, but they never needed honestly worry to fill their bellies. Nature had provided for them just enough to keep them strong and help to raise the kids in the village so they would provide for their elders again once their time would come. They had only ever taken so much from nature as they needed to live and gave back to nature whatever they could in exchange. Since he arrived at this place, however, the only thought that was constantly consummating his mind was about food and when winter would hit, he would think about a warm fire to keep his frozen limbs alive.

But even that was not the worst part of the hell he had fallen into. It was the darkness and the feeling of having no power at all. Lying on the ground on a small patch of hay for at least some kind of warmth and comfort, chained up to a wall with shackles and chains as if they all were but dangerous animals - not that one of them would find the strength to leave this place on their own anyway. Of course, every now and again people tried to leave, but they all came back eventually. Last week a young woman had been dragged back onto the land through the large Iron Gate door at the back were the fields started. She had been highly pregnant, maybe from the Master of the house – more probably from one of the overseers (Who could tell anyway? It would not be the first time that something like this happened). She had escaped a few days prior and when she had been dragged back onto the land her feverish screams had ripped the frame of day to day life apart brutally. None of them had batted a lash when she had been beaten in front of the back porch of the house.

When something like this would happen Ratonhnhaké:ton tried to avert his looks. He really did.
This was what all the others would do after all. They all looked away when one of them would be beaten to death or punished in any way. He could not blame them, really. The urge of wanting to help others had gotten him into this situation in the first place after all. One might think people like them would bond over their shared torment and start maybe even forming some kind of family in those awful times they were forced to live in, but that was not the case. They all just wanted to survive somehow and they did not care for the others around them. Caring was a luxury they did not have. Most of the people around him only cared for their families, but did not even know were those families were now or if they were still existing. Ratonhnhakéton was the same way. He did not know what had happened to his people. He was all alone in this nightmare and the day it had all started was still fresh in his mind.

His mother had not long been dead when it all started, though other might judge his feeling for the time that had passed as being odd. It had been a few years already to be precise, but not nearly enough to forget or for the pain to dull slowly. Maybe it would never be enough time.
April 1769

He was destined to do something meaningful with his life. He was destined to be great even. He was destined to lead, destined to make important decisions, destined to build something up that would influence the course of the world. That was what he had been told all his life, by his mother, by his grandmother, and by the ghost. Yes, this... ghost, this woman or whatever she was. She had told him what he needed to do, had shown him his path in this... vision, but he still had a hard time understanding it, sitting by the riverside on the small stones and twigs the river had taken with it during the last storm a few days ago. He still felt his wings flapping, taking him wherever he wanted to go so easily as if it would not even cost them the tiniest bit of effort. But he had no wings to carry him where ever he wanted to go, nor did he know where he wanted to go in the first place. He wanted to stay, yet he wanted to fly away.

With a small stick, he slowly scratched the symbol she, the ghost, had shown him into the dirt of the riverbank and stared at it for a while. He still did not understand. Even hours later, he could not make logic out of her words or this vision at all. Others before him had been shown their path by this ghost, he knew that. He had heard them talk about it in the past, even his best friend Kanen'tó:kon had already been shown his path a few weeks ago. He had left right afterward, not saying goodbye to him, following suit what the vision had told him to do, but even though the ghost's instructions seemed to be easy, for Ratonhnhaké:ton it suddenly was too hard to even think about. He was only thirteen years old and though the others saw him as a man already, saw him as one of them already, he did not feel like it. Sure, he had already gotten to know the bitterness life brings with it the same way as the river would bring twigs and leaves with it, but yet he felt so deeply rooted to this piece of land he could not fathom going away for who knows how long – if he would come back home at all. What if his village would fall under attack again? What if he would not be there to help the next time something like this happened?

He still felt the hands of this man around his neck when he closed his eyes and tried not to think about it. He still heard his vicious words, the venom dripping from his every word. He still could smell the scent of burning flesh and hair as his mother had died in the flames, yelling for him to go, panicked he would not be safe if she would not be around to protect him from the world and more importantly the other humans.

»Ratonhnhaké:ton! Where did you see that symbol?« The voice was familiar and he did not even flinch as he so suddenly was interrupted in his thoughts. He had not heard his grandmother approaching him, even though he would like to state he had, for a good hunter would never let himself get surprised like this, he supposed. Maybe somewhere in the back of his mind, he had heard her, but not bothered to send the signal to the rest of his brain, because she was no threat. Now he slowly turned to look over his left shoulders to where she was slowly approaching him but kept seated cross-legged on the river bank. His grandmother was small and older than he could even imagine. He could not think of a time in his still so very young life when she had looked any different from now. Her face had always been shaped by deep wrinkles and dark age spots here and there. With one hand she was holding her stick to rest her weight on and under the other arm she had a mat made out of leather.

»The spirit showed it to me.« He slowly began to form an answer, even though he still was not quite certain what to make of that symbol. Kanen'tó:kon had followed a symbol too and now he was gone and would not come back perhaps. »She said I would meet a man who would show me the way forward.« Finally, he let the small stick fall to the ground again and huffed in annoyance.
The men from beyond the valley will return here. I've known it for a long time now. And so have you, even if you chose to ignore it.

We are sworn to protect this place. His grandmother replied with a grim look on her face, but then she nodded and the grim look she had shortly shot him, was replaced with a little twinkle in her dark brown eyes. But you are right as well. The world is changing and we cannot hide forever.

I will not sit here and wait for our end. He did not want to go either. He did not know where to start his search for this symbol or where it would lead him if he did, but as far as he was concerned this was something he could decide against, right? But the ghost had shown him what would happen then and how in the world could he ever let this happen to his people?

His grandmother's next words took him not only by surprise but made his heart ache. Then I release you. You may leave.

For as long as he could remember he wanted nothing more than to be free to go wherever he wanted to go, free to fly like the eagle in his vision, but since he was born into this tribe, he was bound to its rules, bound to the clan mother and bound to her decisions what was going to happen with him and his life. His mother had once decided to roam free through the world and it had almost cost her the support of her tribe. He had argued a lot with her after his mother's death, wanting to go, maybe to search for his father even, but she would never let him go, but rather clash with him again and again. Why have you changed your mind?

Because I cannot change yours. She snickered, before she carefully handed him the leather mat, neatly rolled up for traveling. Take this. You will find what you seek to the west, near Boston. I saw a man borne that symbol who will surely help you, as he once helped your mother. There was a certain sense of pain in her eyes truly, but for now, he was not able to tell if it was the pain of remembering the loss of her daughter or if it was maybe even the pain of losing her grandson to a greater course, maybe never coming back home again. Oiá:ner, his grandmother, the clan mother, was a woman who had born many children, many of them who had already died, many of them who had been slaughtered the last time the village had been burnt by the white men. Ratonhnhaké:ton was her only remaining grandchild.

Thank you. He muttered as he slowly rose to his feet and took the mat from her and for this moment he wished he had never argued with her in the first place. He wished he would have never had the yearning for freedom, but rather stayed here with his people as he should. He had seen what the white men were capable of and it scared him. What world was he about to dive into? Boston was far away and he had never left the frontier in his life.

Yours is a noble heart. But I fear you expect too much. Go. Seek your symbol. Find your way. With that she nodded one last time in his direction, before she turned and made her way back to the village, resting her weight on the thick stick she used for walking and a sign for her status as a clan mother, like her mother had been before her and what her daughter should have become one day. There were no words of farewell, no kisses or hugs because they were both not that kind of person, nor had his mother been. And so he was being left alone at the riverbank. Alone, to start his journey into the unknown.

Get up! A voice barked disrupting the tranquility of his slumber suddenly and without so much of a warning or foreshadowing. Then a kick to his left leg, jolting him awake for good this time after only the voice had apparently not sufficed. I said get up, dirty fucking half-breed! Ratonhnhaké:ton grunted, but rose to his feet anyway slowly in the face of the overseer sneering at
him, looking him up and down like some kind of freak animal. Resisting would make everything just worse and he had no spark left to resist anyway. The chain binding him to his spot on the ground was already off and he was glad it was. Usually, he woke up when the other would awake as soon as the sun would start to rise and the roosters would start to crow nearby walking over the fields like the place would belong to them. His left ankle was swollen and red from the rusty metal biting into his skin every night, as he stared down to his naked feet and calves, slowly walking out of the shack he called his home for three years now, not knowing any longer what home used to mean, for home was gone, dead and burned to ashes for a long time now.

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He only rarely ever used the paths leading through the wide stretch of land and forest that was the frontier, as the white men called it. Normally, when he would leave the valley in secret he would stick to the tree line, maybe even run across branches and stones, feeling every muscle in his body work. However now he fathomed it would be wiser to stick to the paths the people used with their wagons and horses. He had seen a few of them in the past, when he had lounged atop a tree and just dwelled in watching the world around him, like everything was just fine and as if those people would not be thieves taking away their freedom and land with their little settlements, not considering the native folks like his tribe. He knew the general direction in which Boston was supposed to be, but since he had never been there, he wanted to follow the paths and the signs along the way. He was still cautious of meeting strangers, cautious of the white folks wandering about their little communities along the paths, such as Concorde and Lexington. He was not afraid of them of course – just cautious, for he did not want to cause any problems before he even got to Boston.

Ratonhnhaké:ton had not yet left the valley when he was startled by loud noises. Birds were the first ones to quickly flee their trees and fly past the thick roof of dark green leaves above his head and a few rabbits were quickly rushing past him, hiding beneath the underwood, while Ratonhnhaké:ton froze in horror instead of following his gut instinct and mirror those animals behavior. He knew that sound. He had heard it before. It was the sound of gunfire, blown from muskets and rifles tearing apart the serenity of the forest and the valley his people were protecting for generations. For a second he did not know what to do. He knew where the shooting came from and when it repeated he felt his guts clench.

The ghost had told him the white men would come back and maybe Oiá:ner had known already that this was true. Maybe that was why she sent him away so abruptly, maybe that was why she decided that today would be the right moment to let him have a look at this … thing. She had told him to go and he should obey her command. She had set him free and he should spread his wings and fly to Boston, but when he heard the screams echo through the woods, he spun around and ran back from where he came.

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They were building an extension to the main house, out near the fields. A week ago they had started building the foundation. It would not be as big as he had expected when they started, but it would have a pretty spacious basement and would be two stories high when they were finished. It would not be as luxurious and comfortable as the main house, but it would be enough to give the illusion of caring enough for one's servants. Servants, not slaves. That was a fine differentiation only white noblemen were able to make while they were chaining their servants up at night, whipping them at day time whenever they saw fit.

A young girl had told him now everything would get better. The Master let the men build this house for them servants and then they would not need worry anymore like they did now, for they
would have a decent place to sleep at night. Ratonhnhakéton on the other hand knew that it would never get better and that this house he was building with his own two hands, was just a fancy illusion for the Master's noble friends to show them what a good person he was, after all, the Master was strongly condemning slavery whenever he was talking in public.

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He was just a boy and he had nothing but his bow and his hunting knife when he slowly approached the village from the forest. The gunfire had stopped, but the closer he got to the village the louder the voices inside grew and he knew that it was not over yet. There were only two ways to enter their village. He could go through the main gate a few feet away or he could try and sneak in near the lake, but either way he would be spotted immediately and then he would die. He was not as naïve as to think those men – whoever it was – would not open fire at him immediately when they would saw him. He was a skilled fighter for sure, at least for their standards. He had never had the need for fighting in his life really, but he could protect himself from danger if he deemed necessary. He was a good shot and he knew how to wield his knife – but he was a hunter, not a warrior. He was too skinny, too short, too young really to be anything but a hunter for his tribe and though the others were appreciating him for his skills, some even admiring him, he was not a warrior. He could not help them if it would come to a fight between him and – well, how many men were there? Was it possible that his people might have won against them?

The white men were cowards, of course. When they decided to raid a place such as this one, they always came in large groups. He had already heard stories from other tribes and now he was here, near the gates of his home and he did not know what to do. What would his mother do? Would she run into battle without thinking twice? Would she have felt as afraid and weak as he suddenly felt? Suddenly he was being reminded once again on the day his mother had died. He thought about that group of mean attacking a four-year-old boy all by himself in the woods, knocking a four-year-old boy unconscious with the butt of a rifle, choking a four-year-old boy until his head was spinning and then leaving him there all alone with dangerous animals all around. That was how white men were. That was why they were not allowed to leave the valley. Not to imprison them, but to protect them from those cruel and cowardly people. For the white folks, they were like animals. They could not understand the way they were living out here. They could not understand their culture and since they found themselves to be the more evolved ones, maybe it was only naturally they treated them so poorly.

Maybe if the world would be different, then he would be able to understand. But now they were the animals and there were hunters all around and he had never been more afraid as in the moment he carefully crept closer towards the gate, not knowing what was waiting for him beyond the palisade fence. To his surprise, there were no guards keeping watch right at the entrance to the village, maybe because they were too arrogant to think of an outside threat. He was able to sneak in and hide behind a bush immediately. There were a few men rummaging their longhouses. It seemed they were searching for something and Ratonhnhakéton did not know what it could be they were hoping to find in this village other than animal skins and food. They were the ones worshipping the golden coin, not them. It was hard to really make out how many of them there were, but from his position he could see at least five men entering and leaving the longhouses. Around the center of their village where their big bonfire normally was set up and where most women liked to sit and accompany each other during their days and chores, he could spot the other villagers. They had been penned up near the fireplace and the large pot they had used to cook water in was lying somewhere near the shore. The fire was out now and his people, his family, was surrounded by soldiers pointing guns at them. But if those men had hoped to find the women crying, they would leave this place disappointed.

He could not spot Oiá:ner and he could not spot a few of the older men. There was still a bit of
The Master treated his servants like animals. The Master was a great man, but then again, every slave owner was in the eyes of the good citizens a great man. He could not blame those people, though. Surely they were seeing a whole other person than they did. Surely they were only ever shown the great leader and military genius the Master so desperately wanted to be and show off to the world, however every time he would be cut off in his career they - his servants - were the ones to get to see his true self, the monster lying and lurking beneath the pale skin. Ratonhnhaké:ton was one of the people the Master liked to punish especially hard. Maybe it was because he was the only one of his kind on this plantation, at least that was what he had first thought when everything had started. By now he knew the truth and the truth was sickening him to the very core.

»Half-breed!« A gruff voice barked again. It was not the first time. In fact, he was called all kinds of racial slurs and same was true for all the other people around him too. They were no human beings. They were Niggers, half-breeds, bastards, Apes, Redskin, Brownies. They were the dirt under the Master's shoes, no more, no less. A few years ago he would never have let those thoughts get to him or accept them as truth. Now … Now he was not so sure anymore. Three years had gone by in a blink, only signalized by the coming and going of seasons and the festivities in the big house when the servants would get cleaned and dolled up to serve during the various parties, being forced to smile and act as if they were being treated well. Ratonhnhaké:ton had been one of those servants the Master liked to show off, but there were certain occasions he would decidedly not order him to serve.

Ratonhnhaké:ton turned around slowly, taking care that he would not injure himself with the wooden panel he was holding for one of the other slaves. In the beginning, he had ignored those slurs and names he was called and rather corrected them about his real name as politely as he could because one of his kind was not supposed to talk back like this to a white person.

»Master wants to see you to lick his boots again.«

Ratonhnhaké:ton regained consciousness slowly, wondering why his chest felt so tight and why it was so hard to breathe all of the sudden. His vision was blurred as he forced open his eyes slowly and tried to get his spinning head under control again. There was smoke burning in his nose and the horrible smell of burnt hay and human hair – at least this was the first thing that came to his dull brain reliving the horrible day his mother had been killed once again, forever imprinted in the back of his mind.

It took him a moment after he had managed to open his eyes to see what was happening around
him. The longhouses were burning, women were screaming as the men and the children were being slaughtered. He saw little kids running panicked towards the shore or the gates or cowering behind their mothers only to be shot and beaten while their mothers or sisters were begging helplessly and behind a thick veil of tears for their lives or to be killed instead.

Some of them were. Some of them were dragged away from the others. Some of them were pushed to the ground, beaten and spit on. The world around him was red and orange and yellow and smelled of sulfur and agony. Ratonhnhaké:ton was lying on his side near the fire pit. His hands were bound behind his back so he would not be able to put of a fight. His head was screaming in pain and throbbing brutally. Black spots were already forming at the edges of his field of vision again, but he forced himself to try to sit up and have a look around. It took him a few trials to succeed and when he did he wished he had not. It was not only the sudden rush of dizziness overwhelming him, but the full extent of the horrors he was confronted with.

His village was gone, this time for real. There was no way they would be able to rebuild what had been lost because this time no one would be left to rebuild. Most of their warriors lay dead in the dirt, slaughtered like animals by the soldiers. He spotted a few dead soldiers as well, but their warriors had been horribly outnumbered. He saw a small bundle being thrown into the flames of one of the long houses followed by the agonizing screech of a woman who was held with a hand twisted in her hair at the ground and he refused to think about what the bundle had been before the flames swallowed it whole. He noticed that there was only a handful other kids left behind sitting around him, all around his age, not older than fourteen at best. A few girls were sitting huddled together crying and sobbing, their parents were probably gone and their blood on their clothes. One of the girls had her dress ripped and her skin showing, so he averted his eyes quickly. Except him, there were only three other young boys left. They were one to two years younger than Connor and all of them were tied up, one of them crying and sobbing silently, just like the women the soldiers had spared.

He could not see his grandmother yet, but he knew that she was gone and he was glad that her corpse was not being paraded around by their enemies like he had seen before. He did not want to see her humiliated, defiled and slaughtered corpse lying in the dirt. He knew what was coming for those who were left alone in the center of the village. He could spot the carriages waiting not far off already. They had not been there when he had arrived, but now they were and Ratonhnhaké:ton could do nothing but slowly slump back to the ground. Even if his hands were not tight up, he would not find the strength to fight. He was terrified and all he wanted to do was to curl up into a little ball and try to blend out everything that was going on around him. Maybe he should have gone. Maybe he should not have gone back when he heard the shooting. He should have followed his grandmother's order and just left for Boston, leaving behind all of this, because he was simply not able to do anything about this, but if he would have gone and would have followed the path he was supposed to follow, then maybe he could have one day come back after the men who had done all of this and get the revenge he needed to find peace. He tried to remember the symbol he had been shown in this vision of the ghost and suddenly he thought about this orb Oiá:ner had given to him before. It was surely gone now and even if it were not, he doubted that those men knew how to handle this thing or understand what it could do.

He needed to focus on the symbol, he briefly thought, and no matter how much time would pass and how long it would take him, he would go after this symbol. He would be free again someday and then he would come crashing down like thunder over those people. Behind his back his index finger was digging into the ground, slowly drawing the symbol into the dirt again and again as best he could without looking. He felt his finger drawing the lines and thus drawing the symbol into his mind, imprinting it onto the forefront of his being like a mean for his revenge, even though he had no clue what it meant.
At some point, the screaming had stopped and he was being shaken from his dizziness when strong, large hands suddenly yanked him up, grabbing at his long dark hair with an agonizing thrust as if the man wanted to rip off his scalp entirely until he stood on wobbly legs. He thought for a second he had forgotten how to walk, but then the man who had yanked him up kicked him in the back and he stumbled forward without so much as a hiss of pain. He did not need to hear the commands being shouted at them to know what he was forced to do. When he saw how the others were slowly scrambling into the carriages with the iron bars around, he stopped for a second until the soldier behind him shoved him forwards again. Of course, he could try to run, but what would it help? He was in no condition to run and his hands were still bound so he could not fight back. He would get shot in the back and left to die if he tried. Maybe worse. What good would he be dead? This was not his path. The ghost had told him he was bound to change the world and that he would even if it meant first he needed to endure such torment and humiliation. He would not die here, not today, not before he had not got his revenge at those men and at a man called Charles Lee who once had choked him and burned down his village, killing his mother. He would survive all of this and out of the flames, he would rise again like a phoenix ready to burn everything and everyone in his way.

He refused to call him his master. Not out of defiance, simply because he was not his master because he had no master. It was true that he was forced into his services against his will. It was true that this man let his guards beat him and chain him and starve him and made him work until his hands were bloody or until he would collapse because his body could not take the strain any longer. All of this was true, it was an undeniable fact. But this did not make this man his master or a master at all. It made him a slave owner. It made him a monster. And yet he was a monster who liked seeing himself as a king. Authority was all this man thrived on and yearned for. Control was what he wanted and what he hated was disobedience. Maybe everyone working in the forces was like this. He did not know and he did not care. This was his monster he needed to deal with, let the others take care of theirs.

»You sure took your time, Connor.« The voice of the man came from across the room. Like most of the time, he was sitting behind his large Oakwood desk, reading letters or writing letters himself. Should he not be somewhere on the battlefield? He did not know. He had no clue what was happening in this country any longer. There seemed always to be some kind of war and so he had lost count. He stopped at the door, but when the man looked up from his documents and met him with cold blue eyes and a sharp nod, he closed the door behind himself, sealing himself in with this monster. The days when his heart would start pounding against his ribcage in panic or when his breathing would be shortened in fright were long gone. So he just bit back the comment that Connor was not his name and made another step forward.

»You look angry.« The man stated and leaned back in his chair, taking in Ratonhnhaké:ton's appearance like a predator, his eyes darting from his face over his body, over his torn and dirty clothes. He had outgrown them months ago and yet he was forced to wear them still, either because no one cared or because they liked to humiliate him in letting him rip open his clothes with every movement. »Do you have something to say?«

He shook his head. Years ago he would have hated himself for being so obedient in front of this man, but now he was wiser. Making a fuss and putting off a fight was not making anything better. It only made things worse and he … Well, he had finally a sense of hope again that he would be free again. Their new house would be soon finished and then the nights within the shack were over. He would be granted more freedom when he would behave like a good dog, that was what the Master once told him. And now he was strong enough to run, fast enough to get away, clever enough to find his way. New York was not far. He could make it to Baltimore and from there on to
New York and finally to Boston. It would take him weeks maybe, but he would be able to do it. Because he needed to. Because if he would not be able to and would be forced to stay, he would die. Soon winter would hit again and he was sure, it would be his last under these conditions.

»What was that?« The Master asked and his face betrayed the curiosity his question was meant to portray. He was enjoying this. He always was.

»No, Sir.« He replied his voice husky and low and his dried lips hurt with everything he said. He was speaking only when he needed to most of the time, not like some of the other slaves, trying to chat away their days in hopes it would make things better. The others talked rarely to him anyway and sometimes weeks would go by with him not having said a single thing until the point when he was wondering if he still knew how to use his voice at all.

The man huffed in appreciation and waved for him to come closer, which he did slowly until he stopped in front of the desk again. The Master had a lot of slaves. He had started with a handful inherited from his father just like his land, now he had his own piece of land here and over hundreds of slaves and yet he seemed to have found a particular liking for him, as some of the overseers so cleverly remarked from time to time with dirty smiles on their faces, without knowing the real reason for it.

»I met your father today.« The man began with a low hum, fully enjoying the way Ratonhnhaké:ton would look at him every time he would mention his father in any way. But he did not say anything because most times his master meeting his father meant for him to suffer in any way he could imagine.

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He was sure all the bumps in the road and the shaking of the carriage was making the concussion he got surely only worse. Ratonhnhaké:ton had no clue how far they were gone already when he opened his eyes next time and he was not sure how many days had passed. Three he had counted but then sleep and exhaustion had started to blur his perception of the world around him. He felt spent and worn out. He felt empty. He had no tears left anymore and he was sure the others around him being pent up with him side by side felt the same way. At first, he had refused to let his desperation and sadness and grief show in forms of tears, but then, as night fell the first time, he simply could not hold back any longer and what was it good for anyway? Why not cry and be done with it? He refused to think about his grandmother's death, he refused to let the pictures of what had happened in the village get to him and yet, they were a constant presence in his mind. Yet, he was not able to forget or to ignore.

At least they were not being attacked by the soldiers every time they would make camp for the night before moving on the next morning. He knew the girls and women around him were terrible afraid to get hurt during this journey, but he knew, that those soldiers were probably bound to bring them to their destination unharmed and that could only mean that they were going to be sold on the slave market. He had heard of those before. They were heading to a Fort somewhere close to Boston and though his heart had skipped a beat when he had heard some of the soldiers talk about it, he knew that it was almost impossible for him to get away when they would arrive.

They arrived at the Fort when the night already hung low and it was almost impossible to make out more than a few of the tents near the spot where the carriages stopped. For a while, nothing at all seemed to happen until finally movement startled him again as one of the bluecoats hit a stick against the bars near him and laughed when he flinched back violently. When the door of their carriage was opened a girl near the entrance shrieked but got dragged out anyway and like that one after another was being forced out of the carriage and shoved and dragged and pushed towards the
center where a big fire was lighting up the yard at least enough to see the faces of the soldiers walking around. Neither of them dared to speak and some of the younger girls were huddling together again, panicked for what might happen to them here surrounded by all those white men. Maybe he was a bit naïve sometimes, but he knew what they were afraid of. He was not dumb, but he refused thinking about it.

»Are this all of them?« A man’s voice sounded somewhere in the darkness and another man, probably one of the soldiers, agreed before they came close enough so Ratonhnhaké:ton could see them more clearly. One of them clearly was of a higher rank as the soldiers surrounding him, wearing a tricorn and an elegant coat. Probably their commander or something like that. He did not know much about military ranks and hierarchy. His hair was already gray, his face in the light of the flames ridiculously white and his blue eyes cold as ice and hard as steel, as he looked at the handful Indians being lined up in front of him. He had almost expected him to look at every single one of them more careful than he actually did or that he would try to humiliate them in making them strip or worse. He only let his gaze slip over Ratonhnhaké:ton's fellow tribe members before his gaze fell upon him. For a moment he did not know what it was that made the man stop at his face, but whatever it was, he had the distinct feeling it was not good. There was suddenly this glistening in his sharp eyes.

»Take him to my quarters, the others back to the carriages, you can sell them in Boston, I don’t need them.«

They were animals. In the eyes of those white men, they were but animals. Livestock. Good enough to do the hard work they did not want to get their hands dirty on. That was the truth Ratonhnhaké:ton had learned long ago, but now in this situation, suddenly … it finally really clicked with him, while the others were pushed back into the carriages and he being dragged away from them. He never expected any of the others to call out for him in horror because they did not know what was happening to him or because he was part of their community, part of their family and yet a part of him felt the sting of selfish disappointment when none of them did. They were afraid themselves, they were traumatized and when he looked over his left shoulder he could see them staring at him, the older women with horror in their eyes to loose yet another precious child from their community because he had been raised by the community and not just by his mother. He knew every single one of them and even though sometimes they had given him weird looks in the past, he loved them and they loved him but now he was being torn away from them and shoved into the building surrounding the small yard.

He was pushed and shoved through seemingly endless stone corridors inside the Fort towards a destination unknown to him and clueless about the why it was him who had been selected to stay right here instead of having the chance to stay with his people, no matter what this might mean to him. He thought briefly, maybe it was because of his skin tone. Maybe it was because he was lighter than the others. Maybe he was of a different worth for being a half breed. He did not understand the possible reasoning behind this decision. They ended up in a narrow room filled only by a large desk with documents strewn all over the table top and a few chairs. A small bed was squeezed underneath one of the windows into the corner of the room. It was quite a humble room he guessed, but then again he was not all too familiar with the housing situation of white men. The soldier who had been dragging him around stayed with him in complete silence after they entered the room and though Connor had spent the last days sitting in the carriage, pent up and uncomfortable with his knees pulled against his chest, he wanted to sit down. He felt his legs trembling under his weight and was not sure if it was because of the slowly creeping fear he felt or the exhaustion he suffered through. He stank of sweat and blood and urine and smoke and he wanted to lie down and sleep and he was oh so very hungry. They had not been fed during their travel and they hardly had gotten any water to drink too. Now his lips were dry and hurt and his stomach tried to devour itself.
But he would not be able to get something down any way he guessed, not now fearing for his life, afraid of what could be happening to him and then a moment later finally the door swung open and the gray-haired man from before stepped in and nodded to the soldier to leave them alone. He stood there by the door, waiting until the door was closed again behind the retreating soldier who would probably wait in front of the door. Ratonhnhaké:ton's hands were still bound together but the pain was gone so long as he would not move his hands or arms in any way though his skin was probably raw and bloody where the rope had cut into his flesh.

»Surely you are wondering why I let you been brought here instead of sending you to be sold like the others.« He did not answer because he did not know what to say and apparently the man was disappointed because he would not ask him why he was here or who he was. »Do you know who I am?«

He shook his head, but he held his chin up high, his eyes resting upon the man, letting him know that he was not cowering in front of him. He was afraid, yes, but he would not let it show. He would not betray his mother in being weak and trembling in front of a man who had apparently ordered his men to burn his village and slaughter most of his people to enslave the women and younger children. He would keep his back straight, his chin high, his mindset, and his fight going. He would get to Boston some way or another after he was so close now already!

»I am Colonel George Washington, maybe you have heard my name before-«

»I did not.« He snapped without thinking, but instead of being greeted with a slap to the face for this insolence, the man laughed.

»You were wondering why it is you who I kept here, right? Well, this is the exact reason why.« The man - Washington - replied then, before he strode closer towards him, his blue eyes still resting upon him heavily, making him feel horribly uncomfortable.

»I do not understand.«

»Now, who are you, boy?« He tried to sound friendly, but having seen what this man had ordered his soldiers to do was making it impossible for Ratonhnhaké:ton to feel any kind of sympathy for him.

»I'm Ratonhnhaké:ton.« He answered curtly, fast, because he did not care if the man was able to understand his name. He would not manage to pronounce it anyway. He almost expected some kind of reaction to his name, but there simply was none.

»You speak good English, boy. Your mother must have taught you, am I right?« He did not know if he should answer, but since he already talked back to him he nodded sharply, followed by a quick »Yes«.

»And sure you always wondered why she decided it was necessary to teach you the tongue of the white men, right?«

»No.« He replied with a frown, a part of him enjoying the surprise on Washington's face. »I never wondered why.« He added slowly. »My mother was an intelligent woman. She knew I needed to know this language to do something with my life after the white men invaded our country and took our land from us.« Washington motioned for him to keep going while he slowly walked towards his desk, finally letting him out of his sight, before he reached his desk and turned around to him again. »In addition to that, my father was British. She wanted me to know the language my father spoke. She did not want me to have a disadvantage in life.«
Because he already had. His mother had never said it aloud, not when he had been around that was, but he knew that because of him the tribe almost disowned her when she had been pregnant with him. It was not his fault of course, but sometimes the others would look differently at him.

»I knew your mother.« Washington finally stated as his eyes fell upon him again, leaving him in a moment of surprise. »You have much of her.« Horror started to grow inside of him immediately. This man was a Brit, was he not? His mother never said who his father was, so could it be…? »I saw it right away, the same stoic expression, the same eyes.« He felt his stomach turn and bile rising in his throat and his fingers finally started trembling. »I heard she died nine years ago. A tragic accident.« He was leaning now heavily against his desk. »Served that bitch right.« Suddenly his tone changed and the look of his eyes became more menacing, more cruel. »I must say I smiled a little when my men told me they burnt your village and that this Indian whore burnt to death for everything she cost me all those years ago. But in your face, I saw not just your mother, boy. You have much of her, but you look just like your father and this is the reason I decided to keep you to myself.«

»I-I do not understand.« He managed to get out again, glad he did not stammer as much as he thought he would. Stuttering was a sign of weakness in the face of the enemy and this man clearly was his enemy.

»Do you even know who your father is?«

He shook his head, feeling a bit humiliated to confess to this, but in the same moment, he prayed that it was not him. He prayed and begged the gods that it was not this man. But if he was not his father and if he so obviously blatantly hated his mother, what would this mean for him?

The man, Colonel Washington, did not answer him right away, instead he slowly, oh so very slowly, walked towards him again. He came so close that Ratonhnhaké:ton instinctively tried to back away slowly, but when Washington noticed, a wide grin suddenly spread over his face and Ratonhnhaké:ton could see the burning, deep rooted hatred like a spark in the man's blue eyes. »He's the devil.«
October 1772

He was used to the whip. He was used to the feeling of being beaten like a dog until his skin would hang in bloody scraps from his back and until he felt as if bones were crushed under the impact. He was used to the feeling as if he would black out from the excruciating pain controlling his body. Still, today it seemed worse than ever, as he was kneeling in front of the pole. His hands bound together and chained high above his head onto the pole outside between the large house and the corn fields. His arms were hurting because of the strain put on them. His stomach was hurting because of the hunger and the yelps of pain he tried to suppress. The beating would get harder when he would show any signs of pain. This was not only punishment but also a lesson of keeping his mouth shut. This was not so much for him as it was for the others working around him on the property. They were not looking at him because they never were and he was not looking at them. This was just how it was and right now he was grateful for that after he was forced to kneel like this, naked and being humiliated like this in public.

It was not his fault. He had done nothing wrong. He had done nothing to deserve this treatment. He had done nothing. This was what he kept telling himself while the whip slammed down on his back another time. He lost count already and it did not matter anyway. He could only hope to blackout and find peace in the tranquility of unconsciousness, even though he knew the overseers would not spare him from work afterward. The slaves were forced to work until they would fall dead. It happened before, it would happen again. The first time Ratonhnhaké:ton had witnessed something like this was in his first year. It was a young woman. She had been beaten so heavily the morning of her death that she had almost not been able to walk afterward. The overseers had forced her to anyway and later that day after the heat of the summer sun and her pain had been too much on her strained and starved body, she had fallen dead right where she stood. Back then he had been so panicked he had wanted to run to her and help, but an elderly woman had quickly grabbed and hindered him. Now he knew he had been beaten to death if she would not have held him back.

They had left the corpse of the woman lying in the dirt with everyone else just stepping over her body, going about their work and only later, after the sun had set and after they were done with their work, some of the men had been forced to dig a shallow grave and get rid of her body.

Even Washington had admitted that he had done nothing wrong to deserve this beating, but Ratonhnhaké:ton would not make the mistake to be asking him why he was receiving it then because he knew. He was taking the beating for his father.

_Haytham Kenway._ It was just a name. He had no clear image of the man in mind, no clue what this man was like. But a name. He had a name. He knew his father's name. That was more than he had had thirteen years of his life. He would be able to find him, now that he had his name and he knew that Washington knew his father, that he was seeing the man at occasions - just as well as Charles Lee. But no matter the burning hatred he had always felt for Charles Lee, it was nothing in comparison to the hatred he felt towards George Washington.

Now, three years after he first met this man, he knew a lot more about him. He had been treated quite differently than the other slaves right from the get go. He had not been treated more nicely, just different. When Washington punished the other slaves he let the overseer do the nasty bits. There was not hatred involved, only simple punishment for ill behavior. With him on the other hand, every hit from the whip Washington was swinging at his back was filled with venom and rage. He wanted to make him bleed because he could not make his father bleed. The man who was
sabotaging his career and kept being a nuisance even years after he and Washington had first met. Apparently, his father had killed a man named Braddock seventeen years ago with his mother's help and thus brought Washington's career in the army to a sudden halt. Now he was involved in politics and again his father was standing in his way, favoring Charles Lee to become commander in chief instead of Washington. Because of Lee, he was being beaten bloody.

»Have you learned your lesson yet, boy?«

He wanted to say yes, just to satisfy the Master, but he rather bit down on the inside of his cheek and knew it was dumb right away. He could not be so submissive. He couldn’t! He needed to keep his pride, to keep his chin high. He needed to resist, not for the others or to keep up appearances, but for himself, because otherwise, he would start to crumble and break down and that he could not have. Three years he was here already and he did not break. He would not let himself get broken by anyone. He would not play along and in the same instant, he knew that he probably should to spare himself from any kind of backlash. He should just drop the pride he still felt and get it over with. Yet he couldn’t. He just could not do it.

And a part of him wondered how his father might see it. He knew nothing about this man. Nothing except for the fact, that Washington hated him. Another hit with the whip made him flinch more violently and moan in a sudden jolt of pain. His skin was hot and burning and he felt the familiar sensation of something even hotter trickling down his exposed backside. He was sure Washington enjoyed this moment. However, the pain really was not the worst about this situation. With pain, he could deal. The humiliation was a whole different thing though and humiliated he felt.

»Did you learn your lesson or shall I keep on going?« Washington hissed as he fist his hand in Ratonhnhakéton's long hair again to rip his head back. He could see the joy in the man's eyes through the strands of long dark hair obscuring his vision. Sometimes he was amazed Washington would not tell the overseers to cut it short like the hair of the other man around and he did not believe that this was because Washington had any kind of respect for Ratonhnhakéton's culture. It was something different, something he did not want to think about.

»Yes…« He finally forced himself to answer, his voice thick and raspy, his throat raw.

»Yes, what?« Washington sneered giving his hair another hard tug.

»Yes, I learned my lesson, Sir.« He groaned, trying not to spit the words, trying not to bare his teeth at the man. One day he would get his revenge, he knew that. One day he would be the one to sneer in Washington's face. But for now all he could do was obeying his commands and playing along for as long as Washington thought him obedient like a dog, he would not lose his chance of freedom one day.

Finally, Washington let go of his hair and Ratonhnhakéton's head slumped back against the pole again, his forehead resting against the wood and his body slowly falling limp now that the pain seemed to be over. Behind him he heard the shuffling of footsteps as one of the overseers came to his side to free him from the pole.

»Wash him. Give him something to dress himself. No dinner tonight.« Washington commanded his man, but right after one of the men had dragged him to his feet again, Washington turned to Ratonhnhakéton again, grinning like a predator seeing its prey in the distance. Shortly the man's eyes darted over his naked frame and though under different circumstances he would have blushed, he did not find the strength and what did it matter anyway? His feet were sore and his knees nearly buckled under his weight now that he was forced to stand on weak legs like a newborn deer again.

»Make him presentable. We will have a very special guest tonight and I want him inside the house for dinner.«
Washington sometimes liked to show him off like some rare animal to his guests. He would have him hovering near the table to serve food to his guest with feathers and beads tight into his hair and clothes fitting for his heritage. Some of the white folks would then stare at him with their big fish-like eyes and their pale puffy faces in awe as if they had never seen something like him before. It was humiliating and degrading and some of those people downright hated folks like him and would torment him during their dinner because they found joy in it. Those people always said that people like him did not know how to behave properly, but it was them who did not know how to behave ironically.

After the torture he had endured this noon, the overseers had dragged him to the sidelines where the women were normally doing the laundry or washing up. They did not really have a proper bathroom. They had a simple outhouse near their sleeping quarters and a small secluded area right next to the toilet surrounded by a palisade fence where they could wash their bodies after a straining day of labor. Of course, they did not have warm water. They would wash themselves with water from the well nearby, cold as ice most of the times and a tub they hadn't also. By now he was used to the smell of the others. They all smelled of sweat at best, even if they would wash themselves more thoroughly every day they would stink from their hard work.

He was dragged towards their outdoor bathroom and shoved to the ground like a misbehaving dog. He knew what was coming because it was not the first time. A few buckets filled with fresh water were standing around, gathered by the women already to be used later. One of the two men who had dragged him here grabbed the first bucket and simply dumped it over Ratonhnhaké:ton's head, the other one laughing as he heard the sharp gasps from the native boy as he was doused in cold water. His long hair was hanging in his face loosely and he could not see a thing, but the next bucket was swiftly dumped over him too, accompanied by the laughter and the comments of those two men, while he, suddenly, tried to remember the first day of his enslavement and the insanity he had been faced with when he had first set foot on this property.

They arrived at the evening hours at the large house that was their destination. The house itself was resting on a hill and the man, Washington, had told him his home was near Mount Vernon. He did not know where that was, only that they had passed Boston three days ago and thus his chance of maybe finding his father right away. He was alone after they had left the Fort. His people had been driven out of the Fort while he had been talking to Washington and Ratonhnhaké:ton had been forced to stay in a cell during the night until they moved on again. At least he did not need to go back into that caged carriage, but the carriage he was driven in afterward was dark and just as uncomfortable with only one little window to indicate where he was going or how the world around him looked like. His hands stayed bound the entire time and he had hardly even seen the movement of the sun through the small window in the only door of the carriage. He only ever registered that it was night already when the soldiers would stop the caravan to rest and while he had been resting with his back against the door, he had listened to their stories and their gruff voices. Some nights he had been frozen in terror from the things he had heard them talk about. Some nights they had argued if they should grab him and see why Washington wanted him in his house - whatever that meant.

But he arrived at the house in one piece and almost unharmed, except for a few minor scratches and bruises whenever they had let him out to pee and manhandled him quite aggressively. The sun was slowly sinking on the horizon as he was dragged out of the carriage and he expected to be walked into the house, but instead the man who had grabbed him pulled him towards the back of the house and it was there that he finally grasped what was lying ahead of him. The land was wide and covered in lush fields with people running around - working. Black people.
He spotted a few women taking washed clothes off a laundry line. One of them glanced at the newcomer and he immediately averted his gaze. He had never seen black people before and clearly not as many as here! He did not quite know why he immediately averted his gaze, though, but he felt as if it was the right thing for a boy like him to do. The house was large, a monumental building made of bricks and white painted wood and the land was uncomfortable large.

For a moment he thought he might be able to easily escape when night would fall, but then he stared into the faces of the men and women they passed and he knew it would not be so easy. Their empty eyes told him the stories of many failed trials of escape. He was lead to a small shack not far off from the main house. An elderly woman sat in front of the shack sewing holes in clothes shut apparently. They stood and waited for a moment after the man and he had arrived at the shack until two other men arrived at the scene. They looked at him like wolves, grinning like maniacs, taking in his appearance as if they had never seen another human being before. Of course, he knew that this was not the reason why they were staring. They were staring because they had probably never seen someone like him before.

They stopped in front of him and with a nod towards the soldier, the blue coat left them, retreating back to the carriage and probably off the land of his commander to go back to his duty as a soldier. 
»You are new here.« One of the two men said matter-of-factly as if Ratonnnhâ:ton himself would not know this. He was speaking extra slow too, thinking perhaps that this wildling would not understand him otherwise. Apparently, he did not even consider that even if he would not know any English, speaking slow would not help in that regard. He was tall and muscular, a dark beard obscuring the most of his face and a farmer's hat on his black hair. His eyes were squinted and small like those of a pig, as he crossed his arms in front of his chest. »I'm Mr. Lewis, I'm in charge of the plantation. You will call me Master from now on. And that is Mr. White« He motioned towards the man beside him who took the moment to spit on the ground in front of Ratonnhâ:ton's feet as if to introduce himself properly in showing off his good manners, but he did his best not to flinch. »He is the first overseer. You will call him Master too like the other slaves do.«

»I am no slave.« Ratonnhâ:ton shot back immediately and he knew it was a mistake right away.

He hated being dolled up like this. After he had been able to get cleaned up, he had been put in the usual clothes he was forced to wear every time he would attend some event in the big house. Washington had once brought him those clothes from one of his trips. They were nice and warm and they smelled just a tiny bit like home after the Master had forced him to wash those clothes so often they would not smell as much as they normally did. Had he not outgrown his own clothes he might be still allowed to wear them from time to time when he would not be forced to run around in sackcloth and ashes.

But what he hated the most, except for the way he was presented to the guests, was their stares and looks. The women often looked at him scared as if he was some kind of awful monster ready to rip them apart immediately. He was a wildling in their eyes with no restraints, with no common sense, with no manners, just an animal without rules. An animal Washington managed to tame apparently - at least in their eyes. Ratonnhâ:ton, however, knew the truth. He was a wolf and one might be able to own a wolf, break a wolf, but never to tame a wolf. That was what his grandmother always assured him of.

Charles Lee too was someone who would stare quite a lot at him, while he was with the pink-cheeked man and Washington in the big dining room to serve them alongside some of the maids. And while Lee was staring at him, he gave his best not to look at him at all. He did not know why,
but a part of him wondered if Charles Lee might be able to recognize him as the four-year-old boy he had once attacked out in the woods - but even if he did, would it help him? Charles Lee was the right-hand man of his father. He had learned that over the course of the last three years. He knew what the symbol, which he had kept on scratching into surfaced to not forget for the last three years, was. Those men were Templars and although he himself did not know what this meant, Washington was adamant to tell him that those men were the enemies of their great and aspiring nation. Coming from a man who owned slaves and would not shy away from beating those slaves to death, Ratonhnhaké:ton was not so sure if they were the evil ones Washington liked to talk about. However in the eyes of Washington, he was a righteous man and those slaves were his property, so he was allowed to do with them as he pleased. Ratonhnhaké:ton thought Good and Evil might be only a matter of perspective.

»You seem to be quite interested in my native friend over there.« Washington at one point remarked, as he was picking up a piece of potato with his fork. »I can't blame you, he is quite the exotic creature, isn't he? And intelligent he is too! If I would not know better, I would almost be convinced he must have a bit of British blood running through his veins.« Washington chuckled and Lee - averting his eyes from Ratonhnhaké:ton for a moment - chimed in quickly. They hated each other's guts and to him, it was an enigma why they were meeting like this although they were mortal enemies. Technically they were on the same side of course, but neither of them would be bothered by the death of the other. Even behind closed doors they tried to keep up appearances.

»Well, I don't believe he has. His complexion is paler than most redskins, that is true and the curve of his jaw indeed is incredibly noble for a wildling, but I doubt he has just one drop of British blood in his body.« Charles then said and although it was meant to be an insult, it did not really felt that way. »What is his name?«

Washington paused and produced a low laugh, before taking another bite and chewing it slowly, before answering Lee with one raised eyebrow. »You can't expect me to pronounce that native gibberish, but I call him Connor.« Washington explained. »I have him for three years now. He is not the best worker I have, I must say, but he has other qualities and he is a decent hunter.«

»Where did you get him from?« Charles inquired and he tried to sound inconspicuous asking those questions as if they were talking about a dog or a new horse Washington had bought recently. Ratonhnhaké:ton by now was familiar with the way the white men would talk about their slaves. For them, they were no humans and they did not care for their feelings because in the eyes of white folks they had none. »I would guess the boy is about sixteen years old. Of course, thirteen is a decent age for selling a slave, but most slave traders are tending to sell them when they are a bit older and stronger.«

»He was a member of the Kanien'kehá:ka. Maybe you remember them. Twelve years ago they started revolting against us for the first time.«

»You mean the tribe you tried to intimidate by burning their village.« Charles said and he sounded as if it was the most normal thing to do as if this not meant he had murdered many people, including his mother. But of course, Charles must know about the attack! It had been him, hadn't it? Why was Washington talking as if Lee would not know? He had been there!

»Well, it came to my attention that they started to become a threat once more, so I sent my men to take care of the problem.« Washington replied and the self-righteous attitude with which he was leaning back in his chair was making him sick to the stomach. He felt Washington's gaze upon him but did his best to blankly stare ahead as if he would not understand what they were talking about as if it would not concern him.
But as soon as Washington started concentrating on his meal again, it was Ratonhnhaké:ton, who stared at Charles Lee adamantly. He did not quite know what he wanted to tell him or what he was expecting of this man, but he wanted to get his attention. He wanted to see if Charles remembered him if Charles maybe knew who he was. Charles shortly glanced at him, but then he rose his glass of red wine for a toast. »Can't say I would blame you. Those tribes are a problem and we need to get rid of them all.«

»Is that what your dear friend Haytham says too?« Ratonhnhaké:ton's eyes flashed to Washington but the man acted as if he would not notice and he quickly averted his gaze again. He was here to serve whether he liked it or not wasn't important and if he wanted to have a chance to flee from this place one way or another, he needed to please.

»I must say, Master Kenway does have a bit of an affinity for those people, or at least he did show a hint of it in the past.« He noticed the looks they shared and he knew that Charles had recognized him and that he, in fact, knew who he was. He knew it. He knew that he was Haytham Kenway's son, but he was not about to do something. He was not about to tell it to his master. He would let him rot here, just as he once had strangled him. Had he known back then who he was? Had it not been a coincidence that Lee hat attacked him? But why in the world should this man want to see him suffer like this? What did he do wrong?

He expected them to further their talk about Haytham and his affinity for the native tribes, but instead Washington cleared his throat and took a sip from his wine glass. Immediately Ratonhnhaké:ton walked to him to refill his glass. The Master was more bearable when drunk most of the time at least. »So, Charles. Where do you stay at the moment? I believe business brought you to this piece of land.«

»I'm staying in a nearby inn, down the hill in the small settlement, but I plan on going back to New York tomorrow.« Charles explained ignoring Ratonhnhaké:ton for now completely as if the boy had just vanished into thin air.

»So soon? Have you already finished what you wanted to accomplish here or is it Master Kenway ordering you back like his loyal dog?«

Lee did not even flinch because of this defamation, although he seemed to be a rather proud man. »It is true that Master Kenway is in New York at the moment. As you know he just came back from his travels, though I believe you have met him the other day already. But I doubt that I will see him for at least the next week.«

»I did not know he owns property in New York. I always thought his city was Boston.« Were they talking about his father to torment him? Sure they both knew who he was and sure both of them knew that the other one knew too. What kind of game were they playing?

»Well, it is. He stays in the company of another good friend of ours and enjoys his hospitality before he goes back to Boston soon.« His father was in New York. New York was not that far. It was only a little glimpse of hope, almost not visible to him now, but definitely there. He could make it to New York, but even if he would, New York was a big city.

He glanced at Lee and their eyes met for a moment. Lee's blue eyes were red and haunted by something he could not grasp. Some deep rooted emotion welling up inside this man, ready to devour him fully and as if he knew what Ratonhnhaké:ton was thinking, he oh so discretely shook his head. Washington did not seem to have noticed and Ratonhnhaké:ton did not understand, but he knew what he needed to do.

His moment came late that same night when the lights in the main house were dying off one after
another. Inside the slave quarters it was cold, for no matter how hot the days got up here, the nights were often enough freezing cold still. Charles Lee had left hours ago already, soon before the thunder had started to roar over the darkened skies. Now rain was rippling down on the roof of the shack, loud and hard like stones falling from the sky like the plague. He had heard much of plagues in the past three years. Of course in the eyes of everyone around him he was a pagan for not believing in their god or not even knowing about him and although most of the other slaves would not show open anger toward him because of this minor detail in difference between them, some of them would openly spit it in his face what they thought of him and his people. Oh, he knew all about racism after three years on this plantation and he had known before. He had not expected to be treated better or differently than the black people around him, but what he would have never had expected was to be treated so ill by the other slaves just because of his heritage.

In the past three years, he had been forced to listen to the Sunday sermon again and again and had been watched with sharp eyes if he was listening. He still could not understand or grasp the concept of their so called god just by hearing the masters preach from this book of theirs. But he still kept his mouth shut about it, refused to let his resentment show and acted like the good boy everyone wanted to see.

This night he was not being chained up in their quarters, simply because he came back so late that the overseers did not bother to chain him up. Maybe they even thought he would not try anything after the beating he had received earlier that day and it would be a lie to say he was not hurting still. It was not as if they were always being watched while eating or wandering around in the bit of spare time they had between work and going to bed. They were mostly allowed to walk around freely on the property - of course with certain restrictions - and although the overseers were bound to check on them and to make sure neither of them would even think of running away, they seemed to let it slip every once in a while out of laziness - or because they were drunk, which was not always a plus, unlike in the case of Master Washington. Those men could be much more aggressive when drunk for sure and judging by the fact that they had not checked on him after he had passed their little house in which they would stay to keep watch, he reckoned that they must be drunk, for he normally was their favorite victim to beat up or humiliate.

But no. He was no victim. And he was no slave. As hard as it was to remember from time to time, remembering was key in this situation. Washington wanted to break him because he could not break his father. He wanted to hurt him because he could not hurt his father. That was the truth and he needed to keep reminding himself of that fact, because otherwise, well otherwise this man might just be able to achieve what he wanted. It was not about if Washington might be able to break him, it was about if Ratonhnhaké:ton would let him break his spirit.

He spent a lot of time just waiting and listening to the rain, lying between all those other men on the ground, trying to find out when the right moment was to escape. Maybe there was no such thing as the right moment. Maybe he just needed to try it. So, after a while, he finally commanded his limbs to get up again. He did not fear the punishment he would receive if he would get caught. Washington would never kill him, not as long as his father was still alive and in his way.

Not as long as he found joy in dehumanizing him to get back on his father, who probably did not even know about him. Only once he had seen the man who was apparently his father briefly through a window, as he had been going about his business. His father did not come very often to this place, not only because he hated Washington, but because for all the world's concerns he had nothing to do with politics, but was just a simple nobleman from Britain with very influential friends, although everyone around his father seemed to know that this was not true at all. Even Ratonhnhaké:ton knew that this was not true.

At the door of the cabin, he stopped once again. What if his father did know about him? What if he
had decided against finding him? What if he did not want anything to do with him? What if he did not want him?

Of course, it was not the first time he felt those sluggish thoughts creeping up in his brain from deep down within, but every time he would find them in the back of his head it would get harder and harder to ignore them or to shove them back. Even if his father did not want him, the ghost had told him to search for this symbol and that he would no matter what the cost. So he braced himself, took a deep breath and opened the door just enough to slip outside.

The air was crisp and cold and rain was splashing to the ground around him. He was soaked within seconds after he started walking. Slowly and carefully he crept over the farmland. The shortest route would be walking towards the house and down the street leading towards the small settlement down the hill, but it was dangerous and there were not many spots he could hide, so he decided on taking the longer route, down the fields and into the small forest down the hill.

After he had left the shack silently like a ghost he managed to creep through the corn that was grown so tall he could easily walk through the fields without being seen in the darkness around him. And although the darkness was shielding him now, he was far from feeling safe, far from feeling as if no one would be able to locate him. There was much that could go wrong, he knew this. He had seen people escape before and he had seen people being brought back before. He would not even be safe if he would make it down to the settlement. He was not safe only because he would find a way to escape to New York. Maybe he would never be safe again, but at least he needed to try.

When the forest came into sight he stopped and paused for a second. There was a stretch of a few feet between the end of the corn field and the beginning of the forest. A stretch wide enough for him to easily get caught, if he would not take care that this would not happen. There were not many spots to hide, normally there would be a cart full of hay for the horses in the nearby stables, but due to the rain, it was in the barn surely to protect the hay from getting soaked. Now that the rain seemed to lessen a bit, he could spot a lamp in the distance, indicating that one of the overseers was patrolling over the land.

It was only one guy and if he would be clever about it, he would be able to knock him out without being seen as soon as the man was close enough to the spot he was kneeling on. He did not want to hurt anyone really, but sometimes one would not have a chance, he guessed. Still, he wanted to rather avoid something like this. If he would attack a white man, this would be a crime he could be convicted for. Washington would not let him get hanged by the authorities for sure, but as soon as he would leave again for duty (and Washington rarely really stayed for a prolonged time on his land), the overseers would hang him from a tree for everyone to see. He watched the lamp in the darkness moving away and figured the man must be with his back to him now, so he sprinted towards the next bush, his naked feet producing smacking sounds on the muddy ground, and jumped behind it. Apparently, he had gone unnoticed for now. He tried to keep watch of the light dancing in the distance to see when he could move again without getting detected for sure. Of course, it was a stretch to think the man with the lamp would be able to see him so far away in the dark of the night, but he wanted to be extra careful. Better being too careful as too reckless, he reckoned.

He waited for what felt like an eternity, watching the patrolling guard taking at least five turns until he found the courage to move on again. It's now or never, he thought and then, when he saw the light moving away from him again he started running towards the tree line. The ground was wet under his feet and leaves stuck to his skin as he ran through the underwood, breaking twigs in his wake, but he did not care. Those people would never be able to find him in the forest at night even if they would search for him! He knew it! And finally, he felt weirdly at ease with his plan. He
would manage to flee. He would escape to the settlement. He would follow Charles Lee to New York and he would reunite with his father. He would finally do what the ghost had told him to do!

Then something hard hit him on the back of his head and Ratonhnhaké:ton fell to the ground and he knew he would never escape and that he might had not had yet experienced all the horrors the white men had up their sleeves for him.
Ratonhnhaké:ton came to in a fog, wondering why it was so hard to breathe all of the sudden. Finally, he was able to force his eyes open once more only to find that the world around him was still black and wet. He smelled the forest around him, the wet leaves and the soaked ground. If it would be lighter he would be able to see worms crawling through the earth he was laying on, his left cheek resting on a small branch uncomfortably, cutting lightly into his damp skin. The only light source appeared to come from a few torches somewhere around him, but he could not even make out where this somewhere was. Somewhere might as well be a whole other planet for all he knew right in that moment. And while his brain was still trying to find out where he was or who he was, his senses made him dimly aware that something was very wrong. He did not even quite grasp what had happened or how he came to black out like this.

First, he felt pain, his head throbbing after he had apparently been hit with something hard against the back of his skull. This would clearly not be the first time, he guessed. Maybe the butt of a rifle again or a torch. It did not really matter, he guessed. His eyes fell shut again if just for a moment because the throbbing of his skull was unbearable for the time he kept them open. He wanted to run and fight, but his limbs felt like dead and once he had closed his eyes, his eyelids refused to open again.

After a few seconds, he became more and more aware of being shoved into the dirt underneath him face first by a crushing weight, his bare stomach and hips scraping against the ground. He felt the cold air against his naked backside, suddenly alerted by the fact that he was indeed half naked with something – or more horrifying someone – inside of him, strong arms pinning him down although he was not resisting. His mind reeled, not wanting to comprehend as the fog started to lift oh so very slowly. The voice of a man was muttering something behind him, then another. It hurt. It hurt worse than Ratonhnhaké:ton had ever experienced something to hurt in his entire life. Worse even than being beaten bloody with a whip, the pain ripping into him with each thrust.

»Stop-« He managed to get out sluggishly because his tongue still refused to cooperate. Desperate to get away even in his haze, he started scrabbling against the ground in a blind panic, not knowing what to do or make of the situation, not grasping the full impact of what was happening to him at all. Almost instantly the right forearm of someone was wrapped around his neck. As he tried to pull away, he realized that his knees and ankles were impossibly entangled in his pants which had apparently only been pulled down halfway. Worse even, his thighs were shoved farther apart by the legs of the man who was still behind him, effectively pinning him further down to the ground with his weight. He could not breathe. He saw black dots on the edge of his field of vision and his sight started to blur again. Weird how he could see dark blotches in the darkness around him, he suddenly thought.

»Look at that!« A husky voice groaned into his ear but Ratonhnhaké:ton did not think that it was
the same man who was behind him, ripping him apart still. »Enjoying it, don’t you?« The shallow thrusting did not even slow as the man behind him held Ratonhnhaké:ton while he squirmed in desperation against the chokehold, trying to pull free with oddly weak arms as if all his muscles had just defused like alcohol in an instant, as if he was a little child once again, being choked by an adult man in the woods.

»No…« He ground out, still pulling against the chokehold as best he could, but the man behind him did not seem to hear and neither did the man beside him. It finally dawned on him, that he had no idea how many there were, while the man behind him was breathing in ragged gasps and grunts as he pushed in further. »Please-« He tried again, but his choked voice came out only as a hoarse and empty plea.

When he felt the chokehold tightening further and heard the laughter of the people around him (How many? How many? Two? Three? More? A dozen? How many?), Ratonhnhaké:ton realized with a gnawing sickness that it did not matter if he begged them to stop or how hard he struggled. He was not getting away. He was not going to escape either. He was not going to be reunited with his father somewhere in the future. He was not going to be free ever again. They had been waiting for him out here. They had known he would try to escape. That was why he had not been chained up. That was why it had been so easy to get off the land. They had waited for him. They had wanted him to flee. And if he would keep on fighting he would risk a collapsed windpipe or a broken bone or internal bleeding. He could not risk this. He would not die like this. He could not. Washington would present his mutilated corpse to his father, he would show him off like a trophy. No, no, no, he could not let this happen to himself.

He had to just grit his teeth and it would be over soon. Swallowing his terror and humiliation, he tried, forced himself, to go still and limp, for that was all he could do and when he was finally released from the chokehold he sucked in air in gratitude.

Ratonhnhaké:ton watched numbly as drops of blood fell from the tip of his nose, glistening in the faint shimmer of light coming from the torches of the men around him, to land in the dirt just inches away from his face. He was not sure if it was sweat or tears and he did not care either as he just squeezed his eyes shut again, feeling how the tongue of the man behind him scraped the back of his neck, his hair falling over his face, exposing at least a bit of skin.

Then he felt the man behind him shift as he seemed to brace himself. »Alright, you take me all the way, you dirty little slut? Want all of this?« It did not matter if he would say no or if he would beg this man to stop. Nothing mattered as the man pulled him slowly back onto his hips, pushing in farther than he had gone before. »So tight … that's it...just like that...«

Ratonhnhaké:ton tried to stifle a whimper of pain, his numb fingers clutching at the dirt underneath him. It was too much. But the unnamed man, after pausing and letting Ratonhnhaké:ton squirm helplessly, his face scrunched in agony, suddenly pushed in unbelievably further and this time he could not bite away the scream ripping from his lips.

The roaring laughter of the people around burnt hot in his ears as the shame and the man behind him moaned, his body practically in spasms of pleasure. »See? He likes that! 'Told you that’s the way those native inbreeds do it!« The man beside him spat, but still he was unable to turn his head to look at him and he could not recognize his voice too. He was sure he knew him.

Ratonhnhaké:ton felt his tormentor slide out slowly and then starting to pound in again fast and hard, deeper than before, earning himself a second small scream from the boy he was torturing.

Ratonhnhaké:ton had never thought pain such as this to be even possible. He had never thought that something like this could happen to him at all. His mind was stuck in an endless nightmare of
confusion about what was happening and why.

Suddenly a hand was grabbing his jaw and pushing dirty, foul tasting fingers into his mouth. »Love to see another dick in your throat right now.« The man beside him muttered roughly in his ear again and Ratonhnhakéton's teeth automatically closed in on the fingers in his mouth. He could not bite. If he would bite the man everything would be only worse, that he knew for certain! And the man beside him used the moment of hesitation as an advantage against him to shove his fingers as far back as he could until Ratonhnhakéton started gagging violently. He could feel the man inside him twitch, refusing to think about what was inside him still and heard his breath shudder. »I told you all of them wildlings are like this!« Another man reeled not far off to his left side. »Wanna gag on a cock while I fuck you?« The other man to his right side asked, tugging on his hair and splitting his injured head in agony before he thankfully pulled out his fingers. Ratonhnhakéton gasped and coughed, spit dangling from his lower lip.

Each thrust of the man behind him grew so much harder and faster that every single thrust felt like a violent attack and despite his unconscious decision to stay passive, Ratonhnhakéton could not help jerking at the pain, scrabbling helplessly against the ground and the body of the man. Was this the horrors some of the women had to go through? He knew that some of the overseers did gruesome things to the girls and women. He knew that even some of the other slaves did.

»Please…« He was starting to see black because of the pain again, or maybe it was the lack of air, he did not know. »I'm sorry.« He made his mouth say, though his mind was starting to go blank again with the arm of the man behind him winding itself tighter around his throat again. »I can't breathe…« His own voice sounded hoarse and pathetic to him. He was meant to be a fighter, meant to be a leader at some point in his life. He was meant to achieve great things. That was what the ghost had told him!

Lost in his temporary bliss, his assailant gave one final, painful shove of his hips, twisting Ratonhnhakéton's spine with his chokehold until it was about to snap before he was being crushed into the dirt again. The man came with a muffled shout, his entire body shuddering with the release. Ratonhnhakéton's world spun and blurred and after a final wave of pain and nausea washed over him everything went blissfully, blissfully dark and mute once more.

Haytham E. Kenway never experienced the feeling of comfort while being on a ship, whether it was in the ocean or anchored in some harbor, it did not really matter. His father, Edward, had been a lover of the sea - that had never been a secret to him of course. And although he felt, as if it had been a shock to him learning about his father's career as a pirate earlier in his life, now looking back at his childhood, it really was not a shock at all. He should have known right from the get-go that his father was different in more than one way. Maybe he should have even known about his affiliation with the assassins. Maybe he should have known about Reginald's intrigue. He did not regret joining the Templars, though. Maybe he did in the beginning, right after he understood the truth about his father, but he thought about what his father had taught him and that was to think for himself and to make his own decisions because no one else but him needed to face the consequences for his decision. Haytham had thought for himself and he had decided on being a Templar. He did not hate the assassins, he just was not on their side and he did not agree with them on many points, but after the purge, he did not feel the need to go after them any longer.

The only thing he did regret was, that he never understood or felt the same love for the sea as his father had felt as a young man. Maybe he was more like his mother in that regard.

»It appears as if Achilles is trying to form a new brotherhood in the colonies.« A voice behind him
caught him off guard and pulled him out of his thoughts as he stood and watched over the New York Harbor. *The Morrigan* was a sturdy ship and fitted its captain perfectly. From the spot where Haytham was standing on the deck of the ship, he could see a great deal of the city that was slowly growing into importance as it seemed to him. He liked Boston better, but who was he to judge? He was not here for sightseeing or vacation anyway. He was here for business and although he was not exactly dreading the day he would return to his house in Boston, he would stay as long as it would take. Slowly he turned around after Shay's footsteps behind him stopped and turned his back to the railing to face the captain.

They knew each other for quite a while now, but these days Shay's face tended to be more serious than ever and the lines around his eyes harder than in their shared past. Maybe he began to feel something like regret for his actions? It really was hard to tell. Charles sometimes teased Shay about this and Shay was always adamant to explain how dedicated he was to their path. Still, regret was human to feel, Haytham reckoned after all those years. He too sometimes felt regret. There was nothing wrong about it. Maybe … Maybe ten or fifteen years ago, he would have argued differently. »Do you think he will be a threat again?« Haytham found himself asking, but truth was, he did not really care about the assassins. Even if Achilles started a new brotherhood, even if he found some idealistic children and desperate men to follow him again, what match were they really now that the Templars held the power over the colonies? Well … That was not entirely true of course, but with Lee in the race for the position of commander in chief…

»I don’t know.« Shay replied and stepped closer to the railing to rest his hands on the old, familiar wood. This ship was his companion for a long, long time now and apparently he was not yet thinking about ever leaving it behind. But his answer caught Haytham off guard, though he did not show it to the Captain, instead he mirrored his gesture and stared ahead over the New York harbor once again. »I think« Shay began and paused for a second before he spoke up again. »I think whether he will become a threat to us again solely depends on the people he’ll teach. And since usually not a whole group of people find out about the brotherhood at once, everything depends on the first person getting Achilles to teach him. If that person has the will and the yearning to be a threat to the Templars for whatever reason they might have or the dream to really change something about how the world functions, then yes. Maybe he will be a threat again. For now, the only thing I know for a fact is that he was seen in Boston with a young native boy, the day of the Boston Massacre - on which you and Charles had first-row seats as I heard - a year ago.«

»A servant maybe?« An empty question truly. He had seen the native boy a year ago himself. A plump, long haired boy. Not long before he had come back to the colonies again to settle down as he had originally planned. Although he missed London from time to time, the empire did not seem to be the place for him to lay his bones to rest one day. Maybe a part of him had even hoped he would see Ziio again when he would return to Boston. He did not.

»No. Achilles was never one for employing servants and clearly not a native boy. No, this kid was a novice clearly.«

»You haven't seen him.«

»Oh, but I did.« Shay smirked. »I made a little departure from my usual route last time, risked a look at the mansion. Call it nostalgia or whatever you want to call it, Sir, but after I heard about this boy I wanted to have a look for myself. He is an assassin in training without a doubt.«

»Did you kill him?«

Shay did not answer, but the silence was answer enough to Haytham. Shay was not like him or Charles. He was a good man. He did not kill out of pleasure or because it was easier to kill
someone who was standing in his way, at least that tiny bit still bound him to the assassins. He killed when he deemed it necessary. He killed when there was no other choice left. Haytham still recalled the day he could have killed Achilles and the way Shay pleaded for his former mentor's life. Maybe this would bite them in the ass in the end - as his father liked to put it.

»So, if the boy becomes a serious danger to the order, you are to blame. Is that what you want to tell me?«

»I don’t regret not having killed that child. He is sixteen at the most, Sir. Sixteen. He is a child. No matter what kind of person he becomes or what kind of danger he could mean for us someday, I will never kill an innocent child just like that. In the end, he is only one person. What can one assassin do against our order?«

Haytham glanced at Shay shortly, cocking his left eyebrow at the same instant and tilting his head in disbelief. »You were just one person against the entire brotherhood.« Haytham reminded him calmly.

»Yes. But the brotherhood was already weakened by Achilles' losses and my determination was strong. Our order is strong, nothing will break us apart that easily.«

Haytham nodded, but in his head, he was far away again. It was true what Shay said. Achilles had lost his wife and his son, he had been weak in mind, a man with a broken heart and the brotherhood became weak at its seams because of it in the process. But what about him? Was he still the same man Shay had met fourteen years ago? Had he not faced losses of his own making him weaker? What about the betrayal of Reginald Birch which he finally grasped to its full extent? What about the death of Holden? Yes, surely, he had known death from an early age on. He had witnessed his father dying by his side engulfed in an ocean of flames. He had lost his mother too and his sister he had deemed lost for most of his life - maybe it would have been better for her if she would have been killed too. He had never thought about those tragedies to have weakened him in any form. He still did not. If anything those losses had made him stronger in his determination and his cause, and even opened his eyes for other people's thoughts too! Yes, it was true! Fourteen years ago he might have hated the assassins but now, after all those years and everything he had learned and seen, hate did not seem to be the appropriate word. Their causes were not so very different after all.

No, he guessed, if it were only those tragedies he had suffered through, he would not think that he might get weakened by them.

»Did you know that Washington ordered his men to burn down the Kanien'kehá:ka's village three years ago?« The word rolled from his lips soft and easy because he still thought about that woman who taught him her language. He still remembered the nights they spent together in the serenity of the woods not caring about the rest of the world, Templars or assassins. It had only been them out there, as if they were the only people on the planet, as if they were like Adam and Eve, renewing the planet. He had never been a romantic guy but with Ziio… With Ziio he had been blinded by beauty and love and all those feelings and thoughts he had never dared letting into his heart before.

»I did not know.« Shay mumbled quietly. He was not the only one who knew about Haytham and Ziio. He had not been there when all of this had happened of course. He had still been an assassin not caring for the Templar grand master yet. But people were tattle tongues, especially Thomas Hickey.

»This man can never become commander in chief, Shay. I won't let this happen, because if he succeeds, the Kanien'kehá:ka are not the only tribe to be wiped out.« While he stared over the harbor, he thought about Ziio again and about the way she sometimes clutched her stomach when she had thought that he would not look her way. »Men like him crow their righteousness from the
rooftops and spin tales of equality and freedom for all men, but in their large mansions they keep 
slaves who can only do as much as dream about freedom - if they will live long enough to have a 
glimpse at hope, that is.« He could not help but to think about his last visit at Washington's 
mansion together with Lee not so long ago. He still remembered the face of the young slave boy 
working outside the house in the pouring rain in his thin clothes, his long silken black hair hanging 
loosely in his still soft face. »Did you know he keeps a native boy as a slave now too? A trophy 
from the burnt village apparently.«

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As he regained his consciousness, he wished he had not. That was the first thing that came to his 
mind before he even made the effort of opening his eyes. He did not even feel the strength to open 
them. For all he cared, they could have left him to the wolves in the woods. His entire body was 
screaming in agony as more and more parts of his body started to wake up again, but before he 
wanted to open his eyes he wanted to understand his surroundings, to grasp where he might be and 
if it might be possible to fight back against whatever would happen next. He could not smell the 
moldy scent of the wet earth any longer and there was no cold breeze brushing over his body. He 
was naked, that he could feel clearly, but he refused to think about the how and why. He did not 
want to know. He did not want to think about it. He did not want to acknowledge what had 
happened. It would be easier for him if he tried to convince his brain that this had only been a 
dream. A nightmare. A horrible nightmare conjured up by the horrible things he sometimes heard 
at night.

He wanted to laugh, really.

Three years ago he had not known a thing about those things. He had vaguely understood how 
people reproduced because he had seen animals in the woods doing it. He had vaguely understood 
how infants were born because he had seen it in the forest when a deer gave birth to her fawn. He 
had vaguely known that sometimes men would force themselves upon women. He had vaguely 
known what rape meant and sex and what the difference was. But when he arrived here, he had 
finally learned and yet he had not, because this whole concept seemed so alien to him that his mind 
refused to really understand. Now he did and yet he felt that he did not understand a thing. All he 
wanted to do was to crawl back into his mother's embrace like he did when he had been still a little 
child searching comfort by his mother in stormy nights and hearing the old tales their tribe told for 
generations - or sometimes, if he would ask her and if she was in the right mood for it, the story 
about his father.

Instead, he was hit with something hard against his aching and sore back so heavily that his entire 
body convulsed in the sudden shock of pain and his eyes flew open against his will. He was in a 
dingy old room and it took him a moment to recognize it. The floorboards were so dusty they 
seemed white, at least where he was lying on the ground. Around the old rusty oven the ground 
was pitch black and although the fire was producing heat, he only felt a chill running down his 
spine as he noticed the men around him, their eyes upon him like predators on their prey. Strangely 
he did not feel fear, though. What else could they do to him now? What could be worse than they 
already done to him? They could not kill him, he knew this. They could not maim his body too 
much, he knew this. Washington would not let them because he needed him for his revenge.

Maybe he would parade him in front of his father and Lee like this? Well, this could be worse 
indeed, a bitter part of him thought.

He could not count how many men there were because every time he tried to move his aching 
head, his vision started to blur. It did not matter anyway, he guessed. His hands were bound in front 
of him, so tight that the hemp rope was cutting aggressively into his already sore skin. His feet
were free, but he did not know how to use them any longer. They felt numb and raw at the same
time.

»He’s awake, Sir.« A gruff voice said somewhere behind his back and Ratonhnhaké:ton recognized
it as the voice of the man who had spoken to him earlier. One of the guards - that was all he knew
right now. How long had they held him down on the ground in the woods? How long had they
tortured him after he had blacked out? How many had taken advantage of his body? What had they
done to him? Maybe not knowing sometimes was the better choice. He heard a stool creak behind
him, but he did not move. He did not move either as he heard the rustle of fabric as the person
sitting in said chair apparently got up or as thunderous steps came closer, vibrating in his right ear
lying pressed to the ground. He refused to look at the man who was sitting and standing in his field
of vision, staring at him like he was some kind of exotic animal and he was even thankful for the
long strands of hair obscuring his vision this time.

The steps stopped for a second right behind him, then there was a low chuckle and the person
stepped over him and crouched down in front of him so he could see them. »Hello there, Connor.«
Washington hummed as he plucked the strands of hair from his face and brushed them behind his
ear in a gesture so soft and loving, as a father might do to soothe his child. »I heard you wanted to
leave us.«

Even if he wanted, he could not speak, but since he could not, it did not matter what he would have
said. It would not matter either way. He could have fabricated a lie about someone strolling around
the land and that he wanted to follow that person to see if it might be an enemy of Washington or
something adventurous like this, but it would not matter. It never did. So why bother?

»What were your plans, child?« Oh, how he emphasized this word! As if he found joy in the fact
what his men had done to a child. He was no child, though. In his community, he was a man, but in
Washington’s world, he was a child still. Did this make it worse? Maybe. It depended on the
perspective he guessed. He kept to his silence, but his eyes remained frozen on those blue eyes
hovering above him. Washington smiled almost pitifully, but his eyes remained cold without even
the hint of emotion. »Did you plan on following Lee? On finding your father in New York? Oh,
Connor really. New York is such a big city you would have never found him! And just imagine if
someone else would have spotted you lurking around corners, following a gentleman like Lee! The
redcoats would have hanged you immediately! Maybe worse than that. You should be grateful that
people who care about you have found you, right?« Finally, he dared to look away, only to watch a
small spider crawling through a gap between the floorboards. »Right.« Washington agreed. »If you
want to see your father so desperately, Connor, we can arrange that, you know? I am no monster,
dear.«

Maybe he would have laughed if his lungs would have felt strong enough to do anything but
provide his brain with oxygen.

»But first, I think a punishment is deemed appropriate.« Washington announced and got to his feet
again. Maybe he really was going to be paraded naked and soiled in front of his father with the
evidence of what had happened to him still on his body. The only thing Ratonhnhaké:ton saw was
how Washington made a gesture to the men behind Connor, probably the man who had beaten him
with a stick before to wake him. Then suddenly, he felt how his feet were yanked away from him
and within the next second, he found himself lying face down on the ground and on his bound
hands. His first impulse was to fight and squirm and try to get away, kicking his legs, his entire
body shaking in a fit of panic and adrenaline, his heart pounding against his ribcage in horror. He
just wanted to run away as fast as he could and the fear he had previously announced missing came
now crashing back down on him like a wave of ice cold water. »No!« He gasped. »Let me go!
Please!« He did not even know where those words came from or where his mind found the strength
to form them, but Washington responded only with a low chuckle and behind his back, Connor heard something like metal hitting on metal, but he could not see what it was. It came from the oven and that only surged his panic.

»Don’t worry, it will be over in the blink of an eye.« Washington hummed before he turned to another man again. »Hold him down, we don’t want this to get messy.« He ordered and as Connor tried to turn his head at least a bit to see what was going on he saw one of the guards approach him and then felt two pairs of hands on his legs to hold them down, before a third man crouched down in front of him, pressing Connor's shoulders to the grounds with his knees. His lap smelled of urine and worse and he felt his stomach convulse at the sensation. Steps again, loud and thunderous but now he was completely blind, his vision not only blurred or obscured by his hair but by the man's thick legs to either side of his head.

He had thought that the pain he had experienced earlier could not be surpassed by anything. He was wrong apparently. At least he was wrong for now. The pain that followed was blinding and shot white flashes of agony through his entire being. He could not see although his eyes were opened so wide that they were bulging out of his head. He was sure that he was screaming, but he could not hear it, because the only thing he heard was the ringing of pain in his ears and the hiss as the hot burning metal was pressed down on his wounded back, a new large wound merging with the fresh wounds of the beating he had received the last day. Hell, he did not even know how much time had passed since then.

His entire back was aching with pain. He could not really feel the shape of the object that was pressed down on his skin and perhaps it did not even matter. At least, as the pain got the better of him, finally his world turned to black once again and he was submerged in blissful quietude, hopefully forever.
Charles Lee would never make the argument that the colonists had a right to the land they had started to annex decades ago. He would never claim that the colonists had the right to take away land from the native tribes either, because that simply would be a blatant lie and he was very well aware of the fact, that the colonists could deem themselves lucky, that those natives tribes had been ready to share with them in the beginning and that they had not started a war with those white men invading their land immediately. At least not all of them. There were native tribes which were at war with the colonists truly and maybe even rightfully so, because the colonists were burning down their villages and had taken their land as their own, stripping the native children of this land and of their rights entirely, as if it were their birthright to do so, as if they were the true children of his continent, as if they had grown out of its soil. All of that was true and yet Charles Lee had never seen himself as a defender of the native people either, nor had he ever been very fond of them, to be entirely honest.

It was just as he had once said in the face of that boy in the woods. They were nothing. A speck of dust. That boy and all his ilk. They were living in the dirt like animals, oblivious to the true ways of the world. The wiser of them recognized the shape of the future. They threw themselves at the feet of the colonists and begged for mercy, forged a truce with the so-called enemy, because they understood that nothing good would ever come from resisting them. But that kid … he had clung desperately to his life while Charles had choked him with his own two hands. It was the first time he had done something like this. One might say he had only grown more aggressive in his ways since he joined the Templar Order. Maybe before that, the old Charles would have flinched away in shock by the mere thought of laying his hands on a small boy. In some nights, when his mind slowly started to wander and his body found its rest, he still felt the skin of the child under his fingers, still felt the thin neck, the fragile bones. The child had been just like a small bird and Charles would have been able to snap his neck with ease and without really needing any force at all to do it.

Sometimes, he guessed, fate operated in strange ways. He could have met any of those kids playing in the woods. They had heard them kids running around through the underwood, playing hide and seek, the closer they had got to where they expected the village to be. Neither of them had ever been to the Kanien'kehà:ka village before, so following the sounds of the kids had seemed like a good idea. Maybe one could argue that attacking a kid like he had done, was not the most productive way to go about that business, but Charles had never been good with those small creatures and he had never been fond of children in the first place, just adding another nuisance to the fact that said kid was a native. But still, out of that group of children, he had picked this one boy. It must be fate, he guessed. He had recognized the boy immediately and so did Johnson, he was sure of that, although William had not said a thing about it. Later he had argued with Charles that choking a kid that was at best four or five years old, was utter madness and truly degusting, but it had been William, who had knocked the kid out with the butt of his rifle after all. They had not talked about the identity of the child, though. They had kept it to themselves.

And yet, the moment Charles had laid eyes on the face of this small boy, he had seen it. First, he had looked just like any other native child, with dirty cheeks and leaves stuck in his long hair. He had been spirited for such a small boy really, but big for his age. Four, he thought now. He must have been four years old, because Haytham had left America almost five years earlier and if he would be a more decent person, maybe he would feel guilt for having choked a four-year-old child. The child of his grand master of all children he could have choked on that day. Hickey and Church had not seen it of course. The best guess Hickey had made afterward when they had left the side was, that the boy had looked similar to that woman who had helped them years before, although
his skin was a lot lighter than hers, but then Hickey had laughed it off because really all natives looked the same to him anyway. But Charles, although he had seen the similarities to that woman too, had been more struck by the similarities in features to the boy's father.

For a while, after they had left, after Washington's men had burnt down the village and killed the boy's mother in the process, as he had later learned, he had wondered whether he should write to Haytham about his discovery or keep his silence. He could have asked Johnson for his advice, but since he was the second in command to Haytham, he had deemed it important for him to make the decision himself. And he had decided not to tell him.

It was easy not to tell someone about such an important discovery as long as one was not forced to see this other person eye to eye on a daily basis. Haytham had been away for a few years after all and Lee himself had been back to Britain for a short while only to then fight wars in other countries in hopes of climbing further up the ranks in the British military to no avail. He almost forgot about the child. But then he had been to Washington's house in Virginia and he had seen the boy again. Thirteen, maybe fourteen at the time, but clearly that same kid, his similarities to the Grand Master now more striking with the same nose and the same mouth and the same eyes, but with the proud chin and jaw of his mother.

And again Charles had been struck with the question whether to tell Haytham or keep his silence about it. The boy's village was destroyed, he had no place to go to, he was living as a slave, probably under horrible conditions. The part of Charles that was deeply fond of Haytham as his closest friend had thought he must tell him and that he must somehow help the child of his Grand Master and best friend. This part of him had felt a strange bond between himself and the boy, but then the more pragmatic part of his brain had taken over and had reminded him of the months Haytham had spent out in the woods with this woman and how utterly distracted he had been all that time, hardly even caring for their vision and their believes any longer as it had seemed. And he had decided once again to keep his mouth shut.

Now he sat in a candlelit room, a shabby chamber at the local inn. He still fondly remembered the days he had spent in the Green Dragon tavern all those years ago. Eighteen years ago he had been another man. Maybe he had been more naïve as he was now or as he ever wanted to admit, but one thing was certain: he had been an idealist, he had strongly believed in the order and its cause and first of all in the Grand Master of all things. He still did, that had not changed. He still liked to think about the evenings they, he and Haytham, had sat at the bar in the Green Dragon, discussing their plans for the next day and later laying themselves to rest in a small room upstairs with the wind blowing through every crack in the walls and the window shutters rattling like cannon fire in the nights. Back then it had been easier, he briefly thought. There had been no need to keep secrets from the great Haytham Kenway, but then Haytham had started to keep secrets from him and the others, beginning with his absence from the order to spent time camping out in the woods with this woman.

Oh, it was no secret that he had hated her for the way she had been able to distract Haytham from the really important things. It would have been different maybe, if she would have agreed on marrying him and settle down in the city with Haytham, as a virtuous woman should have done, but since she did not, she had persuaded Haytham to follow a more dangerous path only to leave him crushed, as she had learned in anger about Haytham not having made sure that Edward Braddock had been dead all those months ago. A pity reason to end a relationship truly. Just one simple, little white lie and whether Haytham had shown it or not, he had been crushed by the break-up. And now he had a son and he did not know about it. This woman truly had been a wicked creature and she had deserved what she had gotten, he thought. Haytham had a sixteen-year-old son, living in Washington's house, thin and weak. Washington knew who the boy he called Connor was and he had made it painfully clear to Charles that he knew that Charles knew
too. They were now sharing this secret and there was nothing he could do about it, because now after twelve years, it simply was too late to open up.

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He did not want to open his eyes. He did not want to face the world again. He did not want to see what was around him. He did not want to face life. But someone was dragging a wet cloth over his back and made it almost impossible for him not to flinch. Under different circumstances, this might have felt good, but now it was pure agony. He could hear the buzz of voices around him, the more his mind started to wake up. There were people around him; he could sense it and he did not want people around him. He wanted to be left alone to die. Yes, maybe that would be best indeed. Another set of hands started to drag another wet cloth about his skin. He appreciated that someone wanted to clean his wounds and the pleasant cool of the water on his burning skin, but he rather would be alone. He would rather suffer in silence and solitude. He did not want to lay sprawled out on a table like this for everyone to see his naked form and his injuries and the things that had happened to him. Suddenly he knew that he was back in the quarters with the other slaves, he could smell their stench in the humid air lingering about like a thick fog all around him, but he did not know how long he had been unconscious. The last thing he remembered was the pain burning through his entire body as the guard had rammed the hot burning metal onto his back.

He felt the wooden table under his chest and stomach and the splinters gently nipping at his skin, but it had never been harder to breathe, never more hurtful, not even all those years ago when he had been just a little kid out in the woods. Maybe it would have been better if this man had snapped his neck as he threatened him with. He listened to the sound as one of the washcloths was dunked in the water again and then wrung out. He listened to the soft ripple of water drops as his eyes slowly, slowly opened without his doing and against his very will. He felt dizzy and dull. His senses were not yet back again. He felt sick and weird, but when he felt the wet clothes being dragged between his thighs he shot up on the table he was laying on, only to whimper in pain, his body cramping in the sudden shock.

»Shhht… It's alright son.« A woman whispered close to his face and dragged her black, calloused thumb over his left cheek, although he could hardly see the gesture out of the corner of his eye before she slowly coaxed him down into lying flat on the table again. »It's alright. It's over now.« She gently muttered and for a moment Ratonhnhaké:ton felt as if he was back home again, burying his hurting head in his grandmother's lap the day his mother had died such a horrible death, her screams still lingering in his ears, bawling his eyes out while around them men and women were tending to their injured neighbors and families and trying to build up again what had been destroyed.

»Akhso«, he muttered quietly under his breath. So quietly in fact that the woman beside him did not seem to have picked up on that. He wondered what his grandmother would have done or said now. Only rarely he had called her that, for she was not just his grandmother, she had been the clan mother and as such Ratonhnhaké:ton should have addressed her at all times.

»I know it hurts, Connor.« The woman then said. Of course, no one here was able to pronounce his name and no one here cared enough to even bother trying. He too knew not even half of the people's names. »But we need to clean you up, child. Your wounds get infected otherwise. We will try to be as quick as we can, alright? But you need to let us do it.«

He nodded, although he did not know how he managed to, only that he regretted the motion immediately afterward. His head felt heavy and hurt as if his skull had been split in two and he wanted nothing more than sleep again. For a moment nothing at all happened, but then he heard the rustling of people leaving the space around him quietly, but still mumbling. He could make out
the voices of men, but somehow suddenly he did not care any longer. Those men had never respected him anyway, no matter that he was a good help to them, no matter that he always tried to work his hardest. They did not like him for what he was, maybe even because they knew that he was a half-breed. Maybe they would respect him more if he was a native through and through. Somehow he did not care now and somehow he did not care that one of the remaining two persons dragged his legs apart a bit more so they could clean him up thoroughly. Probably another woman, he figured, but he refused to cast a glance over his shoulder. He did not want to see their faces or the pity in their eyes … or their disgust. Yes, probably that. Surely they were disgusted that he, as a man, had not been able to protect himself. He was weak in their eyes and maybe they were right. In the eyes of the other men, he was worthless now, he was no man any longer and up until now, he had never understood this concept. Now he started to grasp it slowly.

He felt his eyes burning with unshed tears and no matter how much a part of him wanted to wail and cry and sob, he did not. He could not. He did not want to appear any weaker than he already did.

The torturous cleaning process was dragged out for what felt like an eternity before he was coaxed into sitting up, so he could get bandaged. Bandages were a precious good for them these days and now they needed to waste them on him. He did not speak during the process but slowly tried to sit up as the woman that had spoken to him earlier, told him to. His legs were dangling over the edge of the table and he held his eyes narrowed down onto his naked, dirty feet. Like this, he would not need to face the women around him, while they wrapped him up. One of them held his hair up a bit as it was in the way of her busy hands and gently put it down again so it could hang loosely in his face and so that he could hide behind the black strands and not need to face the world. He still did not know what had been burnt into his skin, as if he was an animal that needed a branding. He had not felt the contours of the thing that had been pressed down on his skin and he did not even know if he wanted to know what it had been. Did it matter anyway? He would never get rid of it again. It would always stay with him until the day he died and perhaps that was exactly the point. Even if he would manage to someday escape, he would always be reminded on this day.

He did not quite care that he sat here naked. There was no such thing as privacy out here. Men and women were often forced to get washed accompanied by each other in the yard. There was nothing to hide and in fact, Ratonhnhaké:ton did not even know it differently anyway, right? In his village, it had been like this too. Well, at least for the men. As a child, he had not cared if he ran around naked. His grandmother had sometimes teased him later on with stories about him, as a toddler and how he had always run around the village as naked as on the day he had been born with no care at all. But now he was a man and it should be different, shouldn't it? Well, it was, but only for the privileged white men because they, the slaves, were animals and animals did not care if they were naked. Maybe those men were right.

One of the women put a hand on his shoulder as they were finished wrapping him in bandages. Soon they would stick uncomfortably to his skin surely. »You are strong, child, don’t forget that. They can't break you, as long as you don’t let them.« She gently murmured brushing a hand over his hair as if he was really just a small child. He did not flinch back, although his whole body wanted to. He never liked being touched except by the people he loved and trusted, but now, he just could not be bothered, although the only thing he felt was repulse. He did not answer and the women seemed to leave without saying anything else to him. A part of him just wanted to curl into a ball on the hay on the ground and try to act as though he wasn't here, but he did not. Instead, he managed to slide down from the table and to land on his feet. First, he was afraid that his legs did not want to carry his weight any longer, but then he managed to make a few steps. He was still naked and suddenly he felt cold although the air in the shag was humid and uncomfortably warm.

He found his usual clothes lying on the ground near his usual sleeping spot. A pair of blue trousers
which were just long enough to reach a bit down his knees and a dirty, white shirt. It took longer than it should for him to slip into the clothes and after he did he needed a pause to brace himself. He still felt dizzy and his stomach was still revolting. He felt like throwing up, but he could not. He needed to be tough. Not because of the things this woman had said, because although true, he really did not care right now to be strong. The only things that he cared for were that he did not want to be seen as a victim by the others. He did not want them to look at him differently – not that it mattered. He wanted to pretend as though nothing had happened. He had been punished. That was it. End of story. He had tried to run away and he had paid the price for it. It was his own fault. He had been stupid. He had not been observant enough. He should have known. He should have heard them. He should have sensed them. He should have known that it had been too easy. He should have taken the other route. It had been a trap and he ran right into it. Maybe Charles was behind all of this. Maybe he had wanted him to suffer like this. But what was his gain? Ratonhnhaké:ton was sure that he had not been there, so what would he gain if he had not been there to witness his suffering?

Maybe it had been Washington all alone. Maybe he had sensed what he wanted to do; maybe he had wanted to provoke exactly that by talking to Charles and asking him all those questions. But why? Well, he liked to make him suffer, that he knew. He liked to humiliate him, just because he could not do this with Ratonhnhaké:ton's father. This was Washington's way of getting back at his father. This coward would much rather let out his frustration on a teenager than facing the man who was truly at fault. That was to say if his father was at fault. Maybe it really was Washington's fault alone. Maybe he just wasn't what he thought he was.

Ratonhnhaké:ton did not understand politics anyway and he did not care either. He just wanted...just wanted to be left alone.

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The longer Haytham was around his good old friend Charles, the more apparent it became to him, that something seemed to trouble his second in command, but whatever it was; Haytham was not able to grasp it fully. A few days ago Charles had arrived back in New York and since then he had more than once cast a suspicious glance over his shoulders as if he expected to be followed by someone or expected to see someone lurking behind a corner. To Haytham's great confusion he seemed disappointed every time he looked over the shoulder and saw no one at all following him.

But though Charles' behavior seemed odd to Haytham, he refrained from asking him about it for the first few days, thinking that Charles would open up surely, if he deemed it necessary. Other than this those were hardly the times to focus on the personal problems of one individual, Haytham ought to remind himself once in a while.

»Do you ever wonder« Charles spoke up on that particular evening - the fifth after his arrival in the early morning hours in New York - staring deeply interested into his empty beer glass. »What your life might have been like if you hadn't left the colonies all those years ago?«

Haytham's gaze was drawn to his friend immediately and perplexed as he suddenly felt he almost dropped his glass. It was unusually quiet inside the pub for this time of day, but for once Haytham enjoyed the quietude. He was not the same dashing young man anymore that he had been when he first arrived in the colonies all those years ago. Weird thinking back at that time now, although he lately often caught himself thinking about those days. His age started to get to him apparently.

»Do you mean if I and Ziio had stayed together?« Never Charles had or mentioned her name, although he clearly knew the name of the woman that had once managed to steal the Grand Master's heart away so easily. Haytham was very well aware of the fact that Charles had never
liked her, but he had never quite bothered to care about this personal feud. She had not liked Charles and Charles had not liked her in return. It was a mutual thing and no one was to blame really. A short nod was the only answer he would get in this dimly lit pub. Soon the owners would call for the last round and if Haytham had not been already a bit buzzed, maybe he would have lectured Charles instead of talking to him in earnest. »I think it is the natural thing to do, wondering about how one's life might have turned out if one had made a different decision. Who knows? Maybe we would have married. Maybe I could have coaxed her into living the life of a true lady at my side. Maybe we would have had kids.«

»You still have time to settle down and have kids.« Charles reminded him with a little smirk pulling at his lips and though same was true for Charles, Haytham simply did not see Charles as a married man with a bunch of children, although their social standing called for exactly that. He would turn Forty-seven this December and he was already over ten years older than his father had been when he had been born, though his father had been already late to settle down back then. For a man it did not really matter, he guessed, but still a part of him thought (and maybe a bit plangent too) that his time was over and his chances to settle down and have a family of his own already gone. He had simply missed them, he guessed and now he could already feel time starting to slowly drip through his fingers like water.

»But every time I try to, the order finds itself in a situation of either imminent danger or in need of my advice. No, maybe it is just not my fate to have children of my own. Maybe the name Kenway shall die with me and end for good like this.« He drank his last sip of beer before he got up from his stool and patted Charles' shoulder. »Either way, the order is my only concern now and even if I had a child, a son maybe, the order would still always come first.«

That was what he wanted to believe, as he later told himself when he laid his bones to rest on his squeaking bed upstairs, while the snores and coughs and moans sounded dulled through the paper thin walls around him and while a small branch of a tree standing near his window, was gently tapping against his window like the fingers of a small child. He said that the order would always come first and that it would not make a difference even if he had a son, but he did not know if that was the entire truth. Would he have stayed if he would have known that he had a son? Would he have ended the search for his sister and come back to his child maybe? Would he have looked under the bed of this kid for monsters as his father always had? Would he have taught that kid everything he had been taught by his father? Would he have been able to take care of the order without being distracted by his family? Would he have been weaker because of it or rather stronger, because now, suddenly he had had a reason to fight other than his own curiosity and the purpose of the order?

Well, he could think about this as much as he liked, but he would never get a decent answer because there was none. No one was able to tell what could have been if he would have been more persistent with Ziio, if he would have stayed.

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It was a cross. A week had passed since his punishment and while he worked every day as hard as he could, trying to ignore his pain and injuries as best he could so no one would be angry at him or look at him funny, he had not seen what the wound on his back looked like. Of course, he had wondered what it might be, of course, a part of him had somewhat wanted to know, but he could have abstained from it too, judging the circumstances now.

»I thought, since you liked that symbol so much, it would be nice for you to always have it with you, Connor. Wasn’t this nice of me?« Washington’s voice was soft as melted butter and although every fiber of his being wanted to lash out at him, he just nodded.
»Yes, Sir.« He mumbled quietly and he hated himself with a certain sense of passion for his subservience. His mother would not be proud of him, that much was certain and it made him feel worse than he already did. But knowing his mother, knowing his grandmother, knowing that both of them had always been fierce fighters, always been oh so very headstrong and upright, never caving in the slightest no matter the circumstances and now being in a situation such as this, made him sick to the stomach. His mother would have never bowed down like this. His mother would have never said such words. His mother would have never lowered her gaze in the face of her torturer. Every little punishment, every little injury inflicted upon her, every cruelty she would have taken with her chin held high and if anything at all she would have mocked Washington, she would have asked him if that was all he got. He, however, her son, caved in like a child. What would she say if she could see him? Would she coo over him like some of the other women had always done with their kids? Would she have gone on a revenge rampage for her precious child? No. No matter how much his mother had loved him (and that she did without question), she would have kicked him in the side, demanding from him to get his ass up and take revenge into his own hands because that was what a man - a warrior - was supposed to do.

But he ... He just sat here, pathetic and weak in this wooden bathtub like a dog that was cleaned by its owner and he let everything just happen as if he was not really here.

The master bathroom was quite big for a bathroom, Ratonhnhaké:ton mused. He had not often seen bathrooms at all and most white people did not seem very fond of bathing anyway. They rather cloaked their bodies into fogs of perfumes and **eau de cologne** to hide their stench. They rather coated their faces with thick layers of powder instead of washing it. To him, it was of course absolutely ridiculous. His people valued being clean greatly, that was why even the few men of his tribe who had indeed managed to grow facial hair or chest hair, tended to shave it off because it was cleaner that way. He had been raised bathing regularly, keeping his skin and his hair clean. The white men, however, thought that bathing was exactly the reason for the various sicknesses they caught, instead of examining their own behavior with a critical eye. For all Ratonhnhaké:ton knew, one did not get syphilis from bathing too much. However, Ratonhnhaké:ton was mostly disgusted by those horrific, flea infected beards some of them white men sported on their faces.

It was better not to provoke the man, better to just play along, to give him what he wanted, because that way he would get bored soon and leave him alone. Washington liked to hurt him, to make him scream, to see him struggle and resisting. He liked the thrill of the fight, but if he would not fight, there was not satisfaction for the man, surely. Hopefully.

»Aren't you going to thank me?« Washington chuckled before he started to drag the wet cloth over Ratonhnhaké:ton's shoulders.

»Thank you, Sir.« It were just words. That was what he told himself at least. Just words Washington wanted to hear of him for his own sick, perverted satisfaction. Until now Ratonhnhaké:ton did not know if the man had been involved in his punishment out in the woods or later on did anything to him and he much rather did not want to know. He could feel the looks of the overseers and guards on him when he would pass them by. He had not seen their faces that night. He did not know who had attacked him. He did not know who ... It did not matter.

»The other servants think I favor you.« Washington hummed, but Ratonhnhaké:ton's eyes were still fixed on the mirror. He looked horrible and he knew this. He was sporting a nasty black eye, his lips were split and dry, his entire body was layered in bruises and cuts, but the worst part was his back and Washington had made sure he would see it to its full extent, when he had set up another mirror behind him to show to Ratonhnhaké:ton what he had done to him five days ago. The cross was large and angry red at its edges. He knew the symbol well, for it was the very symbol which had accompanied him for the last three years. Back then he had not known what this symbol
meant, but now he knew that it was the Templar Cross and from now on it was burnt into his back
to mock him for the rest of his life, for he would never be able to follow his prophecy and find the
place he should have gone to. »Maybe they are right, but who could blame me? Even though I
know from what ill place you have been brought into this world, you are still a sight for the sore
eyes, I must admit.«

If he would stay quiet, he would get it over with quicker, he thought. Washington seemed to find
pleasure in talking to him like this, in degrading him even more with his taunting comments about
his parentage or his physical appearance. In the beginning, some of the overseers had found great
joy in lining the slaves up and judging their naked bodies. He had been just a thirteen-year-old kid
and yet they had judged every little detail and mocked every little flaw of his still growing body,
be it the small freckles dusting the bridge of his nose and the skin under his eyes, the lack of body
hair or the oddities of his adolescent body. They wanted him to feel ashamed and embarrassed, to
not feel comfortable in his own skin, to think that something was wrong with him. And
Washington now was not better at all. He wanted him to feel worse than he already did, but not by
pointing out his flaws, but by treating him as if he was his personal play thing as if he could do
with him as he pleased. And he could. Maybe that was the worst part.

While he was sitting in the large tub of the Master's bathroom and while Washington kept brushing
the wet washcloth over his dirty skin, he thought how in the world he could have allowed all this to
happen to him. He had never been an anxious kid, he had never been afraid of everything. But
when he ended up here, he had been terrified. He had let this happen to himself back then and he
still let things like this happen to him without fighting back.

Oh, but that wasn't true, was it? He had fought. In the beginning, he had fought a lot and he had got
beaten for it and then... then he had stopped resisting. He did not even know how long it had taken
them. A year? Maybe two? Did it matter? He needed to escape, that was all that mattered, now
more than ever. They had beaten him half to death, they had raped him, they had burnt the
Templar Cross into his back, but somehow Ratonhnhaké:ton was suddenly sure, that this was not
the worst they could do to him and before Washington and his men found out what worse things
they could do, he needed to get away.

Maybe, a part of him thought, maybe Lee finally found his conscious and told his father about him,
if Haytham did not even already know. Maybe then his father would come and rescue him. No. He
did not want to be rescued, he thought, clenching his jaw and balling his fists, as he felt the breath
of the man on his shoulder, mouthing insolent comments to his skin which he refused to hear
anyway. He did not want to let himself get treated as a victim. He did not need rescuing like some
damsel in distress. Those men could do whatever they liked to his body and treat him like a cheap
whore all they wanted, but he would not drown in this feeling. He would manage to escape by
himself and he would find the man who was his father and then he would get his revenge for
everything. For the death of his mother, for the burning of his village, for everything that had
happened to him.

His father seemed to be a proud man from everything he had already heard about him. His father
would never let himself get rescued by someone else surely. He would also rather fight for himself
than being dependent on anyone else.

»It's a shame really.« Washington hummed behind him. »Your father declined my generous dinner
invitation. I wanted to present to him a beautiful Mohawk servant I have with bronze colored skin. I
was always curious whether your father would recognize you or not when being confronted with
his own offspring. I thought it might be a nice idea to offer a few hours of privacy to the both of
you perhaps, after all, your father seemed to like to copulate with animals such as your mother and
you. Sadly I won't see him again soon. He is about to travel back to Boston, as I heard. Apparently,
his ship is leaving in the early morning hours. Such a shame.«

Ratonhnhaké:ton did not quite know what it was that set him off in the next moment. He really did not. Maybe it was Washington's perverted implications, maybe it was his consciousness finally grasping that, if he wanted a chance in life, he needed to act now. Washington was a soldier with decades of experience in combat; he was just a boy with no training at all. He had always been a hunter, never a warrior, although his fate might have seen the path of the warrior fit for him. He knew that he was no match for Washington at all and that he could pay with his life or worse for everything he was about to do and yet he did it.
His whole body was shaking. He almost forgot how to breathe and all he could do was standing there, panting, naked, staring at Washington's body slumped over on the ground like a ragdoll. Ratonhnhaké:ton had no idea what had possessed him to do this or from where he had gotten the strength necessary to overpower a man nearly twice his age and strength, even more, a seasoned soldier and experienced fighter! When Washington started coughing, the remaining part of his brain screamed at him to move - and quickly so. He had just attacked the Master. He had nearly drowned him in his dirty bathwater and although a silent, yet vicious little voice venomously whispered to him to end what he had started, Ratonhnhaké:ton whirled around instead, grabbed his torn clothes from the sink where Washington had carelessly thrown them upon and hurried out of the en suite bathroom.

What now? What could he do? What should he do? Washington would not let him escape easily! He needed to act! He needed to think! But instead of thinking, panic held him tightly in its hand and all he really could do was listening to his instincts. He locked the bathroom door and jumped into his pants. He did not much care for the shirt right now, instead, he ran for one of the open windows in Washington's bedroom. He could already hear footsteps outside of the room coming from the staircase - probably one of the other servants bringing Washington something he had probably requested earlier. He did not know. He did not care. It might be a servant, but it might also be one of the guards and even if it was just another servant, that would not mean he would not get caught as a consequence.

One might assume they would never sabotage each other when it came to trials of escape, but that simply was not true and Ratonhnhaké:ton did not wish to get someone else involved in this either! Even if it would be just another servant, maybe one of the women who had been treating his injuries after that nightmarish night, even if this person would keep their mouth shut and let him escape (not help, just letting it happen), they would be the ones who would be asked about this and who would get punished for not stopping him or calling for the guards! He needed to be quick now, there was no time to think, only to follow his instincts and his instincts quite clearly told him that this would be the right moment to climb out that window, no matter the weather outside. Outside it was storming with thunder loudly growling from the skies. For this time of the year weather like this was not unusual and maybe the weather would help to conceal him too. It was not yet night, but the sky was darkened by the thunderstorm and the rain lashing in thick blasts over the grass made it hard to see farther than a few feet.

Climbing down on the façade of the house was not easy, but he could not risk jumping or falling, although a moment later after he got down a few feet, he heard Washington's thundering voice yelling through the entire house, alerting guards and servants. He looked down and found a small bush right underneath him that was not nearly thick enough to really cushion his fall, but it needed to suffice. With one last short glance up and then over the nearby grounds, he let himself fall into the bush. He landed hard on his left ankle and his whole body ached in pain. Of course, he was still fighting the pain that had been inflicted upon him a week ago, but he jumped up nonetheless and started running as fast as his legs allowed him to, while his naked feet were sinking into the mud with each and every step. He still had his shirt in his left fist, but he did not dare to put it on now and it did not matter anyway. He was soaking wet after just a second already, but he feared more that the light color of the shirt would otherwise give him away too easily. For once, he was glad for his darker skin. If he would be as pale as Washington, his flesh would give him away too easily even in the middle of the night.

He could almost not even see where he was running to, so he just followed his feet. They should
know where to carry him, while his mind was racing in pure panic. He could hear the alarm bell going off somewhere near the house and knew that the guards were on the hunt for him. Gladly he could already see the white fence surrounding the property just a few feet away and jumped right over it. His bruised ankle screamed in agony as he landed on the other side landing right in the mud with an agonized groan. For a moment he just wanted to stay like this, hoping that the men would not find him out here, but instead he got to his feet again and started running, slipping on the muddy ground every now and then, while his entire body was screaming in pain. His back was not supposed to hurt as bad as it still did after five days - then again how long and bad was his back supposed to hurt after he had been beaten to a bloody pulp until his skin hung from him in dirty, bloody shreds?

New York. That was the only thing he now could think about. New York. Somehow he needed to get to New York within the night. He had never been to New York. He did not know how far it was really, but even if he would not make it, he would keep on running, because stopping was no option.

Washington's bedroom was facing to the back of the house and thus overseeing the property and fields, so at least he knew the rough direction he was running into. The forest was not far after he had jumped the fence on the south side of the property so that he would not need to cross the fields but rather run in a curve towards the forest. Surely the guards would think him to run straight towards the forest or the path down the hill. Maybe running into the woods was not the most genius thing during a thunderstorm such as this, but at the very least maybe this would keep the guards from following him.

He had been raised in the woods and although those woods were not the ones he had grown up in, he still knew them better than those men did. Out there he was in his element. And yet he was petrified after what had happened to him in this very forest. He had always felt quite safe and at ease walking around the woods, but now he did not. What if they would grab him again? What if, this time, he would not have the luxury of blacking out? What if he was forced to stay awake while they would take turns violating him, breaking him over and over again until he would be nothing more than a quivering, sobbing mess in the mud? This time, Washington would show no mercy to him and he would only stop with his punishment when he was completely and utterly broken and incapable of even remembering his own true name.

Still, the embrace of the forest was soothing to his mind somehow, as he rushed into it. Diving into the forest turned his world into darkness fully and from now on he could only try not to fall and break all his bones. He did not slow down, though, if anything he even quickened his pace, ignoring his aching ankle, relying solely on his senses. And for a moment he was a kid again, a ten-year-old child running around the woods of the valley he had grown up in. He had always found it easy to navigate around the forests, never had gotten lost for real because the trees and the animals or even the sky always told him where he was and where he needed to go. Now the sky was darkened by clouds and by the dying day and there was only darkness he could stumble through, but he did not feel intimidated. If anything, the storm and the darkness felt like a cloak he could wrap around himself to hide from his pursuers. Even with their torches, they would not be able to find him easily, he was sure of that and yet he still refused to put on the shirt he still held clenched in his left fist. By now it was all wet and muddy from his previous fall anyway.

He could hear voices echoing through the woods and the bark of one of Washington's dogs, but they were still far enough away so that he had a bit of an advance there. That advance was only furthered as he slipped on the slippery ground yet again and fell, only to slither down a ravine. As his body hit the ground at the end of the ravine he started coughing violently and clutched his hurting chest, curling in on himself in pain. He did not quite know how far he had slithered down the hill, but the sounds echoing through the woods were dulled by the distance now and finally
after he caught his breath again, he put on his shirt, shivering by the wet coldness touching his dirty skin. The fabric burned on the new scratches he managed to get himself and high above him thunder roared so loudly it made him shift in discomfort. Maybe the guards would go back to the house, deciding it was too dangerous to run around a forest within a thunderstorm, maybe thinking that he would break his neck sure enough and that they could come in the morning to search for his body.

For a moment he just stayed where he was just like this before he managed to uncurl his body again and slowly stretched out on the wet ground just enough so all his limbs got entangled. He closed his eyes and tried to catch his breath again, while he enjoyed the raindrops crashing down on his clammy skin. This time, it took him a little bit longer to scramble back to his feet, but somehow he managed it and forced his feet to keep on moving, stumbling forward a bit more cautiously this time so he would in fact not break his neck. After a short while he could not hear the voices of his pursuers anymore and even the barking of the dog had faded away, therefore the storm grew louder and more vicious, with lightning bolts striking down from the skies, making the forest one of the most dangerous places to be at right now, but Ratonhnhaké:ton moved on, keeping his eyes focused ahead of him although his vision started to blur on its edges already and although his whole body was desperate for a little rest. His head was aching, but that did not stop him and neither did the rain.

After a while, the forest began to open up again and the world ahead suddenly seemed frighteningly light. There was a small farmhouse ahead, only half a mile from the tree line, but he did not know to whom it belonged. Since he had arrived at the plantation he had never left its grounds really. If the circumstances were any different he might have thought about hiding in the barn of the farm ahead, but since he had no time he just kept on running. Hiding in a barn so close to Washington's estate would probably be not a very good idea either way, for it would be one of the first places his men would look for him at and whoever owned this farm would surely gladly oblige Washington's command and help them search. As he was running silently around the farm, trying to stay hidden as best he could, for he did not want to risk meeting an angry farmer who would drag him off back to the house, he noticed a horse standing miserably on the field out in the rain.

He acted before he could think, as he jumped over the small wooden fence and ran for the horse straight away. It did not even shy away as Ratonhnhaké:ton stopped in front of the animal. It looked as if it just wanted to go inside somewhere safe and dry and warm, but either there was no stable for it or its owner forgot about it. It had not a saddle on its back, just wearing its reigns with which it was tied to a small pole in the ground so it would not just run off. The horse was a beautiful shaggy white and brown mare, although the darker color of her fur was hard to name in the darkness around. A part of him tried to remind him that he did not have the time to soothe the animal, but still he outstretched his hand so the mare could sniff him before he gently caressed its forehead. The horse gently neighed and Ratonhnhaké:ton took this as an okay, as he freed its reins and walked around the horse to climb up its back.

He did not know right away if the horse would help him, if the horse would run off with him, but as Ratonhnhaké:ton pulled its reins, it did and he felt a stone as large as the hill on which the Washington residence stood, fall from his chest with such a loud bang the entire world was bound to hear it.

The slowly rising sun was soon to color the New York harbor in a beautiful pink and orange hue, but it was still dark enough to hide ominous people lurking in the shadows and making it hard to really see anything. The thick white fog lingering about made it almost impossible to see one's own
feet or rather distinct if the shadow ahead standing near the water was a dangerous psychopath or just one of the merchants enjoying the last minutes of solitude before the day would begin. Shay had always liked those early morning hours the most when the biggest part of the population was still sound asleep in their beds or slowly getting up to start just another day of hard work. But no matter the hour, the harbor and the docs were never quiet, never asleep.

The Morrigan would leave the harbor in an hour, as soon as Master Kenway would get back from his little meeting. Usually, Shay felt better when he could join Haytham on whatever mission he went on, but since Haytham Kenway was not only older (even though it were only six years), but also more experienced than him. He refrained from arguing with him most of the times because after all he was Haytham Kenway, Grandmaster of the Colonial branch of the Templar Order and it was not his place to argue with a man such as him, who had seen so much of the world and the corruption of mankind. He was one of Haytham's most trusted men and he prided himself quite a bit on that fact, although he tried to keep it as low as he could. He was not pride to be Haytham's obedient and loyal dog (as Hickey had once put it very charmingly), ripping apart the Assassins limb by limb, one after another. He only prided himself on the respect he had earned himself and he was eager not to lose Haytham's respect in any way. He had never gotten the same level of respect that he now had from Achilles or any of the other Assassins back in the day, even though it had not mattered to him as much as it now did and he was sure that the only reason why it did matter that much to him now was because he felt for the first time what it really meant to have the blind trust of someone who stood above him in some hierarchy. Haytham and most of the others trusted him enough to ask him for advice and that only showed Shay how much he had really grown as a person.

He did not know what Haytham's gain this time was or what he had planned on doing during the night, only that the man surely had his reasons to postpone their departure for another day. They originally planned on leaving New York for Boston yesterday in the early morning hours. He wondered if this was because of this whole Washington-situation he and Charles had to deal with at the moment. Shay always tried his best to stay out of politics as best he could, but of course he knew that Charles was apparently competing with George Washington in the race of rising to the top, but while George seemed to be a humble and honest man, Charles always had a hard time with the good people that should support him, although his arguments were often better than Washington's and although he was clearly more skilled in warfare and strategy. Charles indeed could become a good, maybe even a great leader, if he would become commander in chief one day, but until then it was still a long way to go, Shay thought, and there were still hurdles for Charles to jump. The bad thing was, that Charles was not the most patient man. He wanted success and he wanted it now.

Maybe one reason why Shay wanted nothing to do with all this was his memories, to be honest. Whenever the name Washington fell, he could not help but think back to Lawrence Washington, a dying man he had put to rest and George Washington's older brother and Templar back in the day, when Shay himself still had been an Assassin eager to please his Mentor Achilles. Maybe he should have known something was afoot with the brotherhood back then already, but he had been naïve and idealistic and - and he had not wanted to see the flaws of his new found family and the errors in this ideology he had been so eager to commit to.

So, since he tried to stay out of these political issues as best he could, he mostly tried to focus on what seemed important to him and that was finding the casket and other precursor items if he could, so that the Assassins would not and so that something as horrible as in Lisbon and Haiti could never happen again, for the screams of the people trying to run in panic for their dear lives, clutching their most beloved to their chests before they fell into their death, would haunt him for the rest of his pity existence.
Sometimes he wondered if the Templars were the right ones to possess those items or if there was at all such a person or organization. He had heard of Reginald Birch and his crimes. Surely a man such as this would be able to achieve terrible crimes with such artifacts, but then again … there would always be a black sheep in a herd he guessed and even though that was true for the Assassins as well, he did not regret what he had done all those years ago. He did not hate the Assassins. But the brotherhood as it had been back then had been tainted, yes fanatic even. Even if Achilles would try to build it up again with this new recruit of his, Shay doubted he would live to see the day when Achilles brotherhood would grow strong again or as fanatic as it once was - if it all.

As long as Haytham Kenway would be in charge of the order in the colonies, he thought, it was not very likely that the artifacts would get abused in any way. Haytham was curious for them, true, but he was also a cautious man and he knew not to mess with things that eluded his understanding. The Assassins, however, as far back as the scripts about them told, always went head first into danger, with Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad being the only one to be modest enough to not just use them however he liked without knowing anything about them. Even the great Mentor and Master Ezio Auditore da Firenze had once used the Apple of Eden against his foes without really understanding its powers, although granted he did so only to lock the bloody thing away, or at least that was what the myth said. Assassins always were so hot headed, so short tempered, so short sighted and that was exactly what had attracted Shay to them back then when he had been just a kid himself. Today he could understand all this and see his enemies in a more rational light. Maybe this was Haytham's influence because his temper too seemed to have cooled off a bit and he did not seem to be interested in going after the Assassins with as much ferocity as he had all those years ago. Something in the Grand Master had definitely changed in the last few years.

However, the question remained: What if Haytham would maybe retire or die? Charles was to succeed him, that was certain, but could he expect Charles to treat the objects as Haytham would? He seemed distracted as of late. He seemed far away with his thoughts, troubled by something he would not dare speaking about. Shay was not very fond of Charles to be perfectly honest, but he still had respect for the man, although he feared that Charles someday could mean to be dangerous for their order. It was hard to tell, really, but this was always the grand problem with proud men like Charles.

With a small sigh, he started to walk over to the docks again. Haytham was not back yet, but he might as well tell Gist to get the Morrigan ready so that they could leave as soon as Haytham was back. Somehow Shay felt uneasy to remain here longer than absolutely necessary at the moment. For the moment being, Shay was unable to tell what it was about being in New York making him feel like this, maybe it was because of Charles' strange behavior in the past week. Every time he saw him, the man looked as if he had seen a ghost. Maybe it was his bad consciousness catching up with him for whatever reason or whatever crime he had committed in the past because surely there were plenty. He could not blame the man for having a moral breakdown, of course, after all, none of them were innocent and he was sure that his very own demons would someday start to catch up with him too, maybe even in the form of a young Assassin thirsty for revenge or retaliation of some sort.

Shay only reached the pier, when he noticed something out of the corner of his eye. In the foggy mist of the early morning hours, he could see a shadow lurking behind a few boxes that were piled up near the end of the docks. First he brushed it off as some idiot drunk needing to wee or trying to hide from someone, maybe because they had not paid their bill at the nearby pub, but as Shay walked on towards the Morrigan, he heard the rustling of fabric over the harsh wind and noticed movement, seeing just in time as the figure ran towards another set of boxes without turning his head so much that this figure would notice that Shay had noticed. To him, it was not quite clear if this person was trying to follow him or someone else, even though there were not as many people
around yet and clearly no one who was worth it to follow, but one thing was certain, this person did not have much experience in sneaking up on someone. For a brief moment, he wondered if this person might be Achilles' novice in search of a Templar after seeing *the Morrigan* anchoring in New York, but he guessed, after three years of training with Achilles even the clumsiest novice should be better in following someone.

He stopped and turned his head as casually as he could without alarming the clumsy stalker, seeing shortly how a head vanished quickly behind another box. It was almost amusing to him, almost, because Haytham could be back soon and he did not know if this person, as clumsy as they seemed, would turn out to be a threat or not. He just could not risk it, so Shay turned around acting as if he had just remembered something and strode off again with long steps towards one of the alleyways leading deeper into the labyrinth of the city. He did not hear or notice the person following him, but still, Shay dove right into one of the narrow alleys between a pub and a dressmaker. The harbor and the docks were always a noisy and lively place. There was always so much going on, from people selling fish and other things, over sailors rummaging the nearest pubs and shops, to men transporting cargo, to soldiers patrolling the area so that there would not be riots, to normal people just going about their business. There were boxes piled up on every corner offering ideal hiding possibilities if one was to use them and the shady alleys between the houses around the area too were a fascinating world on its own with people selling dangerous goods, with prostitutes doing their job or other shady arrangements being carried out.

As the darkness of the alley had swallowed him whole, Shay stopped and looked over the plaza again. He saw the person leaving their hiding spot and hesitating for a moment. He could not see much of them, other than it seemed to be a masculine figure due to the thick cloud of fog. Shay just watched in surprise how the man started to walk around as if it meant nothing, looking at the boxes of cargo that were about to be carried onto the various ships. He seemed to look for something – maybe a special item he wanted to steal, maybe something else – but then he let the boxes alone and turned to the docks. Judging by the way the person was creeping along the docks Shay thought that he was in search for a distinct ship and somehow to him, it did not even come as such a surprise as the man found *the Morrigan* and seemed to have found what he was looking for.

Of course, the man could not just go on board of the ship just like that without anyone noticing, even though Shay mused that most of his men were either asleep or drunk in some pub. Surely at least Gist was already up and about strolling over the deck of the ship as he usually did around that time of the morning. The man hovered near the ship for a little moment longer, but then it seemed he came to the same conclusion and he started to look into the large wooden cargo boxes again that were clearly meant to be transported onto *the Morrigan*.

*Is he really trying to climb into these?* Shay wondered and really for a moment it looked like it, but then the man hesitated and glanced alarmed to the ship again. In the distance Shay could see Gist's lantern hover in the dingy fog and the man started to run off in a rush of panic apparently, sliding behind another set of boxes near the docks like a death fearing squirrel. No matter how amusing this was to watch, Shay had enough of this spectacle. He wanted to have dealt with this situation before Haytham would come back. As silently as he had vanished into the shadows of the alley before, he left them again. The man hovering behind the boxes did not seem to have noticed, and the nearer Shay got the clearer it became that he was staring at *the Morrigan* still.

The man seemed to be an easy target for sure, but then his head whirled around and as he saw Shay approaching he jumped back to his feet and started running in a blind panic, surely without even knowing where he was going to. Shay acted accordingly rushing right after the man. He was no match for the trained Templar agent and former Assassin of course and when they were separated only by a few feet Shay jumped at him, throwing the man to the ground and pinning him down with the entire weight of his body. He was sure that he had heard a bone break, but for once he did
The man underneath him grunted and squirmed. He clawed at the ground as if he wanted to somehow get away from under him, but Shay was blind for his fear. He grabbed his wrists and pulled them back so hard he almost caused damage to either his arms or his shoulders, before he got off him and yanked the man up, still tightly holding onto the man's wrists to keep him in check. Their faces were mere inches away from each other when their eyes met for the first time and Shay Cormac was dumbfounded immediately. »You're a kid.« He informed the man in front of him, the canvas of his brown eyes darkened by panic and anger at the same time. If he had hoped for an answer to that (even though, honestly, what answer would that be?), he would get disappointed because all the man – the kid – did was to clench his jaw and bare his teeth at him like a rabid dog about to attack. It was hard to tell how old that kid was. Fifteen, sixteen at best, he guessed by the softness of his face, even though it was not easy to really see details in the slowly fading darkness.

»What did you do out here, boy, huh? I saw you creeping around my ship. Are you Achilles' little bird?« After all, he could tell about the boy he seemed to be an Indian. The slowly rising sun gave away only tiny details about the boy. Shay could see how dirty he looked. Leaves and little pieces of branches were stuck in his black mess of hair, he had a long scratch on his right cheek with blood crusted to it and over all his face seemed to be layered in half healed bruises. His once white shirt was ripped and so dirty it was hard to tell its original color at all. He was not wearing any shoes and his feet seemed muddy. He smelled of sweat but mostly – as Shay had learned in those years he had spent with the Templars – of panic and anxiety. His eyes were clouded by exhaustion and his breathing came out in shuddered shreds, his flat chest falling and rising heavily. He looked positively as if he was about to pass out right on the spot and for once Shay felt almost sorry for this state the boy was in and for which Shay was not all that innocent.

»K-Kenway.« The boy then stuttered his voice so hoarse it was hard to really understand, but when he repeated the name of the grandmaster once more Shay understood clearly. »H-Haytham Kenway.«

»What do you want from Master Kenway, boy?« Shay immediately growled with his brows tightly furrowed and his voice lowered into a dangerous tone. He tried not to show his confusion, although he doubted the boy was able to pick up on this anyway, judging by the way his dark eyes moved from one side to the other, as if he was trying to find a way out of this situation. Master Kenway was not usually fraternizing with native folks, even though he had in the past and even though he did not oppose them in any way (quite the contrary actually) so there really did not seem to be a good reason why a native child would go seek out Haytham at such an ungodly time and then dressed like this too! »Did Achilles send you?«

Even though the boy's face clearly told him of his confusion by the name Shay mentioned yet again, the seasoned Templar did not think a second he could trust that kid if he was, in fact, an Assassin. However, before the boy could even try to formulate an answer, he went limp in Shay's crushing grip, his eyes rolled back into his head and Shay was almost pulled down to the ground with him by the sudden tug as the boy's long legs just gave in.

Excellent, that was exactly what he needed now.
The situation was not ideal, that much was certain, as Shay stood inside his cabin and watched the chest of the boy on his bunk slowly rise and fall in the dim light of his lantern on the small table near the bunk. He could have left him at the docks, clearly, but since this kid had asked about Haytham before he had passed out like a dying swan, he felt he needed to investigate about this further, although he still was unsure if Haytham would approve of that decision or not. At least Gist had not said anything about it after Shay had explained to him why he was carrying an unconscious kid on his back onto the Morrigan. Then again, this was his ship and he was her captain, thus he could do whatever he liked to do here and carry any passenger he liked without needing to atone to anyone about his decisions.

Shay could not help but ruffle his hair in exasperation. Maybe this kid would delay their departure to Boston a little further; after all Shay did not know a thing about that kid. They could not just take him with them without knowing if he had a family that would search for him maybe - Well, then again that would depend on the sole fact if this boy meant a threat to their order or not, even though Shay highly doubted it, just as well as he doubted that this kid had family judging by his looks. Now in the dim light of his lanterns in the captain's cabin he could see the boy a lot clearer than before outside. A bit he felt sorry for his cot for putting this dirty looking kid in it, but, well, he knew worse actually and where else could he have put him? Walking downstairs into the sailor's quarters was not really manageable and he rather kept the boy as hidden as possible for now - just in case.

He was an Indian, clearly, although his skin was quite light for one – maybe he was of mixed heritage, not that this would have an impact in any way on Shay's opinion. He did not care if anyone was of Indian heritage or African. It did not matter. He himself was disliked by many simply for his Irish descent, no matter how unfounded and dumb it was, but he knew how lucky he could think himself to be for the status he had as of now. Irish immigrants such as his parents had always been frowned upon in this oh so very young country that had been built on the backs of immigrants such as his parents for now. He had been lucky for sure, lucky to first stumble upon the Assassins and then to find a home with the Templars. This boy had not had this amount of luck in his life apparently – not that Shay was thinking himself being where he was now solely because he had been lucky. He made his own luck and that was not just some stupid thing he always said, that was the one thing he strongly believed in. If it would not have been for himself and his own desire to achieve something and being someone, he would have never made it to this point. However truly, he did not know a thing about this boy, this child - and a child he clearly was. A part of him felt infuriated seeing a kid mauled like this. His face was one big bruise-colored in all the different shades of green and yellow and blue. He looked dirty to the core as if he had run through a muddy forest the entire night. He was a slave, that much was clear to Shay as he looked at this kid in his torn and dirty and not at all fitting clothes.

He had not touched him since he laid him down on his cot, but the way this kid was sweating indicated that he had a fever. He would call for the ship's doctor, but since he had no clue who that boy was, he would not do it right now. Maybe Haytham knew him and maybe the Grandmaster decided he did not want to draw attention to the boy being here on board of the Morrigan in any way.

A knock on the door ripped him from his thoughts and he almost flinched away from the sturdy wood he had leaned against. Shortly he brushed his hands over his coat as if to brush away possible wrinkles before he slowly turned around and opened the door. He had expected Gist notifying him of Master Kenway's arrival, but it was Master Kenway himself and suddenly Shay felt almost
nervous to show him what he had dragged in.

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It was ice-cold inside the barracks and even colder now that he was pulled from his bed on the hay. He never liked physical contact as much, but since he had arrived at the mansion months ago, he had learned how important bodily contact was as soon as winter hit. Outside the world was covered in snow and a lot of the other slaves had been sent away to other plantations because of the weather and the lack of harvest and work to do around that time of the year for the main house was pretty much empty now anyway. A part of him had hoped he would be one of them, but of course, Washington would try everything to keep him close, even though he had not been here for quite a while, fighting in some war or conflict or doing whatever he was signed up to do in the military. He did not care, he was glad not needing to see him on a daily basis. His desire to slit the man's throat grew and grew with every day he saw him.

Ratonhnhaké:ton was still half asleep when the thick, calloused hand closed itself around his frail arm and pulled on him until he managed to get to his feet, nearly ripping off his thin arm. First, he thought it was already morning and he had just missed the cockcrow, but then he noticed the few other men and their sleepy faces as they were ripped just like that from their places on the hay. Some were pulled up, some were kicked until they scrambled to their feet on their own. The light of the lantern that one of the guards held was blinding to his still sleepy eyes. »What's wrong?« He muttered but was only shoved forward towards the door of their barrack which was wide open now, letting in the cold wind. He was not wearing any shoes as he normally would now during winter and he got no time to put them on, as he was shoved outside into the snowy winter wonderland.

Once he had loved to plummet into the thick bed of snow with his friends, laughing because of the soft sensation when he would fall and throw little balls of it at Kanen'tó:kon and Teiowí:sonte and the other kids until their mothers collected them shouting and cursing because they were frozen solid. Now winter did not mean fun and innocent games to him anymore, there was no Kanen'tó:kon or Teiowí:sonte to play with anymore, now winter and snow only meant hurt and the fight for survival. He missed his thick leather clothes that he had sewn himself after one of the women had shown him how, but they had been taken from him a long time ago and he was not sure if they would fit anymore anyway. A group of men followed him outside into the snow and after the last of them was pulled out of the barrack, the door was closed by one of the guards again.

They were a group of ten men against a group of only five guards with sick, portentous smiles on their red faces. They stunk of alcohol even with their mouths closed and one of the men even still held a bottle of whiskey in his thick paw. They could overpower them if they would try to, but as Ratonhnhaké:ton looked at the blank faces of the other slaves around him he knew that this was not going to happen. It was driving him insane! Why in the world were they all so weak minded? Why would they never fight back against their tormentors? Together they would be able to overpower them and be free at last! However Ratonhnhaké:ton knew that even if he would be the first to start a fight, they would not help him and he would be the one who would be punished.

He was not surprised, as the guards demanded them to undress out here in the snow, because he already knew that they had this sick sense of enjoyment when they could force the slaves to do something like this, no matter if they did it to the males or the females. He was the only on resisting, the other men around him just obeyed with blank faces and empty eyes, slowly taking off their thin clothes as if it meant nothing as if they were not standing in midst of a snowy desert, but Ratonhnhaké:ton stared at the guards unflinching.

»What's the matter, boy?« One of them laughed taking a sip from the bottle this one guard
reluctantly handed to him. His teeth were yellow from the tobacco Ratonhnhaké:ton always saw him chew. Grady his name was, he thought briefly. »Are you too stupid to understand?«

»Maybe he doesn’t speak English.« Another one chuckled helpfully and spit into the snow as the first one, Grady, leaned closer to Ratonhnhaké:ton. His foul breath on his face was nearly too much for him and he could feel the looks of some of the other slaves upon him as if they wanted to say just do it. The longer you'll resist, the worse it gets.

»Is that true, kiddo? You no speak English?« Oh, how he hated this mocking tone. He spoke slow and not even with correct grammar as they often did when they were directly speaking to the slaves to mock and humiliate them further as if speaking to some stupid dog. But he did not answer them to further his own humiliation, instead, he blankly stared at them in resistance. »Being a little shit today again, right boy? Think you can act all tough?« Grady huffed and shoved him against his left shoulder so hard that Ratonhnhaké:ton lost his balance and plummeted under roaring laughter into the snow. Oh if only he would have a weapon. But whom was he kidding? There was no way he would be able to hurt any of them even wielding a sword. He was thirteen and they were grown adults. Still, he resisted, ignoring the laughter burning on his neck as he stared infuriated up to his tormentors, carefully adding Grady's name to his revenge list, as he began to unlace his shirt reluctantly.

»Look at that!« Grady jeered as Ratonhnhaké:ton got back to his feet and let his pants drop to the ground. He did not look away. He did not want to appear as if he was ashamed. He would never lower his gaze because of their taunts. He would keep his chin up, he would stay proud. »You still have a lot of growing to do, don’t you, Ape?«

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What Haytham had expected to see upon his arrival at the ship was Shay, one of his most trusted men, to wait for him on deck like the loyal dog he often was mistaken for by Charles or Thomas. What he had not expected was the message he received from Gist, after he walked up the deal and stepped onto the deck of the Morrigan, as the first sailors were going about their business and making sure that the last bits of cargo would soon be transported onto the ship, before they would leave New York for good.

»Dare I ask what this is?« He found himself asking as he finally stepped into the captain's cabin, after said captain had opened the door for him appearing quite nervous which was highly unlike his usual behavior. Gist had not said much as Haytham had entered the ship. The only thing he told him was that Shay was waiting in his cabin and that he had something to show him. That something now turned out to be a young boy. The same young boy Haytham had seen already at Washington's mansion, even though it was almost hard to tell by the ugly bruises disfiguring that kid's face entirely.

»I caught the boy sneaking around the ship.« Shay explained gesturing towards the kid on his bunk at the side of the cabin. »Said your name, as I managed to grab him.«

»He said my name?« Haytham asked and felt his left eyebrow casually meander towards his hairline. He did not know how in the world this kid possibly even knew his name. Surely, he had seen him at Washington's property, had seen that he was working there like all the other slaves Washington commanded on his grounds, but still how was he supposed to know his name? After all, he was not the kind of servant Haytham knew from his childhood and thus not integrated into Washington's private or political life. Surely he knew the names of some guests that frequented the place often, but Haytham had only been there a few times since he came back to the colonies.

»Yes, Sir, but he passed out right afterwards. Seems he has been through a lot lately, so I reckoned
it would be better to take him in first until you arrive to decide what to do with him. Do you know
the lad?« Shay hummed and sat down on one of his chairs. Shay was never the most tidy person
for sure, but his cabin was a mess. A comfortable mess, as Shay liked to describe it.

»No.« Haytham immediately replied and kept his ground without stepping closer. From his
position he could see the boy well enough, he guessed and he felt, if he would step closer, maybe
he would do something he would maybe later on regret. His life lately really seemed to take
unexpected turns. But then again he was not lying, was he? He did not know that boy. He did not
know his name. He only knew that he was working for Washington and that he probably escaped
him. »He is one of Washington's slaves.« He saw how Shay straightened his posture immediately
and he would not even put it past the former assassin to immediately pull out a knife, even though
Shay had not much to do with politics.

»So … Is he a threat? A spy maybe? Maybe Washington sent him to infiltrate us and get the
information he could use against Lee and to further his own agenda.« Shay finally gave in to his
own paranoia – even though he would say he was just being careful. As if a child like this could
mean any harm really and even if he would, Shay was the last person on earth who would cut a
child's throat to get rid of said threat.

»Possible.« Haytham replied with a sigh. He felt tired, but after all, he really was not the youngest
man anymore and working as hard as he did usually take its toll. »But it's also possible that the boy
genuinely escaped. Of course Washington could have beaten the boy up enough to make his claim
believable, but Washington must know that I have seen this kid already on his property and if not
me Charles surely did, which could only mean two things: either he thinks me stupid enough not to
notice or this kid really escaped, but the last option would beg the question why he should seek for
me then and how in the world this kid knows who I am or where to find me.«

»Wasn’t Lee there a few days ago? Maybe he talked to the kid. I mean, good old Charles seems a
bit odd lately, doesn’t he?«

Of course, Haytham would never support such a claim, even towards Shay, but to himself he could
agree of course. Yes, Charles had acted oddly the last few days since he came back from
Washington's. »Charles is not very fond of native folks. I doubt he would have talked to someone
like this boy whom he clearly thinks to be lower than himself. Maybe he heard my name when I
last visited and thinks I can somehow help him. If he is not entirely dumb he must have noticed that
Washington is not so very fond of me. Maybe he thought the enemy of my enemy is my friend.
However, that still would hold the question how the boy knew where to find me or to look for me.«

»So, until the boy wakes up we cannot do much to figure it out, I guess.« Shay finally sighed and
brushed a hand over his slightly stubbly jaw. »What are we going to do now? I mean, shall we
proceed with our plans as agreed and leave for Boston, taking the kid with us or shall we stay until
we know more? Either way, the kid needs medical help.«

Maybe he should have left the boy in the harbor of New York. Maybe he should have just told
Shay to get rid of the kid no matter who that kid really was, for he could not ballast himself with
something like this really. He needed to focus his mind on other things, on more pressing things
and could not risk being distracted by this kid in any shape or form. But he did not decide on
leaving him behind, instead, the Morrigan left the harbor of New York to take off to Boston with
the kid on board just as the sun started to rise and tinted the world in tones of pink and red.

As Haytham sat down beside the bunk in Shay's cabin right underneath the wheel, he thought
about the day when he had first arrived in this so-called new world, or the colonies how his fellow
Brits preferred to call this unruly land they had tried to conquer and make it their own. He would
maybe never forget the moment he had stood high in the crow's nest and looked upon Boston while a sharp wind had tucked on his clothes, nearly ridding him from his beloved tricorn. He still remembered the slight feeling of uncertainty he had felt at the view of this foreign country which was not so very foreign at all at the same instance. A part of him again felt the same kind of uncertainty every time he laid eyes on the mauled child lying in Shay's bed.

He looked horrible, really and that was not even an over exaggeration. Haytham had seen people that had been tortured before. He had seen death and the sheer brutality some people liked to inflict upon others, but somehow - though he had clearly seen worse - this kid and his disfigured face stuck to him without having the decency to make room for other thoughts from time to time.

Maybe it was sentiment speaking out of him, even though there might not even be a reason for said sentiment. For a while, Haytham just sat at this boy's side and did nothing except avoiding looking at him while he could hear the sailors outside the cabin chanting a shanty and while he felt the waves gently coaxing the Morrigan ahead. But after he got tired of hearing those men outside sing leave her Johnny, leave her for the third time, he glanced at the kid again and felt for his forehead. They had a medic on board of course and the man had tended to the boy as best he could momentarily, but that had not been much and now Haytham found himself in the situation of needing to change the wet cloth on his forehead again. As he took the wet cloth from his forehead he touched his skin for a few seconds. The boy was still burning up inside and there really was not much Haytham could do, other than to dunk the cloth into the bucket beside the bed, wring it out and put it back on the kid's forehead again. At least the water of the pacific was still cold as ice, but that would not suffice. However, in that moment he recalled what his father once did for him as he had been little and struck by a horrible fever. »We need to pull the fever out of your head, lad« His father had said and Haytham did what he remember him doing, as he dunked two additional washcloths into the bucket that he found dangling over the backrest of one of the chairs in the cabin, wrung them out and wrapped them tightly around the muddy ankles of the boy. As soon as he would wake up again he would be in dire need of a bath, but that was not his biggest concern now, even though a part of him wanted to clean that boy's feet and calves desperately. Instead, he made sure that the clothes were tightly wound around his calves before he threw a blanket over the kid again to keep him warm, for he clearly looked like someone who had gone through a lot lately.

Not that this was his place to be concerned about.

Haytham would never make the argument that he was a very empathetic man or that he cared much about other people really. He would not look away either if he would see a great injustice being committed in his proximity and would be able to do something about it without getting into trouble, but he would not get out of his way to act upon something he thought was cruel either - or at least not as long as he had more pressing matters to think about. Slavery was a cruelty he absolutely detested, maybe he got that from his father, who might not have been the most idealistic guy in the world, but at least moral enough to try to act against the slavery he stumbled upon in his past. He wondered what his father might have thought about his son now. He would not be proud of him for sure for not doing something even though he could. Haytham could not stand slave owners or slavery in itself and yet he visited Washington whenever it was necessary and looked away. At least, he thought, he was still human enough to feel his blood boil in his veins every time he looked at the boy knowing that it had been Washington responsible for the way this poor child looked like.

He wanted to tell himself that he would feel this was no matter who the boy was, but he knew that this was not true. Fate liked to play mysterious games, he guessed and even though he did not know it for sure, even though it was maybe absurd and ridiculous since he first saw this very kid he had not been able to forget him at all. It was ridiculous of course, this whole thing. This boy could be anyone, really, even though he appeared to have so much of Ziio. Maybe it was his sentiment
playing tricks on him. Maybe it was the black lump in his chest that wanted to believe that this kid might have a certain sense of meaning to him in some way or another. He really was getting old, wasn’t he? He was becoming a sentimental old man and he could not say he liked the prospect of this.

A knock on the door to Shay’s cabin pulled him violently from his thoughts, but he was indeed kind of grateful for the distraction. He could not sit here and dwell on those things any longer. It was not healthy. It was the ship’s doctor, as Haytham realized as he opened the door to the cabin after removing himself from the site of this kid. The man was already in his late Forties and his face wrinkled and marked by the years he had spent at sea, with his hands and face tanned like those of the other sailors always exposed to the harsh sunlight on deck and the violence of the angry wind and the salty water around them. He was wearing eyeglasses and sometimes had to squint his eyes a little to read especially small text from the book he was likely to carry around with him most of the times.

> How is our patient faring?« The doctor enquired as Haytham granted him entry into the cabin and closed the door again quickly. He was not naïve enough to hope that the boy's presence would still be unknown to the crew, but he still liked to keep this knowledge to a minimum for now.

> Not better than a few hours ago. He is burning up and he had not been awake since. I packed his calves to pull out the fever but I doubt that this will suffice.« He replied walking over to the cot with the older man slowly. Somehow he wanted to have a real close eye on what the man was going to do to this stupid kid. It was dumb of course, but he could not help it either.

The doctor nodded shortly as a sign that he understood before he proceeded to open the boy's eyes to have a look at them quickly as he did earlier. >Well, I hoped he would be awake by now, so that I could have a closer look on the rest of his body without defying his agreement, but since we don’t know how injured he really is, we don’t know if he has a wound that is infected and cause of the fever.«

> So what do you propose?« Haytham sighed heavily. He really had other things to do than to babysit and yet he did exactly that.

> A bath for the start. Let the men prepare a bath for the kid and wash him thoroughly. It can't do more damage anyway and at least the kid is clean then. I will tend to his wounds afterwards and hopefully we get him to open his eyes again and tell us what happened afterwards.«

Preparing a decent bath on a ship was not at all easy - not because the crew would not like to be clean at all of course, but because they were lacking the equipment to decently heat the water for a nice relaxing bath, not that the boy would even notice or mind. Surely he would be glad to at least get the chance to bathe, he, as a good British gentleman, thought, while one of the crew members brought a large wooden tub to the cabin and then proceeded to fill it with water they gathered in buckets from the cold sea and heated up above the fireplace in the caboose. The whole ordeal took about an eternity in Haytham's mind while on the same instant he wondered if they should not rather wait until they would reach Boston for all of this. After all, the trip was not so very far. Boston and New York were divided only by about two hundred and fifty miles after all and the Morrigan, a sloop-of-war, was one of the fastest ships traveling these waters. But still, no matter how fast the Morrigan really was, they surely would not reach their destination before the next day and if Shay would be proved to be correct (again) a storm was about to hit and would delay their arrival further.

Haytham was later left alone with his task of bathing this kid. He of all people! He spared himself and everyone around asking if he was the new babysitter on board of the Morrigan because no
matter how much he disliked this situation he knew that he did not want anyone else to do it, even though it was an enigma to him why that was. So, instead of pondering about those unnecessary sentiments, he got to work and justified his actions in telling himself that the other sailors were needed on deck if there really was a storm coming. He might be the grandmaster of the colonial rite, but right now he was but a passenger on board of the Morrigan and since he would not be of much help on deck, he might as well tend to this boy's injuries instead.

At least the boy was not very heavy, probably due to the lack of proper meals under Washington's care. Haytham had cared for injured men before. He thought about Holden for a second but brushed the thought away as quickly as it came. This was not new to him and he undressed the child with the utmost neutrality and professional attitude but paused as he pulled off the dirty white shirt from the kid's body. Since he needed to lean the boy against himself to pull off his shirt, he had a rather undisturbed look down at his injured back and what he saw made his stomach turn and convulse in disgust. For a moment it was not clear to him what he was seeing. First, he only saw the torn skin and the inflamed wounds all over his back, disfiguring the kid for the rest of his life clearly, but when he finally realized that he was staring straight at his own order's insignia burned into the back of this child, he felt numb and did not know how to proceed further. Suddenly he seemed to have forgotten about what he had wanted to do.

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As he awoke the first thing he felt was the heavenly softness underneath his chest and face, then the gentle rocking of the whole world around him keeping his mind soothed as if it was his mother holding him on her arms and rocking him back and forth like she had when he had been a small child. He had never experienced something like this before, but could not bring himself to open his eyes either. Instead, he just laid there on his front in the heavenly softness around him and listened to the sounds coming from around him. He could hear muffled thunder in the distance and voices somewhere over his head, muffled orders being shouted at unknown creatures. He felt that something soft was sprawled out over his backside. A blanket perhaps? Whatever it was, it was warm and soft and it did not hurt him or his still healing wounds. It took him a moment until he realized that he was not wearing any clothes anymore and although it came as no surprise really (after all he had been muddy all over and was now apparently lying in some sort of bed), it jolted him awake quickly enough, making him jump in horror. The blissful state of being half awake and yet asleep was gone in the blink of an eye and with the sudden movement, the pain in his back came back at once.

He was all alone inside a small room with wooden paneling and creaking floorboards. Three oil lamps were placed all over the cabin to shed a little bit of light for him to look around at least. He was quick to have a small look around, his eyes darting over the large round table with various maps strewn all over the polished wood, over a canon standing very close to the berth on which Ratonhnhakéton was lying, over a pair of armchairs and a small table with various items seemingly carelessly placed upon. There even was a bookshelf, but most of the books were lying all over the ground. In the back of the cabin was a window, but he could not see anything through it, only the wooden desk standing right in front of it and the large ball (a globe? Was it called a globe?) right next to it. There even was a mannequin dressed in a spare set of clothes apparently. It looked weird although it was only a grey-blue-ish coat with a white hood, but something told Ratonhnhakéton that this was a mere piece of sentiment and nothing the owner of this cabin really wore anymore.

For a long moment Ratonhnhakéton just sat there, trying to remember what had happened and where he could possibly be, but then it hit him. He had tried to sneak aboard this ship, the Morrigan, but did not manage to because someone had attacked him and he had blacked out. He had no clue where he was now. If he was lucky he was on board of the very ship he had wanted to
sneak upon, but since he was not a very lucky guy for the biggest part of his life, he deemed he was probably on some other ship, maybe being sold off again to someone else or even being brought back to Washington. Apparently, he had missed his chance of meeting his father once again simply by being too careless.

The only thing that struck him as odd in this theory was, that he had been cleaned up apparently. In the dim light of the oil lanterns it was not easy to tell at first, but now as a few moments had passed and his eyes had managed to adjust to the lighting conditions, he noticed that there was no mud clinging to him any longer. His hair felt dirty still, but this did not really matter he supposed. Then he noticed that his chest was wrapped in fresh and clean white bandages, covering almost his entire back or at least the large cross that had been burned into his skin. The mattress he was lying upon was partly a bit wet and he noticed the wet clothes that had been wrapped tightly around his calves, even though the reason for that eluded his understanding.

He felt dizzy still, but he slowly tried to get up anyway. He desperately needed to know where he was. Sadly there were no clothes lying around for him to quickly put on, only a spare set of linen pants hanging over the back of a stool. Getting up was easier said than done, though, for not only his spinning head made it hard for him to even stand, but also the rocking of the boat (by now he was quite sure that he indeed was on a boat) that tried to make him stumble. A few minutes before the rocking had been quite soothing, now it was a nightmare. His ankle still hurt and as he slowly wormed his way inside the pants and ripped off the clothes around his calves he noticed that his injured ankle was blue and swollen. Wherever he was, he could not run with this injury, so he best tried to be sneaky.

His stomach started to turn with each step he made in the direction of the door and he nearly stumbled over a bucket of water near the berth. Apparently being sneaky was not really his strength, he guessed as he hit the table and pushed it a few inches before he finally managed to get to the door. His entire body seemed to fight against him and his wish of getting to the door to have a peek outside.

It was not easy to get the door open as if something was blocking it from the other side, but Ratonhnhaké:ton just blamed the lack of strength in his body for now, after he managed to open the door a little and noticed that there really was nothing blocking it. A harsh wind immediately ripped on his long hair and made it almost impossible to walk outside. It was pitch black outside of the cabin except for the few lanterns dangling in midair from the masts in the darkness. Out here the sound of the waves crashing against the sides of the boat was nearly deafening and there was a distinct sense of panic deep down in his guts. Of course, he could swim, just in case anything would happen, but he had never been on a boat before and never out in the open sea where unknown monsters were lurking beneath the waves. He would drown immediately for sure if he would stumble and fall over the railing.

As he heard thundering footsteps beside him he ducked back into the shadows of the doorway and made himself as small as possible. A man was running down the left stairs close beside the cabin door, but he did not notice him as he ran across the deck. Above him, he could still hear a man shouting instructions but he could not recognize the voice and when he carefully glanced up and tried to see the shouter, he did not recognize the face of the man in the dim light of the lantern near the wheel. He was wearing a big hat and a thick coat waving around like the wings of a bat in this storm, but he seemed to be calm and as if he had everything under control even though he was shouting at the sailors. It was not the same man who had attacked him in the harbor, at least that Ratonhnhaké:ton could say for certain. But his attacker had reacted to the name of his father, as he recalled. Maybe he had left him there and this man over there had grabbed him to sell him off? Maybe he only tended to his wounds so he could make a better deal for him? Who in their right mind would want damaged goods anyway? What a sickening thing to think, really. But that was
what he was, right? For the white men, he was only something they could buy and sell as they wanted. He was only livestock, nothing more, but they respected their livestock more than their slaves for sure. A cow was worth more than ten of his sort.

No matter what his fate was on this boat, he could not just escape sadly. Maybe his best shot would be to hide somewhere no one would suspect him to be, before they would maybe land somewhere and he could sneak off, trying to make it to Boston by foot maybe, although he did not even know where this boat was headed to. Maybe he would be safe somewhere under deck, he supposed, so he waited until there was no one in sight and tried to make his way to a small porthole with a narrow flight of stairs leading down into the belly of the ship.

To his luck, he did not come across anyone for this moment, for apparently most of the sailors were busy getting the boat through that storm. The boards were slippery from the rain water, but he managed to get to the porthole anyway and snuck down without being caught for once. Again his darker skin seemed to help him in these surroundings, but under deck, he needed to be more careful again.

He did not get very far as he closed the porthole over his head again to keep out the rain as much as possible as he started to hear voices again. Down here it was a labyrinth of boxes, crates and nets hanging from the ceiling filled with other supplies and … cannonballs? This whole place was like an entirely different world to him. He had no clue why the things down here looked like they did or what the men upstairs did or why. He did not even know if there was a room where he could hide down here, the only thing he knew was that it would be probably wise to sneak away from the voices he could hear. This was at least what he thought, but as always his curiosity got the better of him and so he slowly tried to creep up closer towards the voices coming from his right-hand side. Maybe he could catch where the boat was headed to when he would listen to them, he guessed, or at least what boat that was or what those men had planned for him. There was a wall dividing him from the hushed voices and as he pressed his back flat to it he could see the shadows of two figures dancing over the side of the boat in the light of some lanterns, sitting at a table for all he could tell.

»You cannot be sure, is all that I have to say to this.« One of the men said and Ratonhnhaké:ton had a distinct feeling that he had heard the voice before but could not really name it.

»Of course I can't, but why else would this bastard have done this to him? Why else would he burn our insignia into the body of an innocent child who has nothing to do with all of this? No, Shay, he knows and he wants to mock me like this.« Another voice replied, deeper and darker than the previous one with a funny sounding accent that Ratonhnhaké:ton already knew fully well from men like Charles Lee. This person was a Brit for sure, the other one, however, had another accent that he could not really name.

»But what makes you so sure? How should he know?«

»He has seen Ziio back then during the Braddock expedition and he knows that she has helped me, after all he was one of Braddock's men. Surely even a man such as him is able to put the pieces together. You've said it yourself, he has burned down her village twice, Shay, and why in the world should he keep only one of the survivors of this very tribe as his servant if not for a distinct reason? He sold everyone else into slavery so why not him too?«

»Still he could be anyone! You don’t know that he is your son! Washington can't be sure too!« The other man, Shay, replied almost instantly, while Ratonhnhaké:ton's heart was pounding. Could it be possible that for once he had been lucky? Could it be possible that he was on board of the Morrigan? Could it be possible that behind that wall his father sat, mere inches away from him? Suddenly his mouth felt dry and his stomach turned once more as if wanting to shed every piece of
food he had once devoured.

»Unless the kid told him.«

»Do you really think his mother has told him about you? After all, she was quite angry if what Charles said was true.« Shay remarked, his voice trying to sound playful as if talking to a very good old friend.

There was a deep sigh and Ratonhnhaké:ton, still staring at the shadows of the men, saw how one of them apparently ruffled his hair in exasperation before leaning onto his hands. »I just know, Shay. And I believe-«

The wood underneath his feet suddenly produced a loud creak as he shifted his weight so lean in closer and the conversation stopped abruptly. Ratonhnhaké:ton noticed too late how one of the figures shot up from his chair and as he wanted to flee the scene he was grabbed by the neck like a misbehaving dog. »Look who we have here.« It was the man who had spoken first, Shay, how he was apparently called, but his voice lacked anger, instead it sounded more like a small chuckle as he dragged him back to the room, the nook, where he and the other man had been sitting and suddenly Ratonhnhaké:ton felt his heart stopping in its violent hammering.

Of course, he had wanted to meet his father but now he felt anxious and frightened as he was suddenly confronted with the black haired man whom he had seen before at Washington’s estate, sitting at a small round table over a cup of tea staring at him blankly with ice blue eyes.
Chapter 8

Ratonhnhakéton had never thought further than to the part when he would finally meet his father for the first time. He had never thought about the words he would say if he was ever going to meet him for real - or rather be acknowledged by him other than as a servant or slave. He had never wasted a second thought about the things he might say to him or how he would tell him that he was his son. Well, of course, that was not entirely true. He had had three years of time to imagine this moment while his body had been busy breaking underneath the straining work on the plantation picking cotton when he was younger and later helping the men build. He had had three years of making a plan how he would confront his father with his parentage if he was ever going to be able to speak to him at all.

Of course, he could not just say «Hello, I'm your son, nice to meet you», could he? And even if he did, why would this man believe him? What evidence did he have to validate his claim other than his mother's name? And even if his father would believe him at all, what then? His little imaginative scenarios had always ended in him telling his father who he was in one or the other way, but what after this reveal? Would they just ride off into the sunset together, father and son finally united? And what afterwards?

What now? What now? You had three years to think about this! What now, Ratonhnhakéton? What now?

His throat felt tied shut, his tongue felt numb, his mind was racing and yet it was complete and utter silence inside his head while the storm above him was raging. If he had hoped his father would find it easier to talk or show how eloquently he could handle such a situation, he would be disappointed. His father remained silent almost the entire way back up to the captain's quarter, after this man named Shay had caught him and shown him to the great man Haytham like a misbehaving puppy, with a mind unreadable to him. He did not know if Haytham did not want to talk to him as long as they were surrounded by other people or if he yearned for a bit more privacy in that matter, but he felt rather uncomfortable on his way up that was for certain.

It was only then that Ratonhnhakéton grasped that he really did not know much about his father. He had acknowledged this fact long ago, but it was only now coming face to face with this man, that it truly hit him. He did not know if the man had a family of his own already if he maybe had a wife and a bunch of kids other than him already. Maybe his father wanted to get rid of him as fast he could now because he did not want a bastard child around to lessen his reputation. For him, such things were complete nonsense of course, but during his time at Washington’s estate he had learned that such things seemed to be rather important for men such as Haytham and Washington.

He had troubles walking up the narrow steps when they moved upstairs and out of the roaring belly of the boat, but he just clenched his jaw and moved onwards. Still, the moment the door to the captain’s cabin fell shut behind him it was like he heard a cell door being slammed shut behind him instead and he felt himself grow tense immediately knowing that he was all alone with this man, his father, right now. He was a dangerous man with dangerous plans and dangerous believes, that was all he knew about his father, though granted that this was everything what Washington ever told him about his father too. Maybe Washington was right. Maybe his father was a dangerous man, but how much worse than Washington could he really be? Was it possible that he went out of the frying pan and right into the fire? Would a father hurt his own son?

»You are Ziio's son.« His father finally addressed him for the first time and then cleared his throat shortly but clearly uncomfortable with the situation. He still stood by the door as Ratonhnhakéton
turned around slowly. He was aware of his mother's little nickname for the white men. She had
told him once that his father had not been able to pronounce her name so she gave him this name
instead to call her by.

»Yes, Sir.« He replied cautiously and nearly regretted his choice of words. He had been
conditioned to answer like this over the last three years and he guessed it was not so easy to just
leave a habit like this behind so easily. For a second, he thought that he should not say more, that
he should keep his eyes down, while his father slowly moved from the door to one of the armchairs
by the side to sit down at the small table. He felt his eyes upon him, preying like a predator on him
and maybe it was because of his father's preying eyes that Ratonhnhaké:ton finally lifted his chin
again. His father was a proud man, a powerful man and he would be wise to show those attributes
too if he wanted his father to accept him as his. »I'm your son too.« He found himself saying and
although a tiny voice in the back of his head was screeching bloody murder because of it, he tried
not to show his panic after the words escaped his mouth.

His father did not seem shocked or surprised at all and when he thought back to the conversation he
had eavesdropped on, it really was no surprise and yet Ratonhnhaké:ton had never thought that his
father might have noticed him at Washington's estate at all. »Is there any way you can proof that
claim, boy?«

This was the first new thing to learn about his father. Haytham Kenway was not an idiot. He was
highly suspicious of absolutely anything and anyone and he was someone who rather guarded
himself and his order than giving into petty feels. Still, Ratonhnhaké:ton was taken by surprise by
the question and his mask of confidence slipped and shattered right away. Three years ago he
would not have been faltering so very easily, but now he did. Apparently, that was what three years
of slavery did to a person. Three years ago he would have stomped his feet and yelled at his father.
He did not have a proof that was the point. He could not proof to Haytham that he was his child
and how should he? How should anyone? Maybe it was not even true! He only got Washington's
word for it but who was saying that it was indeed true? Maybe it had been but a trick! He felt
helpless and confused and his head was still spinning from fever. He wanted to sit down again and
maybe never get up.

»Look, boy, you cannot ask me to believe such a claim without proper evidence. Otherwise,
anyone could claim to be my son, right?« His voice was flat, but not at all threatening or cold as he
had expected it to sound. »So, just tell me what made you believe that I am indeed your father.«

»Washington told me.« He blurted out without thinking.

»And how do you think does he know that you are my son?« Of course, the Brit pressed further.
Oh, he would never let him off the hook that easily.

»He said… I don’t know.« The last came out as nothing more than a whisper. He really did not
want to sound desperate, but right now he just felt like bawling his eyes out after everything he
went through to make it to his father and to finally speak to him and now, suddenly, he felt as if he
could not trust his own feelings any longer. He felt as if he had wasted three years clawing his nails
into this false hope of still having a family of still having someone somewhere waiting for him,
ready to care for him, to love him even.

»Well« Haytham's voice was like the sharp hiss of a whip slamming down onto his tender skin.
»You came to New York all the way from Washington's estate, you fled from your master and got
yourself in life threatening danger to meet me and you don't even know if what Washington said
was true? I'm sorry to tell you but that makes you either very stupid or extremely naïve, boy, and I
am most certainly not very fond of naïveté or idiocy. The wisest thing for you to do now would be
to tell me in earnest what made you believe him, otherwise, I would feel myself forced to put an end to your misery, after all you indulged into my conversation with Shay and wormed your way onto this ship. Do you even know with whom you're dealing now, boy?«

Ratonhnhaké:ton was already trembling. In his heart he knew that it was the truth, but how should he ever convince this man? »The ghost said I should look for a man who is wearing that symbol of yours!« He called out and felt his cheeks flush although not out of embarrassment. »She told me I needed to find you, but instead I went back to the village when the white men came to burn it down once and for all and then I was brought to Washington and he told me right away!« Still, a very pity attempt of getting his father to believe him while he himself did not feel like he really knew any longer. »He said… he said he wanted to keep me because of you, because he hates you, because—« But he stopped and rather clenched his jaw and balled his trembling fists.

»Because he couldn’t make me suffer for the things I did and for standing in his way every time he tries to climb up the ladder.« Haytham concluded leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms. Only then Ratonhnhaké:ton noticed, when he looked at him again, that his father was still staring at him, taking in his appearance in the dim light of the candles, letting his sharp blue eyes meander over his entire body. His stare was making him feel uncomfortable, but he did not want to show it. He was wondering why his father would not ask of that ghost he mentioned, but maybe it was better like this. »Did he burn that cross into your skin?«

Ratonhnhaké:ton nodded because he felt if he would open his mouth again, he would shatter and that he could not let happen, but at least understanding started to seep into his mind slowly. So it had been Haytham who cleaned his wounds? Or at least he had been present to see the cross before someone had wrapped him up.

»Do you know what this symbol means?«

»It’s the Templar Cross.« He finally found himself replying but his voice sounded thin and weak and he was ashamed.

»Do you know what the Templars are? Who they are? What they do?« Again Ratonhnhaké:ton shook his head. »But this ghost of yours has told you to go search for it and you wanted to obey without knowing anything about it?«

»We don’t question the spirits when they give us insight into our future.« He replied quietly and lowered his gaze again because he knew how dumb something like this must sound to a man like his father. White men tended to laugh about their beliefs, to mock them even and to desecrate their sacred sites.

»Is this the royal we you use, boy?« With that, his father managed to take him by surprise again and caused him to look at him confused. »You look very much like your mother, boy.« His father then stated instead of explaining his previous question, but his heart made a little cautious jump nonetheless as he heard a tiny bit of warmth creeping into Haytham's voice – or at least, that was what he wanted to hear at least. »You have her proud chin without question. When I first saw you at Washington's estate the first thing I thought was that you look exactly like her, but seeing you now, having grown a bit more I see a lot of my own father in your features, boy.« Ratonhnhaké:ton opened his mouth, but he did not know what he wanted to say so he closed it again and his father continued with a sigh. »You have your grandfather's eyes.«

He was sick. Apparently, that was nothing too uncommon, as Shay had ensured him with a warm laugh, patting his back. Still he felt as if his body wanted to get rid of his entire stomach.
Ratonhnhaké:ton did not quite know how long the journey to Boston would take them, but, after he woke up the next morning the storm was over, the clouds vanished and their destination was closer. »I don’t understand.« He gasped after his stomach finally ceased revolting against him. Yet he refused to lean back from the bucket between his hands.

»Pardon?« Shay chuckled and when Ratonhnhaké:ton finally managed to cast a glance at the captain of the Morrigan, the young Irish man was still standing confidently behind his wheel while the tender breeze was gently tugging at his black hair.

»Why am I sick?« Ratonhnhaké:ton breathed, suppressing the urge to vomit again. »I was not sick last night.«

»Granted, that is indeed a bit odd. After all, the sea was a lot tougher last night, the waves stronger, but I guess your body finally catches up on the rocking of the waves, kid. Don’t worry, it'll pass. Most people feel uncomfortable first time they are on a ship.«

»I never saw boats like this one before.« Ratonhnhaké:ton finally agreed. The day was still early, his father still down in his cabin, after he had sent him to get some fresh air in hopes that his stomach would calm a bit. It did not. Maybe he just did not want to be around the stench coming from his bucket any longer. At least those men finally gave him something to wear, even though the clothes were too big for him. He was glad that they did not give him the clothes he arrived in. He did not want to touch them ever again, if it were for him they should just burn them. He just wanted to act as if those last three years had never happened. Then again it had been his anger driving him onwards and if he would forget the last three years, he might also forget this anger that fueled him.

»Boat?« Shay exclaimed in a mockingly shocked tone and Ratonhnhaké:ton could hear Gist muttering something he did not quite catch because the wind was dragging the words away. »The Morrigan is not a boat, boy. It’s a ship!«

»I don’t-« His stomach clenched yet again and Ratonhnhaké:ton had no other choice than to lean over his bucket again, heaving violently until his stomach had nothing to offer anymore. »I don’t see a difference.« He then concluded his sentence breathing heavily.

»It's easy, boy: A ship can carry a boat, but a boat can never carry a ship. What's your name, boy? We had not much time to talk last night, I guess. I would rather not call you kid or boy all the time when you got a perfectly fine name to call you by.« Shay chuckled from the wheel. He seemed to be a quite open person and open-minded too in fact. First when his father sent him up to the deck Ratonhnhaké:ton had frozen in fear. Last night he had not had the time and liberty to really think about it, but now he did and now his fear of the white men came crashing back down on him. He decided on staying close to the captain therefore because he seemed to be a friend of his father and the possibility that he would hurt Ratonhnhaké:ton, therefore, slimmer.

He was silent for a moment and hoped that he could act as if it was because of his stomach and not because of the things racing through his mind. What should he say? There was no way those men would be able to pronounce his name. He never met a single white man who could. What name should he give Shay? Not even his father asked him for his name last night. Granted, he had gone back to sleep soon after their conversation ended because the fever had made him too dizzy to focus, but still… Should he go with Connor? He could not say that he liked that name… it reminded him on Washington and that he would rather not have. But Connor, the slave boy, was a part of him, wasn't he?

»I'm … My name is Ratonhnhaké:ton…« He mumbled into his bucket. »But… But I was called-«
»Ratonhnhaké:ton, hm?« Shay hummed and the name flowed from his mouth like a long lost melody, like the name of an old friend, lost but not forgotten. »It’s a beautiful name. It suits you.« He managed a small smile as he looked up at Shay again before he leaned his aching head heavily against the railing and watched the waves for a while, happy that his stomach finally stopped revolting even though he rather kept clutching his most precious bucket until they would arrive in Boston.

While he listened to the conversation between Gist and Shay and heard not really anything of the things they were saying, he tried to look back on the last night in the cabin with his father. Ratonhnhaké:ton still had no idea where they were at, he and his father. The old wolf had apparently accepted his words as truth, at least that was what Ratonhnhaké:ton got from the way their discussion had ended before Haytham had sent him right back into bed. Shay had been so generous as to let them use the cabin for the night and to Ratonhnhaké:ton's big surprise, his father even stayed with him the rest of the night, sitting on one of the comfortable looking armchairs with a book, reading the night away. He said just in case that he was going to be sick and needed a bucket - which he did. Still ... He stayed and watched him. He looked after him. He even changed the wet cloth on his forehead again while he slept - or at least he guessed so because it had been wet and cold when he woke up this morning.

They had not talked much though until now, instead, his father had appeared distant to him. Well, what did you expect? He asked himself. Did you expect him to pull you into his arms and pat your head the whole night? You are no child anymore. Still... a few friendly words would have been nice he guessed. He still did not know about Haytham's personal life or about his life at all.

»Oi! Pup look! We're almost there.« Shay laughed after a while and when Ratonhnhaké:ton followed his outstretched arm and his pointing index finger he could see land and a city near the water.

»Is this Boston?« He asked although he already knew the answer. He had been told numerous times not to ask questions when he would already know the answer and yet it was a habit of his which he could not rid himself of so easily as it seemed. Even here he tried to be as submissive as possible and he hated himself for it because there was no reason for him to behave this way - or at least that was what he was hoping right now.

»It is.« Gist replied cheerfully as he walked up to the railing where Ratonhnhaké:ton was sitting. Shay's right-hand man had not been too happy with their special guest being up here with them instead of lying down to get better and even though Ratonhnhaké:ton tried to be careful around those men, he found them quite sympathetic for now. He could only hope that he would not need to regret those sympathies later on, but the most bitter part of his brain already was certain that he would.

It was not long after this that they finally anchored in the Boston harbor and it was only then his father left Shay's cabin again. He looked tired, when they left the ship and Ratonhnhaké:ton for his part was tired too. But at the same time, he was wide awake and alerted. He felt anxious wandering around the Boston harbor with his father like that. What if someone would recognize him? What if he was going to be snatched away again? Would his father even try to keep him at his side? They had not talked about what would happen next or if he would join his father like he wished he would. What if his father would send him on his merry way now?

»Boy, where are you going?« The voice of his father was again sharp as a blade and ripped him from his thoughts with a pang. Only then he noticed that he had been stumbling on barefooted while his father had stopped near a carriage with two brown mares in front of it. When Ratonhnhaké:ton looked at him with big eyes the tall man just waved for him to follow and so he
did with his heart pounding inside his chest brutally. He was aware of the fact that he was now at another white man's mercy as soon as he would enter the carriage, but he did so anyway. If his father would betray him … well, at least he would know then. Maybe it was unlikely that his own father would stab him in the back, at least other people would think that way, but he thought one could never be too skeptical about strangers and that his father was. The only tie they shared was their blood and that was not worth much in some cases - though, in others, that was worth everything. In his tribe, it had been this way. It did not matter to the others that his mother was dead and that they did not know his father. He had been of their blood, one of them. He had done nothing to protect them.

Climbing into the carriage hurt his ankle and his sore back, but when he sunk into the comfortable seats he closed his eyes in relief for a moment. At least he was not feeling sick any longer. »Where are we going?« He prodded carefully when Haytham got into the carriage behind him and closed the door. The man did not answer until he sat next to him and the carriage began to move.

»Home.«

※※※※※

He watched him sleep again. This was starting to become a habit, Haytham mused. He had spent last night watching him although he had wanted to study his journal. Instead, his eyes had been glued to the boy's sleeping face. His son's sleeping face. His son, whose name he did not even know. Hell, what a chaos. His questioning of the boy last night had been nothing but a farce, really. He had known already that this boy was his and yet he had asked him for evidence which this child could not produce. Maybe he just wanted to see how the kid would react if he was able to stand his ground and he had been, although he had started crumbling underneath his eyes. He could not really blame him, he decided. He had lived as a slave for quite a while apparently. Sure he was anxious in the presence of white men like him. Especially … Hell, he could not get that image out of his head! Every time he closed his eyes he saw the angry cross burned into the kid's flesh like he was just some animal that needed branding. He felt sick thinking that Washington did so because of him. That he tormented this child because it was his and because all the things Haytham did wrong in the eyes of this maniac.

Suddenly he thought about all those times he and Lee interfered with George's plans in the past few years and he wondered how much pain those deeds had meant to this kid. What humiliation had he needed to endure? Oh, he had seen the marks on his skin. He had seen the purple and yellow bruises on his hips. He had seen the handprint-shaped bruises on his legs and he still felt sick thinking about it. He would feel this way no matter who that boy was - or at least that was what he wanted himself to believe. The fact that this was his son who had been humiliated like this just made it worse. Washington disgraced his son, a Kenway and he would not get away with this.

While a part of him felt he could not tear his eyes from him, another part found it hard to look at him at all. It pained him to look at him. It angered him. It was driving him mad. He noticed the way he talked to the boy, the anger seeping through although he did not wish it to. He tried to distance himself as much as possible from this child without distancing himself at all. Surely he was going insane. In the entirety of the Forty-seven years, he was alive he had never felt this way before. He had never felt this conflicted and torn and angry before, not even when he learned the truth about Reginald and his betrayal.

A bump in the road made the boy's head loll against his father's shoulder and Haytham was shortly confronted with the feeling of the soft almost black hair of the child against his neck. He thought about shoving him away, but then he decided not to. He did not want to disturb his sleep until they would arrive. It had been only a few minutes until the boy had fallen asleep in the carriage, so, he
reckoned, his body was still tired and weak and needed rest. With a faint chuckle on his lips, Haytham brushed a hand over his face. He barely knew this boy. Not even his name he knew because he had refrained from asking. Maybe he was afraid that he was not able to pronounce the boy's name as it had been with his mother. Somehow a part of him did not want to make the boy use a different name than the name his mother gave him only because he was not able to use it. And yet, if the boy wanted to stay with him and live with him, he needed to blend in more. Haytham did not really care for the things people were saying about him. He would never care if someone would snicker behind his back because of the half-breed who was his son, but-

What was he even thinking? It was only a few hours since he had first talked to the boy and yet he sat here behaving like some idiot making plans about their children's lives! He did not know if the boy wanted to be part of his life at all. Maybe he just wanted to go back home although his home was gone now. All of this was so bloody weird. The boy had been told by this … spirit of his to go search for the Templars and he found them, but the kid did not even know what that meant really. Maybe he would not want to join them, as soon as he learned about the truth.

The boy's condition worsened by the time they arrived at Haytham's house in Boston. He missed his patch of land in Virginia from time to time - or rather he missed the time he spent there just settling down and playing farmer for a while until duty had called him back again. Of course, his house in Virginia was being maintained while he resided in Boston. His house in Boston was not as big as the other of course, but since he was often gone anyway he guessed it sufficed. His house was in the North End of town, far enough away from the city's core, but near the Union Street and thus near the Green Dragon Tavern where he and his companions still liked to meet. As his carriage stopped in front of his townhouse on Marshall Street, Haytham slowly nudged the boy beside him awake but only got a grunt out of the kid. It took a moment until the boy drowsily opened his eyes. They were completely glossed over by fever and as Haytham felt his forehead quickly he almost cursed under his breath. He cursed the boy for not staying in bed and himself for allowing it and being hostile towards him due to his lack of sleep during the night.

He had not been able to close his eyes, even though he knew it was dumb. It was instinct, he guessed. Fear did not seem to be the right way to put it. He wanted to be ready if the kid needed something. With a little bit of help from the boy and his probably not obeying limbs, he managed to get him out of the carriage without throwing him like a sandbag, even though that would have been a lot quicker for the kid weighed practically naught to him. »Benjamin Church, Lancaster Street.« He turned to the carriage driver. »Tell him Haytham Kenway sends for him and be quick to bring him here.« He flung a penny at the man which he was quick to snap before he went to bring the boy inside. By now the kid was clutching to his side like a drunken peasant, barely even able to stand on his own two legs like a newborn fawn.

Haytham did not waste a thought about how cute this might have been when the boy had been a fawn himself still, instead, he got him up the three steps to his doorstep as the door was already opened by his housekeeper Mrs. Taylor a rather round woman with pink cheeks. »Oh, Mr. Kenway, I wondered when you would be back!« She greeted him friendly as she stepped aside to let him in. Her friendly face was quick to adjust to the surprise as she noticed the boy hanging from her master's side and even though Haytham could almost feel what she was thinking about said boy, she ushered them inside instead and rushed to the narrow stairs. »I go prepare the guest bedroom, Sir!« She chirped and already called for her apprentice Susie, who seemed to be already upstairs for Haytham could hear her thundering footsteps. He already scolded that girl a few times for being too loud when he wanted to work, but now he could not care less, as he tried to maneuver the kid upstairs.

»You need to walk, boy.« Haytham huffed in annoyance as the kid did not move on his own up the stairs. He had to somewhat drag him up the first few steps but he was weighing heavily like this
and his feet were seemingly not cooperating the slightest bit, his head lolling against Haytham's shoulder uselessly once more. With a grunt, he snaked his right arm under the boy's knees and pulled him up so that he could carry him to the first floor with little resistance of the kid. When he somehow managed to get him to the guest bedroom close to Haytham's own bedroom, the women were already done preparing the room for the child.

Mrs. Taylor helped him to get the boy onto the bed. His naked feet were already a bit dirty again from wandering just a few feet from the ship to the carriage. Gladly Mrs. Taylor did not ask who the kid was or why Haytham brought him along. He was not in the mood to answer her questions and surely it was none of her business anyway. She only ushered Susie to get hot water and towels so that they rid the kid off the sweat that was already coating his body again until the doctor would arrive. He had seemed well on the ship this morning, well enough to walk upstairs and get some fresh air at least, but maybe he should have insisted more strongly that he would remain in his bed instead of just letting him do whatever he wanted.

A nice little fire was crackling inside the room while Haytham sat with a grim face near the fireplace and watched the flames dancing in the dark of the room. He tried not to listen to the rustling that came from the bed as the doctor was working on his son with idle hands. To Haytham it had taken an eternity until Church arrived and now the sun was already setting again. He expected Shay tonight, but right now he did not really care about any of this. His mind was dull with anger. Why had this bastard not hurried to come here as he should have? When Church had arrived half an hour ago the boy had been panting and moaning in pain already, tossing from one side to the other in his bed and making the wounds on his back open and bleeding again. He tried not to look as his friend and comrade sewed a few of the deepest cuts close. Some of them were deeply infected, some of them festering. Haytham knew that there was a very real possibility that the boy could die from the infection or the fever, but he refused to think about it.

The grandfather clock in the hallway rang six by the time Church cleared his throat and turned to pack his bag again. When Haytham cast a glance at him, the doctor was wiping away sweat from his brow. Benjamin was a skilled surgeon, he knew this very well, but now he seemed nervous and Haytham did not grasp why. Maybe his friend had grasped the severity of the situation quicker than Haytham did, but then again that surely had not been hard after Haytham had practically yelled at him as he arrived to take care of the boy.

»I have done everything I can for him.« Benjamin announced with a sigh and grabbed his back. »But that wasn’t much, I’m afraid. I leave you a few of my tinctures and medicines to give him, but be careful for I do not know how he might react. I doubt he is used to these kinds of medicines.« Haytham nodded sharply but still refused to speak. »He should be watched the night and I shall come back in the morning to have a look at him. For now, we can only wait.«
Chapter 9

Noise was bouncing from red brick stone house walls and echoing through narrow alleyways between buildings, leading deeper into the bowel of the still growing town. The shouts of a paperboy sounded from the corner of the street not far away enthusiastically announcing the newest headlines, talking about the events from all around the world. Conflicts were brewing all over the world apparently, but for now, it seemed to be nothing too serious and if it would not be for Charles being his friend, Haytham really would still be on his farmland in Virginia counting his cows or harvesting corn. There was nothing much to do for him here and now at the moment, other than to keep an eye on the brewing conflicts. He had given up on his search for the precursor items and the Templar Order needed to turn to more practical things in those rather peaceful times, even though it was quite clear that it was only a matter of time until another war would start in this country. He could feel it deep in his old bones like a virus eating away at him, especially now that there was a new Assassin on the rise.

Well, he was just a kid, as Shay had so perfectly framed it. Just a kid like his.

The boy had not been awake since they arrived back at Marshall Street, which was a week ago. He was rather weak; his frail, almost starved body possessed not enough strength to fight against the fever and the deep-seated infection. At one point Benjamin had been forced to cut away a piece of infected skin on the boy's lower back leaving behind an ugly open wound which would surely leave a big scar, not that it would matter now anyway. This was the only time the kid had opened his eyes even though only for a few moments, screaming in pure agony and terror. Changing the bed sheets had not been an easy task for Mrs. Taylor and Susie, but a necessary one, so every time they needed to do it because they were drenched in either sweat or blood, Haytham had to either pick the boy up in his arms until they were finished or roll his body onto the other side of the bed. Hygiene, however, was the most important thing now, even though Mrs. Taylor liked to shake her head about it. He had not yet told her who the savage boy, as she liked to call him when she was alone with Susie, she needed to care for was. And to Haytham there was no real need of telling those women the truth now anyway. Surely, they would treat him better if they would know. Surely, they would not make faces when they needed to clean him up again as much as they did thinking he was just a random savage. But this was entirely his point. They should treat an orphaned savage boy just like they would treat their master's flesh and blood or at least show him some respect.

Haytham was the one needing to feed him whenever his time would allow him to. Feeding an unconscious person with soup really was not a very comfortable task, as he was ready to admit. He could have let one of the women do it, but for some reason, he wanted to do it himself. Maybe it was just the sentiment ruling over his mind – or boredom. He was not used to having no real conflicts to deal with other than those nagging annoying squabbles between Charles and Washington of which he was always informed by his friend. Charles was always eager to tell him about Washington's plans and he too received letters from Johnson nearly every week telling him about his future plans for the land of the remaining tribes. In William's eyes, it would be best taking the land from the Indians to administer it properly and to give them the chance of staying and living a peaceful life under their protection. Though Haytham agreed, he also saw how stubborn those native people could be and maybe he could even understand. After all, they were the intruders and they were the ones stealing the land from the native tribes.

He had not seen Charles or any other member of the order, except for Shay and Benjamin, since he first met the boy and he had refrained from writing him about the kid's presence in Boston either. It was not important anyway, at least not for Charles. Other than this, Haytham was sure that a little
black bird had already told him for sure. He did not know if his friend had really noticed this boy on Washington's property, but even if he had, there was no way in telling if Charles had ever noticed the similarities or thought that this boy could be Haytham's son at all. Though granted, Charles had been acting odd after his last visit to the Washington estate.

With a sigh, Haytham moved away from the window of the room after he had just closed it to let fresh air in and the stench of a sickroom out. The air outside was bitingly cold already. Surely they would soon see the first flakes of snow already. His birthday was close too, not that he would have any interest in this particular day, other than it being a reminder of his father's death and him being robbed of the future he should have had. Most of the time he missed his own birthday anyway if it was not for some friend of his reminding him about that day or if it were not for the annual letter of his sister writing some superficial paragraphs telling about the weather in London or the way she was spending her days nowadays.

When his eyes fell upon the kid he wondered when his birthday was. He remembered the subtle way Ziio would sometimes clutch her stomach whenever she thought he would not notice, but he did not know how far she had been when he left her – when she shooed him away out of anger. They had been together for a few months after he had dealt with his good old friend Edward Braddock and needed to face the setback in the matter of the search for the great temple. He thought, maybe his son had been sired in that very night on that very ground inside the temple, in front of the wall with the ancient paintings of the story of Iottsitison. Chances were good his son was a child of the spring that had followed after, Haytham's favorite season of the year. Considering how stubborn the boy seemed to be, judging by the sole fact that he had survived at least three years as a slave and managed to escape and make his way to New York all the way from Washington's estate, he might as well be an Aries, he guessed.

His own father had deemed such things very important, as he recalled and now as an adult and knowing that his father had been a seafarer and thus depended on the firmament to guide him from time to time, he understood why. His mother had always laughed about his father's superstitions concerning the zodiac signs, but he had always listened to it with a curious mind, his sister rolling her eyes at the stories she had so often heard before. He still remembered his father sometimes ramble about the zodiac or the stars when they sat by the fire and just enjoyed each other's company. He had told Haytham a great deal about star formations and how to navigate under their lead. Always be wary of Scorpios, his father had liked to laugh, glancing at Haytham's mother who had just responded with a warm chuckle. A joke he had never quite understood. He felt as if he was still missing out on it.

Boredom really did strange things to a person but now, revisiting those years of innocence and carefree youth, he wondered under which stars his son had been born. Had he been born when he and Holden had been in search for his sister? Had he been born the moment when Haytham had found her? Hopefully, those boy's stars had been lucky and not deciding on a grim future for him.

The kid was not getting better. A week after they arrived, he was not getting better. The medicine did not work, the tinctures did not help. Keeping him clean did not help, feeding him did not do anything good. Haytham often woke from a snooze hearing the kid retching in pain, spitting out everything Haytham had been feeding to him during the day. Then Mrs. Taylor needed to change the bedding again. It was weird to him how agitated he felt about this whole situation. He did not know a thing about his son. There was no evidence that this kid really was his child of course, but still, Haytham felt the connection that was there truly. First, it had been nothing more than a hunch, but now it was something stronger than that. Every time the kid was tossing and turning, moaning in agony he felt as if he needed to do something to make it better, but there simply was nothing he could do. A bitter part of him even wondered if he should not just release the poor child from his suffering like one would with a dog, but the more selfish part of him, the part that still thought of
Ziio and all the little what-ifs, was stronger for he did not want to lose a child without having the slightest chance of getting to know him first.

Maybe it was his destiny to lose every bit of family he had, even the one he had not even known existed for the last sixteen years. He wondered if he would have ever left the colonies in search of his sister, if he would have known about the existence of that unborn child back then. He wanted to think that he would have stayed, but maybe his honor would have forced him to rescue his sister anyway.

Seven days after all of this had started and he was yet to get a full night of sleep. He would not go as far as to say that it was the worry keeping him awake, no. He could have ordered Mrs. Taylor to watch the boy during the night while he caught up on his sleep next door. He would have heard every little noise anyway next door for the walls were just so thin, but he simply was not able to really find sleep even when he was trying in earnest. The most he managed was to doze off from time to time. This was driving him insane truly but slowly and Mrs. Taylor's nice words did not help at all in this situation. If anything, it made it worse. He felt useless, to be honest, for there was not much he could do except wait. Oh, this whole ordeal reminded him on the endless journey with Holden to France so he could confront Reginald. He had sat by his beside too and tried to care for his wounds until he would be well again. There really was nothing worse than not being able to really do something about a certain predicament.

»Sir« Susie's voice sounded from the door in his back, thin and careful, shy even. She was not a very shy girl mostly. No, she could actually be quite annoying to be around, but surely she now was a bit more cautious around her boss. Haytham turned around slowly after he had busied himself in watching the street for a moment longer. He had left the door to the room open so that air could circulate through the room when he had had the window open too just a moment ago. She lowered her brown eyes to the floor as he looked at her. Susie was a young girl, sixteen at best, (he really did not care) with mouse brown hair and a slender frame unlike the round Mrs. Taylor. She was certainly not ugly in the eyes of the young boys in town and if he himself was younger, maybe he too would have come to like her appearance, though she was lacking greatly in intelligence and wit. »Mr. Lee arrived. Do you wish to speak to him in the sitting room?«

»No…« He mumbled and drove his left hand over his face in an almost defeated gesture. »No, I will meet him in my study.« He had almost forgotten about Charles. Of course he would drop by now, after he had just arrived in town.

»Shall I make tea?« The girl asked quietly as if not to upset her employer.

»That would be indeed terrific, Susie, thank you.« After all, he as her employer should at least try to be polite and friendly towards his employees no matter how annoying the young girl could be from time to time with her shrill laughter echoing through the house whenever she was once again flirting with the boy who delivered the coal for the oven to the backdoor of the house. After Susie left him, dropping a curtsy (which she normally never did) and hurrying downstairs soon after Haytham threw another glance at the boy. He had not asked him for his name and he still was angry with himself for it. The first night after their arrival in Boston, Shay visited him like he so often did. It was the former Assassin, who had told him the boy's name, but there was no way he was ever going to pronounce it correctly and of course Haytham was too proud to ask his old pal for help in that regard. Maybe this was Ziio's revenge, to give their son an even more difficult to pronounce name than her own. Before he left the room he walked up to the bed again and pulled the thick blanket higher under the chin of the boy. He hesitated a moment, but then finally he left the room and closed the door behind himself, even though he felt like abandoning the boy as if he was just an infant.
Charles already waited for him inside his study, as Haytham entered and closed the door behind himself. »Charles.« He greeted him with the warmest smile he managed to force his face to produce against the lack of sleep that was paralyzing him. Charles did not rise from his position as Haytham gestured him not to. Instead they shook hands quickly, although their greeting normally was of a warmer nature. »Pleasure to see you. Is there a reason you dropped by or is this your regular visit to see if your old friend is still alive and well and has not yet succumbed to his boredom?«

He could hear the nervousness of his friend as Charles cleared his throat when Haytham took a seat at his desk with Charles sitting on the other side as usual, a nice, calming fire crackling behind him in the fireplace, as it was already cold inside the house. Having him here now felt rather familiar and maybe this was exactly what he needed the most right now. A bit of stability and familiarity in this chaotic situation, to level his head again and get his thoughts in order. He could not possibly keep cooing over that child like a mother hen for much longer. »Cormac told me about the boy that ran away from Washington.«

»You mean my son.« Haytham replied bluntly, interrupting his friend before he could maybe say something to injure his own reputation in Haytham's presence. His chair squeaked a bit, as Haytham leant back more. Why bother beating about the bushes? He was no friend of this and rather spoke the truth without hesitation, even now when Charles stared at him in shock and disbelief, that Haytham spat out the truth so bluntly.

»So it is true?« He gasped.

»It is.« Haytham nodded as he already heard Susie's stomping feet on the stairs on her way back up. It did not take long until there was a knock and the young girl stormed in without waiting for him to allow it. She noticed her mistake immediately as Haytham's dark gaze rested upon her face, blushed and continued to serve them their tea anyway before she left again. »This girl… Really, I should shorten her salary.« He muttered, feeling oddly like his own father complaining about his servants. »Anyway, I believe the boy is the reason why you acted so strange the other day after you came back from Washington.«

»Strange? When did I ever act strange?« Charles was quick to reply.

»Charles, please spare me. You do know what I mean. You saw him - that boy I mean, and that caused your strange behavior towards me. But why, is the more pressing question right now. Is it because you knew who the kid was and decided not to tell me?« There was no accusation in his voice, or at least Haytham tried to leave it out of his voice.

»No. I did not know, Haytham!« Charles immediately responded with flushed cheeks. »I only suspected and did not want to make any move until I would know for certain. The way George presented him to me, well … Still it was impossible to tell if he was speaking the truth or just wanted to coax you into making a false move with me as his helper.«

Unlike Charles Haytham did not take a sip from his tea. Instead he glanced out the window for a moment to gather his thoughts, before he looked at Charles again with serious eyes. »Even if there was reason for doubt, you should have told me about it. But what made you believe that it could be indeed true, Charles? Wouldn’t it be a big coincidence if my son out of all the other natives would be in Washington's grip? What made you even consider that I have indeed a son? Clearly I wasn’t aware until I met him face to face.« His tone was provoking, his eyes those of a cat lurking around a corner for a mouse to make a false move so that it could catch it.

He knew his friend Charles well enough to tell when the man was facing inner conflict and a sudden surge of panic. To other people it might be not as obvious when Charles’ cheeks would
suddenly start to show blotches of violet and red, but to him it was obvious that he did not quite
know what to say and how to turn the situation around so that he would not look like a traitor to his
friend and grandmaster.

»When you and the others decided to go looking for the Kanien'kehá:ka against my orders twelve
years ago, you found them didn't you?« Haytham continued to probe, after his friend appeared as if
his mouth was sewn shut all of the sudden and Charles visibly paled at the question, but then he
regained his posture and leant back with a defeated sigh; a man who had decided to face his fate
and the mistakes of the past apparently.

»No, we did not.« He answered, but there was a strange sense of dread in his voice, as if he was
aware that he would lose something he held dear to his heart if he would continue. »Or at least we
did not find their village, to be precise. We were lost in the woods for quite some time and could
not find the village, but we stumbled upon a group of children playing in the forest. So, we decided
to grab one of them-«

»By we you mean you, right?« Haytham was quick to interrupt.

Charles almost bit his tongue but he continued anyway. »We caught one of the boys of the group.
He was the one closest to us and farthest from the other kids. It was not our primary goal to
frighten him, only to get answers from the boy, maybe bring him to show us the way to the village.
He was only four or five years at best, spoke perfect English and fought like a rabid dog the
moment I grabbed him.«

»Go on.« Haytham ushered his friend with a wave of his hand, as Charles stopped his tale with a
glance as if to ask for permission to use the bathroom.

»He threatened me.« Haytham felt how the corners of his mouth started to lift into what could be
considered a faint smirk. Knowing this boy for a few hours now, he could imagine the picture.
Charles, towering with more than six feet over a four year old boy and yet that very boy dared to
threaten him, a grown and possibly very dangerous man. »He refused to tell us.« There was this
nagging feeling that Charles did not tell him everything that had happened between him and the
boy, but for now it did not seem important, he guessed.

»What happened then?« Charles' face told him that maybe he did not want to know the full story.
His old friend tensed visibly, but after everything Haytham had seen and heard in the last Forty-
eight hours, he doubted that it would be all too shocking to him whatever Charles was going to say.
After all, he knew his friend's often bad temper and Charles was not a person that was exactly good
with children either.

»Well« He started with a heavy breath before he nervously scratched the back of his skull, setting
down his teacup slowly. »I saw smoke coming from further down the hill and thought that it must
be the village. First I wanted to grab the boy and drag him down there after he refused to tell us, but
then I understood that it wasn’t a normal column of smoke from some cooking fire down by the
lake. I already knew that Washington was in conflict with the Kanien'kehá:ka and I knew that it
was his men attacking. We saw them on our journey, but until then didn’t think anything of it
really.«

»So?«

»So I told William to knock the boy out.« It came out so fast it could as well be just one word.

»You told him to hit a four year old boy?«
»He could have been five.« His friend replied in a sorry attempt of protecting his honor. »But yes, I told him. I know it was not the right thing to do, but in that moment, I thought if I wouldn’t, the boy would run down that hill and maybe die during the attack. When we arrived at the village it was already too late, we could not do anything and your friend died in the flames shortly after. It was much later that I understood that this boy could be yours and when I did, I did not know how to bring up the topic. You were busy with other things and when you learned about the death of this woman, I thought it might be too painful to bring it up, when I could not even be sure that it was the truth.« Finally his friend seemed to calm down a little as he sank back in his chair a bit more. He seemed relieved to have finally told the truth. »When I visited George a week ago, he presented the boy like a trophy to me to make it clear that he was aware who the boy really is. The way he talked to me in front of that boy… He wanted to taunt him with new information I believe and I did not know how to help him without playing into George's hands.«

»I don’t know what happened after your last visit, but whatever it was, George seemed to have found a reason to punish the boy severely. Maybe he tried to run away after your visit and was caught, but I am glad that he succeeded this time.«

There was a loud noise coming from the other side of the hallway right when Charles was about to say something else and Haytham jumped up in surprise. It did not take long until there was a sharp scream coming from outside the study. »Mr. Kenway! Mr. Kenway, please come quick!«

He followed Susie's demand without thinking twice as he stormed out of his study with Charles right at his heels. The door to his son's room was wide open and Haytham bridged the distance with just a few steps, before he burst into the room to find the young girl on the floor by his son's side, who was lying on the ground next to his bed writhing in pain like a fish on land. »What in earth's name happened?« Haytham thundered as he crouched down next to the boy. He was drenched in sweat, his hair hanging wet in his face, his nightgown soaking with sweat, pain disfiguring his young face in sharp lines and edges while he was visibly and audibly fighting for breath.

»I don't know, Sir!« Susie exclaimed in her shrill, panicked voice. »I found him like this! He must have fallen from his bed when I went out of the room!«

»I told you to keep an eye on him!«

»I know, Sir, but I needed to-«

»I don’t care, Susie! Now go and fetch the doctor or it will be the last time you set foot into this house!« She jumped to her feet with something like a sob leaving her lips before she stormed out and nearly ran into Charles on her way out. Haytham did not care about this outburst of his or how his friend would react to this. He blamed the paternal instinct which he would have never guessed he possessed or be able to feel. »Help me get him up there again.« He turned to Charles and his good old friend wasted not a second to grab the kid as Haytham did to help him get him onto the bed again. The sheets were soaked and Haytham cursed under his breath. He was sure that Susie had not at all watched the boy after she had served them their tea. Surely she had been idle flirting with some lad on the street again. How could she not have noticed the wetness of the sheets? How could she not have noticed the condition the boy was in? Why had she not come earlier to him if she had indeed noticed?

As he pressed down his left hand on the shuddering chest of this kid he could feel his heart beating fast in his chest, so fast indeed that he was afraid it would explode or just stop beating. At this rate the kid was going to die for sure and this time right under the tips of his father's fingers. Briefly he felt reminded of the last seconds in his own father's life that had been cut short oh so very violently.
He remembered lying on the carpet in his father's study, watching the man he had spent eight years of his life looking up to bleed to death as if he was just a normal human being, as if he was just a mortal like everyone else. Now, so many years later he was well aware that his father had been just a normal person, of course, but to him, as his son, he had always seemed like some king of deity. Then again, that was probably something every kid thought about their parents and every parent thought that they would never need witness their children die, because children were not supposed to die before their parents - even children of which their parents had not known before.

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There was noise. That was the first thing he noticed, before he even opened his eyes. It took him a moment to filter the gibberish of noises in his head and although there were certain sounds he could not determine, some of them he could sort and name. He heard the sound of hoofs and the neighing of horses somewhere in the distance. He heard people shouting and praising all kinds of goods. He heard the *click-clack* from heels on cobblestone and the closing and opening of doors. The sounds of a living, breathing city, he guessed, for he had never been to a city before. He could only imagine what a city sounded like and he had never had enough time to really think about it in all its glory before either. But maybe he was imagining things all wrong and he was just in a small village. He did not have much experience with the settlements of the white folks and what they sounded like.

He needed a moment to adjust and just listen to those new sounds while his head was throbbing in indescribable pain, feeling ready to explode within the next few moments. After a while he felt light coming from outside burning through his closed eyelids and it took him a moment to understand that the sunlight had been shining down on him for quite some time now before he could even begin to feel or understand that it was indeed there to wake him after what seemed like an eternity of sleep.

First he furrowed his brows, but as this did not help to escape the burning sensation of the sunlight, he tried to open his eyes in earnest now, even though there was a real possibility that he might regret opening his eyes all together. He did. With open eyes the sunlight was even brighter and more violent than before so that he immediately squeezed his brown eyes shut again with a small groan leaving his lips only to reveal the presence of someone or something else in the space around him, through the sudden rustling of fabric like a thunderstorm in his head, seemingly alerted by his groan and movement.

»Boy?« The voice sounded oddly dull and muffled as if it was not coming from his left hand side but from another room, but Ratonhnhaké:ton was pretty sure the owner of the voice was directly by his side - or at least he was after he felt the sudden touch of a large, warm hand on his left shoulder. He felt the skin of the hand upon his own skin and shuddered by the mere thought of being exposed like this within the presence of a stranger, but apparently he was hardly in the condition to do anything about this. »Son. Are you awake?«

Surely the man talking by his side must address someone else, but still Ratonhnhaké:ton forced his eyes open once again with a quiet, but pained groan. He felt as if he had been run over by a carriage with at least four horses. His head felt like splitting in half right down the middle, the brightness coming from outside was blinding, but he forced his lids to blink so his eyes would get used to the loud light. The hand never left his shoulder during this agonizing process. The ceiling above him was of dark wood and he could see blueish wallpaper with some kind of weird flower pattern halfway up the wall, while the lower half was covered in wood casing. He guessed this was en vogue now. Only now he started to feel the unfamiliar softness of the mattress he was lying on and the warmth of a thick blanket covering his body. There was the familiar sound of a fire gently crackling in a corner of the room and light coming from his right hand side. Maybe a window.
When he finally managed to turn his head to the left side, it took him a moment to make out the face of the man sitting beside him. First it only was a blur, but then the shape started to develop from the cloud of flesh in front of him. His father's chin was the first thing that was chiseled out of the cloud, then his nose and his strong forehead, before the rest started to slowly move into sight and his grey-blue eyes burnt into his own. A few strands of his black hair, that was slowly starting to turn grey, loosely framed his father's strong jaw.

»You are tough, boy.« His father huffed with a small sigh as he leaned back into the dark brown leather armchair standing beside his bed. »I have seen stronger men succumb to a fever such as this.«

He was silent for a moment because he needed time to regain his senses and come back with a witty retort at best. He could not think of one, his head was still clouded with pain and fever. »That’s because those men did not have a purpose to fight for.« He mumbled, slurring his words quite badly and to his surprise his father answered with a small chuckle - or at least that was what Ratonhnhaké:ton thought to hear.

»Maybe you are right, kid.« He then sighed and finally took is large hand from his shoulder. Almost he thought his father would maybe pet his dark hair or caress his cheek, but he did not and maybe it was better this way.

»My name is Ratonhnhan:ton.« He answered slowly, having troubles to pronounce his own name which he had repeated over and over in his head during the last three years to not forget who he truly was. He did not quite know why he needed to tell his father right in that moment, but he did. Maybe this need was born out of fear the fever would struck him down anyway the next moment just like this. He wanted his father to know his name at least, if he would die. »Washington called me Connor.« He did not quite care for the weight of his slave name any more. He just wanted his father to have a name for him just in case. He wanted his father to stop calling him Boy.
Chapter 10

»Mr. Kenway junior, I'm afraid your father is looking for you.« Taking on the role of a submissive British butler did not suit Shay at all and he did not deliver the lines as well as he thought he would, still, he did it mostly out of personal amusement. Shay was a familiar face to be around already to Connor since he first met him. It was not long since he had arrived at this place actually. It had only been two weeks (three, counting the week he had spent passed out and asleep) and already Shay was dropping by every other day to see how he was faring, as he claimed, whenever he had a little bit of time on his hands. His father stated that Shay had never been that obnoxious in the entire decade they already knew each other. Shay, however, kept telling them that his visitations did not have a special reason at all, let alone the reason that Connor was here now. He knew of course that neither Haytham nor Connor believed him, after all, one could not claim Shay Patrick Cormac to be a silly man.

Somehow Connor was glad when Shay was around, even when he would not see him because he had to discuss important business with his father. He was easy to be around, he had a calming influence on him really – unlike his insufferable father – and he always had a story to tell. Already Connor found himself fascinated by the tales the Irishman told him.

It was dark down in the basement except for the little oil lamp dangling from an iron hook near the stairs that were leading upstairs and the dancing flames were casting long menacing shadows on the walls around him, looking almost like the men who used to taunt him, who used to hurt him, who used to laugh at his pain. There was no staircase leading to the basement within the house, for when it had been built there was none. Apparently, his father had wanted to change that and Connor knew why too after he first went down into the basement. It was only this one room located underneath their dining room, as far as he could tell anyway, with a sturdy door in front of the staircase, which always had to be locked securely whenever no one was inside. Down here was where his father kept his numerous weapons and a ton of documents and maps and plans that he most certainly refused to store in his study. Just in case, as he told his son when he first showed him the basement, not telling him though what this case might be.

Well, then again, his father did not exactly show him the basement, nor did he really show him anything. Connor had seen the stairs leading down to the basement from the bathroom window which was facing towards the backyard of the house where Mrs. Taylor had her vegetable patch and her herbs and had asked his father directly. Sadly, his father seemed not to be a man of great explanations or he simply had no interest to tell his only son more than he absolutely needed to know. For the last two weeks, Haytham had done his best to stay out of his way, though. They had mostly seen each other only at the dinner table, for either his father would leave the house so early in the morning that Connor would still be fast asleep or he would lock himself in his study the entire day.

»Maybe he should stop poking his nose into his work so much, then he would not need to search me.« Shay chuckled instead of scolding him for his insolent comment about his own father, a man of great pride and intellect, a man to whom Shay apparently looked up to.

»Well, I won't argue with you, Pup.« He grinned sheepishly as he took the oil lamp from the hook next to the door leading to the stairs. »But you are still weak, its cold and it is already late. I think you would fare best going back upstairs again.« Connor knew that he did not really have a choice. It was not like Shay would drag him upstairs by the hair if he would not follow his invitation, but he knew he was right. Down here it was freezing cold and he was already shivering in the thin clothes he still wore every day in lack of something proper to wear. He was indeed still weak and
that troubled him immensely. The pain had lessened during the course of the last two weeks, but it was not nearly as much gone as it should be by now and that was indeed driving him mad. He had spent most of the time in bed really and only was allowed to leave the bed since … Well; he was not exactly allowed to leave his bed.

»I can't lie around all day.« He grunted as he refused to stand up from the cold, hard ground he was sitting on. He did not really care that his clothes would get dirty from sitting on the ground like this, although he noticed that his butt was cold. Shay, however, proved himself to be a man of patience, unlike his own father, as he himself sat down on the dusty ground, not caring if his black robes would get dirty - unlike his father, who was always desperate to keep up appearances and to look absolutely flawless. Connor was always in awe how neatly he managed to pull back his hair with not a single silky strand to resist his orders, while Connor's hair was a mane no one seemed able to tame.

»Can you not?« He asked with raised brows. »So then tell me, Ratonhnhakéton, why is it that you cannot lie in bed all day? I mean, if I would have the chance and not as much work to do as I do have, I would love to spend a few hours extra in my humble bed clearly.« The little wrinkles around his dark eyes told of his amusement talking to the teenager as if he would do nothing but this all day long. Connor knew of course that Shay was a dangerous man, much more dangerous even than he surely thought he was. Connor did not need seeing the weapons Shay was always carrying with him, even if sometimes it was only this strange hidden knife that was attached to his arm, the same as his father possessed. He had never seen any of the men using those knives but he could tell for what purpose they were and that purpose clearly was not peeling apples – although that was exactly what he had seen Shay doing with it. However, no matter how much of a dangerous man Shay was, talking to him clearly made it harder to help Connor reminding himself that he was truly dangerous or able to kill him in just a second.

»I need to start training.« He huffed and grabbed his naked feet with both his hands if only to busy his idle hands. He could not stand to do nothing at all. He could not stand boredom and after three years of slavery, he was not used to boredom, while a quiet little voice in his head kept reminding him that maybe one of the overseers would come and beat him if he would have ever been caught doing nothing.

»What training?« Shay grinned, his face that of a man pretending to know nothing about the claims a child would make. It was infuriating to Connor.

»To become a Templar!«

»Well, there isn't exactly a strict training to become a Templar.« Shay finally chuckled and ruffled through Connor's dark mane. He did not mind him flinching away from the touch and Connor somehow did not mind that he would ignore Connor's fear of being touched. »Our order is not strictly speaking one only consistent of fighters, you know? Just look at good old Benjamin for example, although of course most of us at least here in the colonies are indeed somewhat skilled in fighting. But why is it you think you would need to learn how to fight? You are a boy born to a rich man, to an influential man. Don't you think you should rather pursue your way in going the educational way, maybe, later on, go into politics to change the world instead of roughing other people up? Your father would have made an excellent politic if he would not have the constant urge to feed people their own teeth, whenever he finds someone especially impolite.«

To Connor, it sounded weird how Shay sometimes talked about his father. Of course, he had already noticed that Shay indeed looked up to Haytham and that he was a man who was greatly respected by his peers and feared by people like Washington. A dangerous man, Washington had called him, the devil. But to Connor, it was almost unimaginable that his father would get into a
fight and beat someone up. He was a tall man, of course, a man strong in build and intellect and surely he could snap the neck of his enemies with just the flick of his wrist, but still, to him, it was hard to think of his father like this. Whenever Haytham would touch him in any way, no matter how fleetingly, his hands were always as gentle as if he was touching a bird made of thin glass. It was infuriating. »I want to kill Washington. And for that, I need to be stronger!«

»You want revenge.« Shay clarified his words as if he wanted to have them both at the same page when discussing this topic further. »I do understand that, Pup. Really I do. I have been there myself, so bear with this old man here and let me tell you that revenge never is a good way to approach one's future. A Chinese saying says He who yearns for vengeance, better digs two graves.«

Connor quietly scoffed and dug the heels of his naked feet into the dirty ground underneath him as he was sitting cross-legged on the floor near the training dummy his father had apparently set up at one point. »I could have already killed him.« He growled, still feeling Washington's head underneath the tips of his thin fingers. If he would have just held him under water for a bit longer!

»But you did not and maybe it's better this way. If you would have gotten caught you would have been hanged, because you would have only been a savage - excuse my language - a slave who killed his master in cold blood. Now, however, you are a Kenway.« Shay hummed beside him, his words soothing or at least they tried to be.

»I'm not.« Connor was quick to respond of course, for he still did not understand what Shay meant.

»Well, you are to me.« Shay chuckled and patted his left shoulder. »Come on now young Mr. Kenway, unless you want your father to drag you up there with his teeth, because I promise you he would do just that to get his misbehaving pup to behave.«

He did not feel like a Kenway, whatever that was supposed to mean anyway. Shay was the only one who really lay emphasize on this name when talking to him and reminding him of it, even in his father's presence, which always made Connor uncomfortable, to be honest. He did not know how his father felt about this situation. He did not know if he truly … well, acknowledged him as his. Yes, Haytham had watched him while he had been sick, yes he had stayed by his side for an entire week and seemingly worried about him, but, well… he did not really feel anything. He could not tell if his father saw him as his son or just some charity case. Even though at least he already knew that his father was not one for charity. He did not really expect fatherly affection. He did not expect hugs or kisses. Not even a pat on the head from time to time. He did not want this either. They both were not the type for something like this and they did not know each other as father and son. Maybe they would never build such a relationship. Maybe it would stay this distant as it was now. Somehow this possibility made him sad. His mother had been loving and affectionate even though she had been stern to him. He missed having a parent. He missed being guided. He missed being protected. To his father, he still seemed to be Connor the slave and not Connor - his son - Kenway.

»Shay told me you are craving vengeance.« His father interrupted his train of thoughts as Connor kept staring into the flames dancing in the fireplace down in the sitting room. His father sat with a book on one of the large armchairs close to the fire and everything seemed oddly normal. Just father and son sitting by the fire and going about their own business, although one of them was planning a murder, thinking about how he could make a man suffer who had tortured and humiliated him for years. A man who had single-handedly ended, crushed and burned his childhood. He sat there wrapped in a thin blanket for he had refused to go back to bed this early, although outside it was already dark. Shay had left them an hour ago after he stayed for dinner. His father had not said anything for their had been no outsiders present at the table who might be
concerned by Connor's appearance, but he had been angry with him that he had been sitting in the
clothes he got from Shay on board of the ship at the dinner table. Well, he did not have anything
else to wear yet, hadn’t he? Shay most certainly had not minded.

As Connor did not reply to his father, the man cleared his throat and lowered his gaze on the book
in his hands again. »Although I do understand this wish of yours and the feeling, I cannot allow it.«

»It's not your place to allow me anything.« Connor hissed without really thinking about it, but he
started to regret as he heard how his father closed his book so loudly that it sounded almost like the
pong of a whip being crushed down on the ground. »Is that so? Well, I do apologize, boy, for I
thought you were searching my help earlier. Why of course, if you do not need it or wish for my
help any longer you do know where the exit of this house is, I believe.«

He was angry and rightfully so; after all he had nursed him back to health for three weeks. Shay
even told him that his father had hardly ever left his side in the week he had been asleep. He
clenched his jaw to hold back what he wanted to say. He wanted to scream at his father for not
being there when he needed him, for not helping him when he had been all alone, scared and hurt.
He wanted to tell him how it had been Haytham's fault what happened to him and that he had been
a coward when he had left his mother. But he did not. It was not fair and deep down he knew this.
No matter how big his rage was, how strong the agony still burned, the emptiness inside was
almost unbearable. Washington had tried to break him and although he did not entirely succeed, he
had been close. He knew he had and Washington knew this too. Just one touch of the man more,
just one more day in his presence, one more hour under the hungry eyes of the man who had hurt
him and he would have fallen apart. And he felt so ashamed for admitting this even to himself. But
it was the truth and he still felt his skin crawl just thinking about it and he still felt hands on his
skin that did not belong there, hands that were not welcome.

»I have to kill him.« He growled. »He has to pay for… He has to pay.«

»And pay he will.« Haytham said so matter-of-factly as if they were just discussing the weather or
some not important political issue over a cup of tea and sandwiches. »Believe me, boy. He will die
when the time is right. Unfortunately, we still need him and cannot simply kill him off so easy. He
is a pain in the ass for Lee and our goals, but for now, he still holds valuables we do need.«

»I don’t care for Lee or your goals!« Connor finally erupted. »My mother's blood may stain
another's hand, but Charles Lee is no less a monster than Washington and all he does he does by
your command, so why would I ever even fathom helping this man in any way?« With that he
jumped from the sofa and made a few shaking steps towards the door leading to the hallway, his
father's cold eyes still resting upon his face, calculating, waiting, watching his every move as if to
attack if he would show him a weak spot.

»I did not command him to go search for your people. Quite the contrary actually! We did not harm
your people, Connor, so do not make the mistake and blame us or Lee for something we did not
have control over. Washington is your enemy, focus your hatred on him and do not endanger our
goals.« His voice was low and threatening. The threat behind them was clear to Connor. If he
would ever do something that could endanger the goals of his father's oh so beloved friend Lee or
the Order, he would surely be punished. His father's blue eyes were flashing in the dim light of the
fire and for the first time, Connor felt chills running down his spine for the way the man, his
father, looked at him.

»Yes, but you did not save them either.« He hissed, his eyes narrowed into thin slits of anger before
he turned around and left the room. He could not stand being around his father right now and he
was sure that his father felt exactly that way too. To a man like Haytham, always so calculating,
always in control, he must be a terrible disappointment for Connor was never in control as it seemed. He thought about the prophecy he got years ago and although he found the symbol, found his way to the Templars, he was still alone and he still did not know what to do next or where to start. All he really cared for was to shed Washington's blood and his father would not stop him.

The thunder was loudly ripping the sky apart while Connor took another turn in his bed. He was not able to find sleep. The bed was too soft. The city outside was too noisy. The floorboards were too squeaky. He could hear every little noise inside the house through the paper-thin walls, even his father turning in his bed inside the room next to his. How could this man even sleep when Washington was still living and breathing and well? Was he not yearning for revenge for his son? Did he not care at all for the injustices his only child had suffered by the hands of this animal? Did he maybe even think he deserved being treated like this by this man? Was he maybe not worth his father being upset for him? Was he that much of a disappointment for the great Haytham Kenway? Or were his plans simply so much more important to him than his own flesh and blood?

Well, he did leave his mother behind because of something important he had to do. Maybe he should just accept that his father would never treat him like one would a son and move on from that. He should just concentrate on getting better and then leave to find someone to train him and help him get revenge. Maybe even Shay. Shay seemed like a man who understood, didn't he? Surely he would help Connor with getting his revenge, wouldn't he?

Frustrated he threw himself onto his stomach and buried his nose into his pillow. He should be glad that he indeed did have a pillow to rest his head on and that he did not need to lie on a bed of hay on the ground any longer, freezing in the cold winds of winter, fearing he would freeze to death any longer. He did not need to feel hungry any longer, he did not need to fear hunger any longer. He did not need to fear Washington's men attacking him in the night any longer. He should be glad. But he did not. He only felt furious and anxious. He felt as if ants were crawling under his skin. He wanted his revenge. He wanted his father to train him, to help him have his revenge, but the old man refused to. He did not listen to him. He did not care. Why on earth did this ghost want him to find his father then anyway? Or did she not want him to find his father after all? Was maybe Shay the one to confide in? Or did he lose everything when he decided to not follow the spirit's orders and went back to his village to get captured by Washington? Maybe the path he should have taken was no longer there for him to walk. Maybe he screwed up everything. Or maybe all of this was all a big joke.

Breathing into his soft pillow he wondered how his old friend Kanen'tó:kon experienced all of this. He only left a short while before Ratonhnhaké:ton got his revelation from the spirit. He too had been chosen to search for a certain sign, for someone to teach him. How did he fare? He wondered where Kanen'tó:kon might be now - if he was happy and still alive if he was sometimes still thinking about him. However, finally, sleep took him into their arms like a loving mother or the monster from a fairy tale, to lull him into their billows until he would drown in the nightmares awaiting him as they did every night.

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Haytham Kenway was not able to find sleep. He lay on his back in his bed and stared at the ceiling, thinking about everything that had happened lately, listening to every little sound the old house made. His life seemed to spiral out of control and that with every day more and more since this boy came into his life. Oh, Haytham did understand this boy's wish for vengeance, this he truly did. How couldn't he? Vengeance and the wish for justice had been the one feeling to usher him on in life since his childhood had been ended so violently, a feeling that his son too had experienced surely. He had desired nothing more but vengeance for his father's death, for his sister's capture, for his stolen childhood, for his crushed life. He had spent his entire life dedicated to this feeling
alone and yet achieving his goal, getting his revenge, had left him empty and cold. He had sacrificed so much in the cause of getting justice. And this boy, oh this boy… Connor reminded him at all the things he lost on his crusade for justice against those who wronged him and his family. And he reminded him of the things he could have had if he would not have sought out revenge if he would finally have let the ghost of the past rest. Because if he would have laid the past to rest, he maybe would have been able to reconcile with Ziio and his son would not have needed to suffer what he had suffered.

Maybe that was why he had such a hard time being near the boy now that he was getting better slowly with every day. Benjamin still came by every other day and warned the boy to rest more, but Haytham could hardly tie Connor to his bed and the boy himself was too active to just lie around all day. Even if he would be able to tie him down (which of course he was), he wouldn’t do it. Tying a boy like Connor to the bed was like breaking the wings of a bird. Maybe he even let him escape his bed because he knew that feeling and because he himself had such a hard time staying still. The boy seemed to be quite fond of Shay, however, and Shay seemed to be quite fond of the boy. It seemed easy for Shay to talk with Connor while Haytham himself had such a hard time dealing with this petulant teenager of his. This puppy wolf – as Shay liked to call Connor, which would declare Haytham the old wolf, apparently.

With a sigh, Haytham rose from his bed and walked towards the window looking onto the street in front of the house. The city was quiet this late at night, beautiful even. Only a few lone people were roaming the streets and for a moment Haytham was tempted to leave the house and roam the shadows as he did when he was much younger, lurking in the shadows like a cat on its hunt. Maybe those nights of his youth as the most deadly predator in all of Boston were by now long gone and forgotten. Maybe it really was time to make room for the next generation and in his case even for his own son.

Yes, he could understand his desire for revenge and if he would ever finish his letter to his sister, she would probably finally agree with her younger brother on that topic too and mark a day in history with that very letter. He could understand why his son wanted to be trained to be a fighter, why he wanted to join the Templar Order even though he did know nothing of it. And although he could understand all of this all too well, a part of him urged him to wait, urged him to not throw his own son, his only child, into this endless fight that came with joining the Templars. His son was not wary of the consequences yet. He hardly knew anything about the Templars except their sigil, so how was he supposed to know about their greatest enemies? The boy would be slaughtered in no time with this new assassin on the rise. He wondered what his father would have done if he would have lived to go through with his decision of inviting Haytham into the brotherhood. Would he have gone through with it or would he have maybe faltered, fearing that his son joining the brotherhood could mean his child's death? Had his father maybe even been afraid of that day?

Haytham himself had never really thought about it until now, but now that he did, he could hardly stop. The selfish part of him did not want to risk his own flesh and blood in this war for power. The selfish part of him was even willing to make peace with the Assassins only so he could spare his own child from ever getting involved in this, because like every parent he wanted his son to live a happy and fulfilling life. But if he had learned just one thing, than that this kind of lifestyle was not leading to that. Well, maybe this was not his decision to make. Maybe it was Connor's decision and maybe he should just let him make the decision on his own.

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Connor did not quite know if he should be glad as he finally was allowed to leave the house for the first time in four weeks. His wounds were of course not yet fully healed, but well enough so his father finally agreed on showing him the city. What he was definitely not glad about was their first
destination after they left the house. When his father took him outside he thought the older man would just show him around town, tell him where he needed to go for certain things, introduce him to influential people who could, maybe, later on, be of help to him. Instead, they now stood inside a tailor's atelier and the owner of said location was currently poking needles into the clothes Connor was trying on. Apparently, his father had not been idle during the last weeks, for the tailor had already a variety of clothes for Connor to try on so he could finish them. From one or two frocks, over breeches to dress shirts, Connor was forced to try on everything and let the man poke needles through the material. He had never thought that he would one day wear clothes like these. They had always been reserved for the white men in his mind and it somehow felt wrong to wear them himself now.

He was, of course, aware that his father wished to clothe his only son decently so he would not draw attention to them, but in those fancy clothes, there still was the little native boy who did not belong here, who did not belong anywhere. He felt like he was wearing a costume when they later left with him wearing a dark blue coat, a pair of beige breeches and a nice white shirt. At least his father did not force him to wear a cravat of any kind, but the ruffles on his sleeves looked already too ridiculous for Connor's liking. Of course, he had noticed how much this outfit resembled that of his father and maybe … just maybe, he felt like it meant something deeper than just having his son dressed nicely.

»You do not look very happy.« His father finally addressed him after silence had ruled over them for at least the last three hours while they had been at the atelier. Of course, he had let his father known how much he did not want to be there with the darkest and deepest scowl he could muster. He did not like being touched anyway, let alone by strangers and after the incident, this aversion of touch only grew worse and worse with every passing day. He knew it was not healthy, but he could not stop himself from flinching or shrinking away whenever someone reached out to touch him. It did not quite matter if it was his father, Shay, the doctor or even this tailor.

»Because I'm not.« He replied with a frown before he kicked at a loose stone on the ground. Even new boots his father got him. He did not ask when his father had measured his feet to know the right size. It was not important anyway and Connor felt the urge to throw himself into a puddle of mud to get those brand new clothes dirty. He did not – mostly because his father would surely kill him for ruining his clothes like this.

»And why is that?« Gently Haytham urged him forward. He almost expected his father to usher him into the next carriage to get back home, but to Connor's surprise he did not. Instead, they slowly marched forward towards the end of the street. Slowly, because his father was still mindful of his wounds and because Connor had been standing still for three hours straight on his injured ankle. »Is it because you thought I would show you the deepest and darkest corners of the city first?«

»When do we begin training?« He turned to his father instead of granting him a decent answer. »I don’t want to get dressed up, I don’t want to see anything that I don’t need to see to fulfill my goal.«

»And your goal is to kill Washington.« His father stated with a sigh, as he crossed his arms behind his back.

»Yes.«

»And what after?«

»When Washington is dead I … My people can live in peace.« At least those who were still alive and had the chance of living a peaceful life.
»There will be another, Connor. There always comes one to follow a fallen man and the next might be more vile than Washington ever was.«

»That’s not possible.« Connor hissed glancing at his father with squinted eyes. What did Haytham know anyway? He did know shit about the things Washington had done to him! He did not know the pain he had inflicted upon his body and his mind! He did not know the torture he had endured, the trauma he had suffered from this man's hands and words. He had been just a speck of dust, just like Charles Lee once said. He had been nothing, not even worthy to call by name, not worthy to remember his name, not worthy to have a name. His father's hand on his left shoulder ripped him from his thoughts and made him flinch only to have Haytham take his hand away again in the most awkward of gesture he had ever seen. His father did not seem a man fond of touching too.

They walked down the street of the tailor's atelier like it was normal after this. Maybe it was. People did not look twice at them. Well, that was not entirely true. They looked at him, but not his father and most of them averted their gazes as quickly as they came and hurried onwards to get out of their way. They, however, meandered towards the end of the street and when they reached the corner, Connor could hear the noise of such a town for the first time in its full glory. They had reached the harbor. People were running around the docks, salesmen were crowing about their goods and prices. It stunk of fish from the little stalls standing alongside the docks near the water. Children were running around deeply engulfed in a game of cops and robbers, women were laughing over baskets filled with fruits and although it was cold today, the sun was shining brightly from the skies.

»It is possible, Connor. This is how the world works. When one monster falls, an even greater monster is there to succeed them. Killing Washington won't help you.«

»And it won't harm me either.«

»That I cannot promise.«
Inside the pub it was noisy and a funny smell was lingering in the air like a thick cloud of smoke. Connor had never been to such a place - of course he had not! - and he felt terribly odd entering the pub behind his father. He did not know why his father wanted to bring him to this place anyway, but he would not question his reasoning either. After they left the tailor's shop, his father had shown him around the harbor often pausing because Connor had needed a break. Of course, he had never said that he needed a break, of course, he had never let it show that he was still hurting and still weak on his legs, but his father was quite attentive he had to admit and thus he had noticed when Connor had slowed down a bit every now and then. His father always tried to hide these little breaks, pretending that he wanted to show him something the salesmen were selling across the harbor so that Connor could rest for a moment and would not need to say anything. It did not take Connor long to look right through this of course, but he appreciated it nonetheless.

The Green Dragon Tavern had not been too far off, his father had later decided as the weather threatened them with a rain shower and so they walked all the way from the harbor to said tavern in the Union Street. »What are we doing here?« Connor groaned as he slowly followed his father through the crowd that had already gathered at the tables all around. There were people laughing and blabbering. There was so much noise! It was a disharmony of laughter, grunting, gruff voices and loud arguing that belted off every corner of the room, even that early in the day, only accompanied by the irregular shouting of the barkeeper when someone's drink or meal was ready. The man behind the bar wore a dirty dishtowel over his right shoulder; he was a bear of a man really, with scanty gray hair and a belly so large it almost looked as if he swallowed a barrel of beer.

Even though his father did not seem to notice, Connor was very conscious of the heads that turned their way, as they walked in a straight line slowly through the crowd. He had noticed it throughout the day quite frequently and although it was no wonder really, it still felt odd and it still left him with a bad taste in his mouth. He did not know if his father had noticed it too or if he just refused to show that he had. His father was like an anchor to him in this very odd situation. What if someone in here would recognize him? What if someone who knew him as Washington's slave would see him here? He wanted to grab his father by the sleeve to soothe his mind, but he did not. He could not. He was no child anymore and he could not cling to his father like a four-year-old.

»We are going to have lunch, Connor, come on.« His father finally turned to him and glanced back over his shoulder. There was a moment of hesitation written all over his father's face, as he surely noticed the frightened look his son had on his face, but then he let himself fall back a bit so he was beside Connor again and closed his right arm tightly around his shoulders to guide him towards a narrow fleet of stairs that was leading upstairs. Connor felt terribly ashamed that his father saw how terrified he was of the crowd around them. He never liked crowds anyway, but now it was even worse and he feared he could be attacked by one of those random strangers just for being an Indian, just for coming to such a place, dressed like this.

»Is it always this lively in here?« Connor found himself asking silently, so silently maybe that his father did not even hear him, but the old wolf smirked faintly. Surely he understood that his son tried desperately to make small talk to soothe his own nerves a bit. »Most of the time. It gets even more crowded when it's cold outside and of course, as soon as night falls and everyone gathers for a drink. You would drown in the crowd if a lad as you would ever visit alone at night.« His father did not say what he meant with a lad as you, but Connor was not stupid and he knew that he meant native with this. He had noticed the glances shot his way, the suspicion, the fear, the disgust. He would not just be helplessly overwhelmed by the crowd, he would be in danger.
Connor nodded slowly as a sign that he had understood what his father meant with his choice of words. He had never been able to understand what people liked about alcohol in the first place. He thought beer smelled vile and wine foul and bitter. He absolutely detested it and the smell inside the tavern was nauseating to him, so quickly after he entered the tavern. It reminded him on the foul breath of the men who had hurt him.

When they reached the stairs his father was quick to remove his arm and gently shoved him forwards so Connor would not fall behind again. A bit he felt lost as his father took his arm away again. The steps were polished by the many feet running up and down on a daily basis, but the railing did not really look all too trustworthy, so he refrained from holding onto the railing. Connor noticed a few smaller tables along the landing with a few more men lingering about talking in hushed voices and seeming a lot calmer than the people downstairs, but his father was quick to gently lead him to a more secluded area and a large wooden table in a darker corner of the big room upstairs. They walked past a few doors leading to the very few guestrooms the tavern was holding and Connor wondered what people might stay in those rooms at such a lively, loud place. Surely he would never be able to sleep with so much going on around him. Only a small window allowed some sunlight to shine onto the table in the corner. Somehow Connor felt odd sitting down at the long table, but his father sat down with a relieved sigh at the head of the table and so he followed his example. His father did not often rid himself of his hat, but now he did and carelessly placed the head on the wood, tempting Connor to steal it.

It took only seconds until a rather round women came to them and Connor blushed as he saw how frivolous her dress looked. He was quick to avert his eyes onto the table and on the same instance, he felt terrible because of it. After all, he was a man and he was supposed to look at the bosom of a woman, wasn’t he? He was supposed to lust after women like all the other men did, even as young as he still was. Instead he only always felt as if someone would scold him for staring. Maybe it was just because of the way he had been raised and although he was considered almost an adult in his culture already, they were taught quite sternly by their mothers and grandmothers to behave decently. Other young men his age however already went after women and did not behave decently whatsoever.

»Mr. Kenway!« The woman chirped as she strode closer towards the table. »Long time no see, me and my husband missed you and your friends already. I hope you will come more often from now on.«

His father was the finest British gentleman he could be as he curtly nodded his head in her direction and treated her like a real lady, which always seemed to be working just fine with women such as her. »Maybe we will, Cathy.«

»And who is this fine young gentleman you brought today? I don’t think I've ever seen him before.« He did not look at his father, instead kept inspecting the table with all its little holes.

»This is Connor.« His father replied, but before Connor could feel his heart sink a bit, his father was quick to add: »My son.«

»Oh, my…« Cathy replied and Connor could feel her stare intensify, could feel her eyes drilling into his face, but she too was quick to move on and act as though Haytham, a fine British gentleman, had not just told her about his bastard savage son. »What can I bring you? I'm sure you guys must be starving.«

»Just bring us whatever you have for lunch today, Cathy.« The woman smiled and left them again to walk back downstairs. Connor was not a very picky eater anyway and now he really was starving. The food was good. Not nearly as good as the meals Mrs. Taylor would cook for them,
but it sufficed, though Connor still had a hard time imagining his father sitting here with his friends to have dinner, whoever those friends might be other than Shay and Charles Lee perhaps. Not only that, but it was generally weird for him to imagine his father as a person who would come to such a place and order food such as this. His father always seemed to him like a tomcat prancing around the city wearing the most finest clothes, with his nose always held high, always looking down on the people he thinks to be lesser than himself.

»When I first came to the colonies my friend Charles guided me to this location and it had been a place for us to meet ever since.« Haytham started explaining after they had finished eating and made their way out of the tavern once more. Connor was glad to smell fresh air again after the stuffy and foul smelling air inside the tavern.

They had not talked much after they arrived at this place really, but Connor had noticed the way his father had watched him while he ate. He had not said anything about it, but he had felt the tiniest bit uncomfortable under his stare. He never liked being watched, especially not after what had happened during his first attempt to escape. Since then he always felt as if it was written all over his forehead what had been done to him and felt odd and unclean when someone would look at him. His father had refrained from talking to him about his injuries as much as he could. He merely asked him about the cross on his back, but nothing else really and Connor was glad that he hadn’t. He was not familiar with violence as he experienced, he was not familiar with the kind of bruising he got from this or if anyone would be able to tell just by looking at his wounds. He did not know if his father knew. He did not want his father to know. He did not want anyone to know. He was afraid that his father might look at him with disgust if he would know. After all, he had been weak, hadn’t he? He had not done anything against it. He had tried to fight back, but he had not succeeded. He had let it happen.

»I don’t like Lee.« Connor scoffed, for no matter the time that had passed, the name Charles Lee still provoked bitter anger inside him. »He choked me when I was four years old. What kind of person does something like that?« He found his father unflinching when he glared at him with his dark eyes. Well, surely he did not care for this attack on his own son; otherwise, he would have already done something about this man who liked to attack small children.

»He told me.« Haytham replied after a moment, which he had used to study his son's face apparently. »Not right away of course. A couple of weeks ago, after the both of us came back to Boston. He heard that you were with me and apparently his bad consciousness caught up with him.«

»And you still allow him in the order?« Connor frowned, while he still tried to make sense out of his father's words, but he did not succeed for in his mind there was no way to make sense of this.

»Charles is a dear friend of mine and a valuable member of the order, especially now that he is running for Commander in Chief against Washington.« Of course, the order and their goals were always more important than his son or the way a man like Charles Lee had treated him.

»And I am your son, does that mean so little to you?« He almost did not want to hear an honest answer. He was afraid of what his father might say. He was afraid to be all alone again, to be left behind with nothing once again.

»Connor you don’t understand the severity of the situation.«

»Because you never tell me anything!« Connor finally erupted as he took a few steps backward to distance himself quite literally from his father at this moment. »You just lock yourself in your study all day long and you don’t tell me anything, but then you say that I know nothing about this world you are living in! How is that fair?«
He felt agitated and his father looked as if he was not about to do anything about the state his son was currently in, as if this did not really concern him as if he had no empathy for his son at all. Instead of saying anything to calm him down perhaps, he just stood there with his arms crossed behind his back and watched him like a bomb that was about to explode. »If I did not tell you anything then because you are not ready yet and this outburst only proves that you are not ready to accept the truth. You are still a child, Connor, you don’t need to rush these things. You will learn about the order and our goals when you are an adult and until then you do what I say.«

It was this order that set him off. He was done following orders, let alone the orders of a man who had abandoned him and his mother and never made attempts of going back to them in any way. »Don’t act as if you would care about me! You did not care about me when you left my mother! You were not there when I needed you the most and now you expect me to follow your orders? If that is really what you believe I would do, then you are beyond delusional!« He almost stumbled against a stranger passing by this unruly scene, as he took another step backward. Still, his father did not make a move towards him. He seemed angry, though, judging by the way he was clenching his jaw, with a small vein pounding on his forehead.

»And what do you think you are going to do now, boy?« He growled and finally stepped closer towards his son. Suddenly his father had something threatening to him. He stood tall and strong in front of his son, with his back straight as a wooden plank and his chin raised so he looked down on him in the way Connor hated the most. He was sporting the exact same look on his face that Connor only knew from Washington. »Are you going after Charles to have your petty little revenge? Or are you going after Washington himself right away? You are just a child, Connor, and they are men with much more experience and strength. To them, you are just a speck of dust and it won't take them much effort to release you from your misery.«

He could not help but bare his teeth at his father before he pointed at him with one shaking finger. »I will go and kill Washington. I will have the revenge that you are denying me and then I will go after Charles Lee, yes. And if you try to follow me or oppose me, then I will kill you as well, father.« He did not turn around initially, mainly because he did not want to turn his back to his father in fear of the knife the man had attached to his wrist after he just threatened his very own father with death. Instead, he took a few steps backward, before he turned and ran.

He was shivering with cold as he walked through the narrow alleyways of Boston near the harbor. He was roaming the city on his own after their little argument and Connor was glad, that he was alone for now. He could better sort out his thoughts and feelings like this. It was not that he did not know how to get back home, but … Well; Boston was quite big and confusing for a boy who had never been to a town before. He would not go as far as to say he had got lost of course – Because he had not. He was still in total control over the whole situation, even now as the night was creeping into the town and filling every corner with darkness.

The later it got, the harsher the wind was blowing, so he started to look for shelter somewhere near the docks. Maybe, he thought, he would even be able to find the Morrigan and maybe even be allowed to sleep there tonight. Surely Shay would not send him back home after the fight he had with his father and after Connor would tell him all about it. Surely Shay would understand. Sadly he was not able to find the ship, he only found a group of men lingering about the corner of a pub and out of habit maybe, Connor did his best to hide in the shadows of a pile of boxes and crates so they would not see him right away. He could not circle them without the possibility that they would catch glimpse of him, though. There was no other way than to hide and wait until they would leave on their own apparently. He did not even know why he was so careful, only that his stomach told him to. For most people in town, he seemed to be just a dressed up savage and not once at least one person showed him any kind of respect or friendliness. They all wear anxious around him and looked at him with great suspicion. This kind of behavior only fueled Connor's
fury towards those people and although this furious little voice inside his head wanted him to look for a fight with the group of men on the other side of the pile, he thought he should better stay out of trouble for now.

He did not intend to listen to their conversation, but then again he thought that, if he really wanted to grow and become stronger and to live in this town, he first needed to understand this town. He needed to know certain things about this little world he had been pushed into, otherwise, he would be blind and deaf to his surroundings from now on and that he could not have. This was something he learned from an early age on. If you wanted to hunt, you need to know your surroundings by heart and now his hunting grounds were this city.

»Did you hear what happened? Greg said that Washington was attacked by one of his slaves.« Connor heard one of the men groan. He sounded like a sailor – well, then again what did sailors sound like? – and judging by the way that he was at the harbor and that those men were standing near a pub that was surely mostly frequented by seafarers, he thought that they all might be sailors. Then again, this was hardly the most important factor right now. He felt his heart waver as the message sunk in.

»The native one?« Another man laughed half-heartedly. He sounded drunk already.

»I think so, but then again they all look the same anyway, don’t they?« The first man cheered, he too was slurring his words. »All I've heard was that the one who did it fled and now the boss is even more agitated than before because of that slime ball Lee.«

»So is that why he wanted to come to Boston?« A third one asked this one sounded a lot more sober and clear. His accent was weird and nothing like Connor had heard before.

»Because of the savage who wanted to kill him? Nah ’course not, would be a bit weird if he did, right? Nah, he's got some important business with other important people.« A fourth man replied and the way he talked about the situation made it quite clear that he did not think very positively about those important people, as he called Washington and his colleagues.

Connor's heart was beating fast, faster than he thought it would. Washington was in Boston. He was here and Connor was all alone out here without a weapon. What if one of Washington's men had seen him today with his father? Should he try to find out where the man was and handle the situation himself or should he rather go back home and talk to his father about it? What if Washington would go after his father? He knew after all who Connor's father was and maybe he thought that Connor might have tried to get in contact with his father after he fled. And what if someone had even informed him about Connor's whereabouts? What if he already knew? What if Charles told him? It would suit this guy! He needed to go home. He needed to talk to his father. He could not face Washington all alone. He needed to breathe; he needed to calm down just a bit! Instead, he whirled around and almost got one of the crates on the pile to fall. He managed to grab it before it could shatter on the ground, but there was still noise and he knew that he was doomed, even before one of the men jumped around the edge of the pile.

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It was already past midnight and there was still not a single sign of his petulant son, while Haytham still sat looming over his journal in his study. His candle was almost burnt down completely and his back was aching. Maybe it was indeed time to finally go to bed, but then again, how could he while his son was still out there on his own? He leaned back with a heavy sigh and drove his left hand over his sleep-deprived face. This was getting ridiculous now. Connor was sixteen, he was still a child of course, but he was not a tender little flower. He could look after himself, or at least that was what Haytham expected him to.
He should be fine even in a city as this. There was no reason why he should be in any form of danger really. And yet, even though he knew that he should not worry too much about his son, he still could not even begin to start focusing on his journal or really anything else. What if he got lost? Surely he was clever enough to always find back home, right? But then again Connor was not a stray cat. He had never before left this house and he did not know the city. But he was clever. He was smart. He was a hunter and he would surely find his way back home soon. Or maybe his stubborn son had finally decided to turn his back to his father once and for all after Haytham did not react to his need of punishing Washington or Lee in the way he would have wanted him to.

Lee had made grave mistakes, yes. Even more so than Haytham had thought he had, but when Connor told him that Lee had choked him, a four-year-old boy at the time, yes, he had to confess, he had felt furious. Bad enough that William had hit a small child to knock it unconscious in the middle of the woods where he could have easily gotten attacked by a bear or a wolf in this helpless state, but choking a small child? No, that was a whole different thing. To wrap one's hands around the thin neck of such a little, innocent creature, really demanded for a special mindset. And for what reason anyway? Well, he already knew that Charles' temper sometimes got the better of him, but never like this, he mused. Then again, if he had not attacked Connor, maybe Connor would have died in the flames too just like his mother. He saved him with this attack and for that Haytham was grateful. He could have done it in a different way, but Haytham did not want to imagine having not only lost the only woman he had ever loved but his own son too without even knowing about him. This would have been the worst, to have lost something he had not even known he had.

Maybe now he should hold this precious good even closer, protect Connor even fiercer, but he did not. Instead, he kept fighting with Connor and would rather sit in his study all day to not face him. He should go looking for him. Finally, he rose from his chair and grabbed his candle holder to light his way out of the room, even though he knew his surroundings by heart. As usual, he locked the door to his study as he left the room silently.

He wanted to just walk downstairs, grab his coat and be off into the night, instead, the nightly idyll was shattered quite literally when he heard the ruckus coming from downstairs. He could not help but grow tense immediately. The sound seemed to come from the back door that was leading to the backyard and except for Haytham himself no one was inside the house. Mrs. Taylor would not come back before six in the morning to start her day.

Haytham had never been uncomfortable with being alone in his own house, of course, instead, it had been quite odd to him suddenly having someone else living inside his house too, when he brought back his son, but now he inched carefully closer towards the staircase. He was glad that he still wore the hidden blade attached to his wrist even so late at night – not that he would need a weapon in case of some stupid burglar trying to break into his house. He did not forget to get rid of it during the day, but he was so used to the feeling of this weapon, that he simply did not care for removing it. It gave him even a sense of security, even in times he did not feel threatened at all.

Odd, really, that he would wear such a weapon, a weapon his father had intended for him to wear at some point in his life. What irony.

There was the sound again and this time, he was sure that someone was trying to break into the back door. Briefly, he thought that it could be Connor trying to sneak in like a wild cat that had been out all day hunting. If he wanted to sneak into the house without his father noticing he was doing a really poor job, though. Knowing his son for a few weeks now, however, made him question that it could be Connor trying to break in. The boy would probably rather try to climb through his bedroom window or spent the night outside instead of confronting his father or risk confronting him. He was proud and Haytham was glad that his pride had not been broken by
Haytham was silent like a cat as he moved downstairs and straight towards the backdoor that was located in the sitting room. Right before he entered the sitting room, he blew out his candle and placed the candle holder on a small shelf right next to the door inside the sitting room. Moonlight was streaming from outside just enough so he was able to make out the shapes of his furniture and the remains of the firewood in the fireplace were still glowing. He did not question how anyone came into his backyard for the wooden gate really was not much of a hurdle considering that the lock was easy to break and the fence itself easy to climb over.

Coming closer towards the door he heard scratching sounds, even little curses sounding somewhat familiar through the wood, still, he drew out his hidden blade without thinking twice, ready to strike the intruder as soon as they would enter his house. Keeping that in mind he positioned himself right next to the door close to the wall, careful so he would not be spotted through the window. There was a click, as the lock finally gave in under the ministrations from the burglar outside. Well, most burglars would not make the effort of picking the lock like this, instead, they would rather wait for an opportunity such as an open window or they would use brute force hoping no one would hear.

Haytham stood in complete darkness between the door and the window when the doorknob was turned from the other side and the door slid open oh so very quietly. He did not think twice as he struck the intruder with his blade, for there was always the chance of asking questions later and his blow was not aimed to be deadly. There was the distinct clank of metal hitting against metal and another blade flashing silver in the darkness and the faint rays of moonlight. Within just a second a thousand thoughts rushed through his mind. Had the Assassin maybe found his way to him already? Did the old man Achilles maybe tell his new recruit to go straight for the grandmaster of the colonial rite? Was this boy really so stupid, so oblivious to try and murder Haytham Kenway in his sleep?

»You're awake.« A familiar voice chirped cheerfully - much too cheerful for Haytham's liking considering the situation. He could smell alcohol vibrating in the air coming from the intruder. »Sorry, boss, didn't want to wake you up. Just wanted to bring back the pup.«

»Shay?« He did his very best to not sound surprised in any way really. He tried to act as though he would have been waiting for Shay's arrival at his house so late in the night as if all of this was planned and as if he was still the only person in total control over absolutely everything happening around him. Sadly he was not, but he refused to acknowledge this as fact. It was Connor's fault anyway. Shay's pale skin seemed to glow in the darkness as the both of them slowly retracted their hidden blades. This whole situation could have been quite funny, under different circumstances.

Connor, yes this was another thing, as Haytham finally turned to pick up one of the oil lamps standing nearby on a small side table, to light it. First, he did not see Connor, only when Shay gestured outside where the pup still sat on the steps leading to the yard, with slumped shoulders and a hunched back. Shay grinned as he took the lamp from Haytham, so his Grandmaster would have his hands free if he wanted to use them. »I found him at the harbor.« Shay informed the father of the boy quietly and on his breath Haytham could smell beer. Well, Shay was a free man and allowed to drink whenever he liked to and honestly he did not even care for Shay's condition as he slowly moved outside to look at his son. »I wanted to knock, Sir, but your son demanded to sneak in without waking you up.«

Haytham only raised his left brow at Shay's explanation for his tried break-in to his house. Usually, Shay had no problem in picking locks, but since he seemed at least a little buzzed, maybe Haytham could forgive this poor performance. Since he was a father now, he guessed Shay expected him to
start lecturing the boy, but when Haytham came closer to Connor and finally was able to look at
the boy sitting on the stone steps like a small child with the cold, harsh wind biting at his own skin
already, he forgot his anger - almost.

Connor looked horrible. Not only was he pale and looked as if he had the most miserable time of
his life, his face was bloody all over too. He did not wait for permission from the stubborn child as
he dragged him to his feet and into the house with Connor still averting his eyes, being oddly
silent. He did not like Connor's big mouth, but he did not like it either when the boy was silent like
this. He would have liked it more would the boy have cursed at him.

»What happened?« Haytham hissed at Connor, but when the boy only bit his bloodied lip, Shay
answered with a sigh.

»Well, I had a few pints near the harbor, heard the ruckus outside when I wanted to go back to the
ship. Nothing unusual, saw a bunch of sailors fighting, thought nothing of it at first, but then I
noticed that the pup was involved in the fight, so I joined in - Well, to be honest, though he did not
need much help. Your son is tough.« Shay almost sounded a bit proud, as he told his tale, or at
least prouder than Haytham felt.

Though, Haytham thought. So tough that he got beaten bloody by some sailors near the harbor for
a reason he could not even begin to fathom! He nodded at Shay, a sign for the seafarer to leave
without any more unnecessary words and that Shay did. They could discuss this situation
tomorrow, Haytham mused. No matter if Shay was buzzed or not, the former Assassin turned
Templar was still very much capable of following orders even in this state. The door falling shut
behind Shay was like a wake-up call for Haytham as he proceeded to drag his son upstairs into
Connor's room, so he would be able to clean his wounds and have a look at them.

»Really, Connor, I am disappointed.« He growled dragging him up the stairs with the oil lamp in
his right hand again to guide their way. The small cone of light coming from the lamp was dancing
over the walls and cast unnatural shadows that did not seem to belong here. Connor was not very
fast walking upstairs or walking at all and Haytham still tried to be mindful of his son's older
wounds and his fractured ankle, as he had been during the day, whenever he had noticed that
Connor slowed down or fell behind a bit or started to look pale. He had really tried his best to not
let Connor notice that he in fact really had an eye on him during their little adventure in town, but
of course, his son had noticed for he was not nearly as oblivious as Haytham thought he was.

When they entered Connor's room he placed the oil lamp on the small bedside table on the right-
hand side of Connor's bed. He did not waste time to light a few more candles in the room
immediately before he forced Connor to sit on the edge of his bed. Still, the boy did not look at him
or had opened his mouth to say anything at all. Haytham had expected him to at least mutter
something after his father told him how disappointed he was, instead, he kept his quiet and his eyes
rested on the floorboards. Under his thick black mane, Haytham could see a bit of dried blood that
had run down his forehead. Bruises were already forming alongside his left cheekbone, his lips
were bloody and split and there was a bit crusted blood between his nose and his mouth, tinting his
nostrils almost completely black. His clothes were ripped here and there and his hair was a
complete mess.

Haytham quietly cursed as he proceeded to leave the room to grab the carafe from the bathroom
which was filled with clear water, so he could fill it into a bowl and return to his son with the bowl
and a white linen washcloth, so he could at least clean the blood from his face. However, before he
could even start doing what he wanted to do after he returned to Connor, there was finally a small
noise coming from the bed, something that sounded a lot like a little hiccup. »I ripped my new
clothes...« Connor said, his voice barely even a whisper and Haytham paused in his task for a
second as he put down the bowl onto the bedside table next to the lamp. »I'm sorry, father. I'm sorry for not listening. I'm sorry for...« He stopped and Haytham could hear the way he drew in his breath, strained to not slip into uncontrollable crying apparently. »I'm sorry for arguing with you.«

While Connor seemed to try his best not to cry, Haytham did his best to act as though he did not hear how frail his son's voice sounded. Of course he could hear that the boy really was frightened and on the verge of crying, but as long as Connor wanted to pretend that he was not, Haytham would play along to not hurt his pride and thus he turned around with the wet cloth and carefully proceeded to clean off the blood as he leaned over his son. He grabbed him under the chin with his left hand, while he cleaned him with the right one. »Finally some sense, boy.« He hummed and tried to sound smug, but in reality, he was relieved that Connor came back in one piece, even though he had not been ready to admit this to himself earlier. Admitting that he had been worried for his son, was not something he was ready to do, because admitting to his worries, would come with a price and he was not yet ready to pay that price. »Will you tell me what happened? I refuse to believe that any son of mine would just get into a fight with a group of drunken sailors for no reason.«

There it was again the small hiccup coming from Connor's throat and this time, being so close to the boy he could already see his bottom lip quiver dangerously and his dark eyes shimmer with tears he still refused to shed. Almost he could see how Connor contemplated lying to his father behind those dark eyes. »Those were... They were Washington's men.« He answered even more silent than before and if he would not be as near as he was, Haytham would not have been able to hear his voice at all. »Washington is in Boston.« Connor finally said and although he forced himself to speak and to clear his throat, the first tear already ran down his pale cheeks, right over one of the small freckles adorning his face. »They caught me eavesdropping and attacked me. I think one of them recognized me. I did not want to fight, I wanted to run away, but I-« He paused again and his voice was already shaking. »I was so afraid.« Finally, there was no turning back anymore and Haytham finally did not need to pretend any longer as he sat down next to him on the bed. There was no point in trying to clean up the boy now anymore anyway and after all he had gotten rid of most of the blood anyway. »I thought they would bring me back.« Connor sobbed as he tried to rub away the tears from his cheeks - to no avail of course. »I was so scared they would bring me back.«

»They won't.« Haytham finally said as he carefully wound his arm around Connor's shaking shoulders. »You don't have to fear him any longer, Connor.«

»But I do!« Connor finally sobbed and to Haytham's greatest surprise he did not flinch away from his touch but leaned closer instead, desperate for some comfort, for someone or something he could hold onto. »I do fear him. I'm so scared I cannot sleep. Every time I close my eyes I see him and I am so scared he's going to hurt me again. I can never go back, father!«

»You don't need to go back, Connor.« Sadly, Haytham had never been good with comforting other people. He was a man of blunt words and truth. He spoke what he was thinking quite clearly and without sugarcoating anything, but maybe this was not the right approach here, not when his son was finally letting him in. He guessed, sometimes letting someone bawl their eyes out without saying anything was good enough, but since he still was Haytham Kenway, he could not get rid of that nagging little voice inside his mind, that always told him that he needed to say something witty or intelligent to cheer his boy up. The truth was, there was nothing he could say to cheer him up, for he knew where this numbing fear his son experienced came from. He knew what Washington had done to his son and for that knowledge, he was not able to say anything without needing to confront his son with what had happened to him. For a moment he felt reminded on Holden, after he and Jenny succeeded in rescuing him from the torture he had endured. He had done what he
could, to nurse Holden back to life and to ease his mind as good as he could, but in the end, Holden had been broken too badly by the loss of his masculinity. «As long as I am alive, I won't let him or anyone else takes you again.» It felt odd saying something like this. He was not a man who wore his heart on his sleeve, but he forced out those words anyway, for he could only hope it would help his son to realize that he was going to be safe with him and he order. He needed desperately to say those words, to make Connor understand somehow that he did mean it when he said he was going to protect him, for he could not risk finding his only child hanging from a noose.

»You can't promise me that.« Connor choked and against better judgment Haytham pulled him closer and drove his hand into the boy's neck before tangling his fingers into his thick hair. It was not the first time he felt his hair, but the first time he felt how soft and silky Connor's hair really felt. It reminded him almost painfully on Ziio and the hours he had spent combing through her hair with his fingers. Maybe it was even the first time, that he wondered how it would have been if he would have been there when Connor was born. He wondered how it might have felt holding this kid when he had been so little and frail. He wondered if he would have carried him around on his shoulders when Connor was a bit older, just like his own father had sometimes. »He will get me.« Connor sobbed. »He will try to get me because I nearly killed him because he wants to humiliate you in humiliating me, because he thinks he can hurt you, because he wants you to stop interfering with his plans, because he hates you!« His voice sounded broken and raspy and Haytham did not know what to say for the first time in his life. He was at his wit's end because he knew the boy was right. As long as they would sabotage Washington's strive for power, Washington would always want to stop them in any way he could think of, even if that meant hurting, torturing, mauling and raping a young boy who had done nothing wrong in his life to deserve this other than the fact that he had been born as the son of Haytham Kenway.

»We will begin with your training and with your education tomorrow.« Haytham knew, although he promised Connor to protect him, that this was a promise he could hold. He would die some day or another. He could die tomorrow or in a month from now. He was living a dangerous life, but until that day came, he would do everything in his power to protect his own son and to secure that Connor would be able to protect himself when the day of his demise came. But first and foremost, he needed to finish that letter to his sister finally. He needed to tell Jenny about his son so that Connor would be secured no matter what.
Chapter 12

July 1774

They lost Johnson. The news came not as a surprise as they arrived at his house, but it was still a crucial hit for the Order nonetheless. The news arrived him by letter. It was just a simple sheet of parchment arriving at his doorstep with the morning post. It almost felt surreal, as Haytham started to read the message announcing that Johnson had died during his meeting with the remaining clans of the native tribes. Lee had written to him to tell him about the fall of their friend and brother, so shortly after the events that would go down in history as the Boston Tea Party last December. His words were brisk and chosen as neutral and passive as possible and were lacking any kind of emotion that could be mistaken for sentiment or even grief for that matter.

With Johnson, they lost an important ally in their fight for the colonies and against Washington, but he was only one of many, even though they could have needed him and the support of the native clans which were already poisoned by Washington and his words. The man's thrive for power was getting uncomfortable for Haytham and a new source of worry every day. By now Washington was becoming a very serious threat to his good friend Charles' own ambitions.

His other main source of worry he found in the basement.

Two years had passed since he and his son found each other. Two years had passed since he had been able to adopt his son into his household and to give him the name he deserved from birth. It had not always been easy, but then again he reckoned, handling an adolescent boy was never quite easy. Still, Haytham could not shake off the feeling that Connor might be different with someone else to teach him. They often argued and fought and Connor liked to leave when it came to a situation like this to vanish for a few hours before coming back with his temper cooled off a bit.

They both were victims of their bad temper but Haytham was too old and maybe even too stubborn to run away like his son liked to do. Really, running away was more for young people like his son, he thought, even though he was not old yet and very much in good health with the exception for this old wound in his side that always liked to remind him on his misplaced trust all those years ago.

»Johnson is dead.« He announced his presence as he slowly walked down the dusty and dirty steps to the basement. He could hear his son panting in exhaustion before he even saw him. Lately, Connor spent every spare minute down here. In two years he had grown quite a lot, not only in physique but also his mind had grown quite a lot and for that Haytham felt especially responsible, without wanting to flatter himself of course. They had started Connor's training after that night in which Connor had been in a brawl with Washington's sailors at the docks, mainly because that stubborn kid had been too impatient to wait just a day longer. The first few weeks had been hard for the boy and he had grown impatient with himself and frustrated to see how limited he really was in his abilities, but Haytham had to confess that he had been impressed how determined the boy was after all.

For every lesson in combat, there had been two more for his still so young and flexible mind. Logic, strategy, languages, the arts. It was important to Haytham that his son would be a bright man, that he would have the ability to make wise decisions and Connor's brain soaked everything up like a dry sponge, greedy to learn more and more and more.

As he entered the room fully he could see his son standing near the dummy he used to spare with whenever he could not find a suitable opponent (which was mostly either his own father or Shay).
He was only wearing a pair of loose beige pants and his long hair was tied into a messy braid so it would not be in his way as much as it used to. By now it was almost long enough to reach his hips and he was curious how long Connor would let it grow. For some reason Connor always shied away from cutting his hair and Haytham did not care enough to ask him for the reasons he might have. His son was standing with his back to him, so Haytham could see the cross that had once been burnt into his son's skin clearly in the flickering light of the lamps around. Still, even after two years, he felt sick seeing this stigma his son had to wear on his back like this and usually Haytham would never touch this part of his son's skin if he had to touch him at all. At least them Kenways were not very touchy folks anyway.

Connor had been sick quite often in the past two years for he had needed a lot of time to adapt to his new surroundings and the town itself, so he had found himself more than once sitting by his bedside, rubbing soothing circles on his back in the middle of the night, but always tried not to lay his hand on this symbol. Connor was still eager to become one of them and Haytham was still eager to keep his son out of this, even though it should fill him with pride maybe. His father surely would have been proud if Haytham would have followed in his footsteps and not became a Templar, however Haytham was more anxious thinking that Connor might join this endless war between Assassins and Templars and that he could lose him in the process. Even in those two years this constant, nagging fear never vanished, never left him in peace just once. Sure it was only natural to fear for the life of one's own children, but Haytham was painfully aware that this was going maybe a bit too far. If Connor really wanted to join them, he should be allowed to.

He made great progress in those two years. He had grown strong and big and was maybe even a bit intimidating to some. Susie, their second housemaid, by now tried to avoid Connor as much as one would try to avoid the plague itself, as if he would otherwise grab and crush her at the first chance he would get to do so. He was a friendly giant, he would never harm anyone as long as they would not harm him first, but Haytham was aware that Connor was not yet done growing or maturing. He was still only eighteen years old and he had still much to learn. He still did not know what it really meant to join the Templars, no matter those endless hours Haytham had invested to tell him all about it and to make him understand.

Connor still sported the black eye Shay had accidently given him a few days ago when Connor had insisted on sparring with the former Assassin when Shay made the mistake of visiting him down in this room, as he turned around to face his father. Well, one good had it to have Shay with them because the Captain of the Morrigan not only taught Connor how to sail a ship (after Connor nagged him about it endlessly), but he also taught him every little trick that Shay himself had learned in his time as an Assassin. A few of his long strands of hair had escaped the braid Connor was wearing and hung loosely in his face and beads of sweat were dripping down his face. Sometimes Haytham feared that his son was overstepping his physical limits and that he only did so because he wanted to proof to himself that he was not weak, that he was no victim. They never really talked about what had happened to him at Washington's estate and Haytham was wise enough to not bring that topic up all too much. He knew what had happened and Connor knew this too, there was no need to force him to talk about the horrors he had lived through, but a bitter part of him thought that he needed to, because otherwise, Connor could maybe really endanger himself because he wanted to proof that he was still a real man and that he could fight, so that something like that would never happen to him again.

Haytham had seen this type of behavior before, mostly in his time abroad, before he came to the colonies for the first time and went to the Netherlands where he had joined Braddock for a short while. He had seen it all before and he knew what would come out of this and yet he could not bring himself to say the words, to speak openly with Connor about this. He did not want to see him crumble in front of his very eyes, instead, he helped him grow tougher than he had already been before.
»Johnson?« Connor asked breathlessly. His voice was deeper now than two years ago, but it had still this soft ring to it, the warmth of his heart as an undertone. »How?« Of course, his son was trying to appear as unfazed by these news as he possibly could – that was another thing Haytham noticed quite frequently lately. Connor was trying his best to no act emotional, or not as emotional as he was used from his son by now. The truth was however that Connor had been growing quite fond of William in those past two years. Odd, how Connor still very much hated Charles' guts for choking him but seemingly forgiven William for knocking him unconscious with the butt of a rifle. Then again, there was nothing too weird about their blossoming companionship, judging by the fact that William was a friend of the local natives and that he was very much active when it came to their rights and wellbeing. William could even speak the language of Connor's tribe and thus had been the only one around with whom Connor could speak in his native tongue.

»It was the Assassin. Apparently.« The face his son made would make Shay proud for sure, Haytham briefly thought as he noticed the way his son was scrunching his brows. The sole mention of the Assassin Brotherhood always seemed to make him sour. There was no reason why Connor should hate the Brotherhood as a whole, for Haytham had always made sure to tell him about both sides, having his own father in mind and the good they could maybe achieve together. There was peace between Templars and Assassins in other parts of the world and there had always been periods of peace between them. But now there was an Assassin on the run killing Templars and he would have a hard time holding back his own young son.

It was maybe only a matter of time that the young Assassin and the young Templar in training would bump their heads together and surely it was inevitable at this rate too. Two young lads on opposing sides, with hormones dripping from their ears and testosterone tainting their views on the world, could only clash eventually. He could see it in the way Connor's dark eyes stared back at him whenever they would argue. Of course, Connor was thrilled to fight. Fight anyone who would give him a reason to. He was young, he was wild, he was full of energy and he needed to let out his frustration – and sadly it was Haytham's task to hold him back as much as he could. However, the question remained: Was this really the right thing to do? He remembered how he himself had been at Connor's age and with every day he noticed more and more that Connor indeed was very much like he had been back in the day.

There was no way Haytham would be able to hold him back, at least not without losing him. There was no way his own father could have held him back if it would have ever come to this. If he would try to hold Connor back the boy would only try to break free because one thing was certain to Haytham: Connor would never let himself get tied by chains anymore. However, if Connor would leave and go on a rampage without his guidance (and that he would do surely), he was bound to fail and pay with his life.

»William was going to meet the surviving tribes in the frontier to talk to them about selling their land to us, so he – we – would be able to protect them better, but the Assassin killed him during the negotiations with the clan leaders.« Haytham finally started to explain the mission Johnson had been on when he had been killed. Of course, Haytham had known about this for quite a while now, but Connor had not and mainly because he and the others had been sure Connor would not agree to that plan - not that if he would agree or not had any impact on the order.

»It's not right to force them to sell their land.« Connor replied with a frown as he wiped away a few strands of hair from his face, but he stayed surprisingly calm. Haytham would have expected more of an uproar. »It's not right to force them under the rule of some intruder. This is the country of the people which lived here for centuries. This is our country, it's not right to say that it's not and steal it like this.« Of course, this was a sore topic to discuss with someone like Connor and Haytham could even understand where he was coming from. He had never liked the way his fellow Brits went above their conquest.
»I know.« Haytham replied as calmly as he could before he reached out to Connor and flung his arm around his broad shoulders if only to guide him upstairs again. »But we did not want to steal their land. We just wished to protect the land and your people from men like Washington for he surely will try to steal more and more of the land of the other clans. If he is to succeed in his conquest, your village will not be the last which will be burnt to the ground in the end.«

As they reached the staircase he shoved Connor in front of him so he could actually force him upstairs. It was getting late and Connor needed a bath. Desperately. »Williams's death has been a heavy hit for us.« He carefully added though he knew that this was nothing he needed to tell his son.

»What now?« Connor sighed as he slowly moved up the stairs in front of his father, even though he could feel the reluctance radiating from the boy's body.

»Well, only time will tell, I guess.«

»I could try to find the Assassin and-«

»No, you cannot.«

He almost bumped into him as Connor stopped and turned around to face him, standing a step over Haytham, so that his poor old father really needed to look up at him, craning his already aching neck after nights of leaning uncomfortably over his journal. »I really don’t understand you, father!« He frowned. »Why won't you let me go on the hunt for the Assassin? He already interfered with your plans, didn’t he? Wasn’t he the one who set up this chaos last December at the harbor? We need to stop him, so let me stop him!«

»You're not ready yet, Connor.«

»I am! I'm training day and night! I'm ready! I can take him on!« Connor's eyes were seriously pleading even in the dim light of the staircase and Haytham already knew this look his son was casting at him. It was tempting to give in, that he really had to confess. »Please, father!«

To his luck, Haytham was a quite stable guy and he would not fall for the puppy eyes. »No, Connor. Until we don’t know who this Assassin is, I will not let you go out there to hunt him down.« He would not risk losing his son, that was what he meant so say, but the words would not leave his mouth, of course. He had promised his son that he would help him to get his revenge and now this Assassin was in the picture and everything seemed as if it could very well end in tragedy. Haytham, however, had decided years ago, that he indeed had experienced more than enough tragedy for one life already. »Connor, I know that you are impatient and that you want to help the order, but the only thing I ask of you is to pause and to don't act upon your impatient nature. This Assassin is years ahead of you.«

»Then why won't you finally accept me into the order?« Connor groaned and still continued to block the way with his body. Sure he had gotten bigger, but he was still no match for Haytham and even though Connor knew this quite well himself, this would not stop the stupid kid from challenging his old father. »Did I not proof to you that I am fit to join? Have I not done enough to be accepted yet?«

»You are too young.«

»You were younger when you joined!« Maybe it had been a mistake to tell Connor about the way he ended up joining the Templars. He had not told him about his grandfather, the Assassin, and pirate. He did not even know why, but somehow it had not felt right to him. He still did not know if
Connor was ready to learn the truth about his heritage and if he was yet ready to not see the world painted in blacks and whites.

»Yes I was, but it was a different time back then and I did my fair share of work for the order.«

»I did too!«

»You ran a few errands, that does not mean working for the order.«

»Because you won't let me!«

»I will not discuss this with you now, Connor, I have other things to do now that we've lost William. So please cut it already. We talk about this when you are older.«

»No we won't!« Connor growled before he finally moved up the stairs again. »You don’t want me to join the order! You are ashamed of me, aren’t you? That why you don’t want me in the order!« Of course, the petulant child would not wait for an answer. Before Haytham could even begin to understand or form an answer in his head, Connor stomped up the stairs already. He expected to hear the back door slam shut, but he did not, instead he heard the gate be thrown shut behind his escaping son. So the boy was on the run again, he mused as he slowly moved up the stairs. He paused for a moment, standing in the backyard of his simple townhouse and wished that he would be in his farmhouse in Virginia again. He missed the quietude, even more so since Connor was living with him. Yet, he did not want to miss this again. He wondered if he should follow his brute of a half-naked son through the city, but maybe it was better he would let him cool off a bit first before he would face him again. He would come back running anyway as soon as he would become aware of his lack of clothing when the first women on the streets would snicker or blush at his sight.

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Somehow it seemed that no matter what he did, it was never enough to please his father. Somehow it seemed that no matter how much he trained, no matter how eager he learned, no matter how much he helped, it was never enough. He was never enough. His father would never say that he was ashamed of him or that he was disappointed with him to his face, but Connor felt it nonetheless quite clearly. Two years had passed and he was still not good enough for his father, he was still not the son he wanted, not the son who deserved the name his father gave him. He still was not good enough to be accepted into the order, to make it official that he was his heir and worthy of the title of Templar.

It was terribly frustrating to him. Well, of course, it was. It was hard to get up every morning before the sun had even decided on getting up herself to start training until his body would not be able to take it any longer, only to see that his father was disappointed in the lack of progress. It was not like he wanted to be praised by his father. He just … He wanted … Well, maybe he just wanted his father to acknowledge the effort he was putting into this, to see that he really meant it, that he was worthy of becoming a Templar, of joining his father and fight by his side. This was no longer just about revenge! It was about this country and its future. He was not dumb, he knew that the time in which his people had ruled this country was over. The white men had taken over and there was nothing he could do against it, but he could at least try and make this country a better place for all of them so that everyone would be free and equal and could live peaceful lives.

Two years he had spent trying to learn as much as possible about military strategy and structures, so he would be able to make informed decisions if someone would ever ask him. However it seemed as if his father and the other Templars were always just looking down on him, still only seeing the little savage boy in him. His father had not even talked to him about William's plans.
even though Connor could have been of help.

A bitter part of him thought that he was maybe not done improving enough yet, that there still was a lot more he could do. Well, he already raided his father's office plenty of times to read through all of his books. He already had hour long discussions with his father or William Johnson or even Ben Church. Charles Lee was still a sore topic for him, but at least he did not contemplate murder anymore each time he saw him. Still, they tried to avoid each other as much as they could. He even learned how to sail a ship! He learned about nautical maneuvers, Shay even let him take the wheel from time to time! Somehow it was still not enough, though. Somehow his father was still not satisfied with him.

»Why hello there, pup.« He was not even surprised that Shay found him here, but somehow he was a bit glad. »So why exactly are you here and why did you decide it would be good to turn up half naked near the docks?«

Connor scoffed as he heard the rustling of the fabric when Shay sat down beside him. He had run to the harbor without thinking twice when he left the basement and his father behind. It really was not that surprising that Shay would find him here, for the harbor was mostly the place he turned to when he needed to calm down. He liked the harbor at night and he liked sitting up high on a rooftop to look over the sea and the narrow streets leading to this place. Seeing the moonlight glistening on the dark ocean always made him feel a lot more at ease and the crushing of the waves reminded him of the sound of the forest during a storm. He missed the woods of his childhood greatly. He would never say something though for he did not want to look ungrateful for the possibilities his father gave him here in Boston.

»Got in a fight with your father again?« Shay chuckled as he bumped his left shoulder into Connor's right one.

»You are getting old.« Connor huffed quietly instead of a response. There was no need for a response anyway. »I thought you would find me sooner.«

»Well, I did find you sooner, Pup. I just decided to leave you to your thoughts for a moment. You are hardly discreet sitting up here, half naked on a roof. Surely every lady seeing you will run! And my hair is just turning gray because of you and the trouble you always make.« Shay laughed. Connor liked his voice greatly. When they first met he had found the sound of it and his accent weird, but he really came to like it and Shay's presence he liked even more. He was his friend, the only friend that he got left maybe.

»That's what father says.«

»Because he is right. The poor man always worries about you.« Shay boomed and patted his naked back lightly. Shay was one of the few people who did not make him flinch as much when they were touching him and he was definitely the only person who was not afraid to touch him at all in the first place. He had never looked at him with pity, never treated him like a delicate flower. When they would set sail together Shay would treat him like every one of his sailors too and Connor liked that very much.

»I don’t think my father worries about me.« He sighed finally and let his head hung low a bit. »I feel more and more that he is disappointed with me, that I am still not the son he wanted or that he thought I would become when he takes me in.« Shay let his hand rest on his back for a few seconds before he retreated it slowly. Connor always noticed how his father tried to avoid touching his back, especially the spot where the cross had been burnt into his skin. »I mean, why else would he still refuse to accept me into the order?«
Shay let out a breath of air that almost sounded like laughter again. »Oh, Connor.« He chuckled and placed one of his large hands on Connor's head to ruffle through his dark hair. »Really, I like you, Pup. Your father is right, you know? You really are still quite naïve.«

Connor almost jumped up, but instead, he just brushed away his hand in frustration. »I'm not naïve! Stop treating me like a child! I'm tired of being always treated like a child! I did so much to prove to my father that I am worthy of joining the Templars! I did well, didn't I?«

»Your father is afraid that he could lose you, Pup. That’s why he won’t let you join.« For a moment at least Connor finally stopped his train of thoughts to just stare at Shay in surprise. »The battle between Templars and Assassins is raging for centuries and there is no reason to believe that this will ever change. This war has already taken so many lives on both sides and caused so much suffering, that your father is simply worried you could fall victim to it too. He is at an age now where he does not want to risk anything anymore. In his younger years, when I first met him, he would not have thought twice about going after that Assassin himself. But now everything is different. He wants to protect you, but I think we are all aware that you don't need him to be protected. You can look after yourself, can't you?«

Connor really wanted to say something against it. He wanted to start arguing with him that his father must have ulterior motives, that there must be another reason, that he had to be disappointed with his own son, but he could not bring himself to open his mouth again and finally he felt how cold the wind really was up here, ripping on his naked skin even though it was already July and the days hot.

When he later walked home still barefooted and half naked with people staring at him in distress because they thought he must be mad, he thought about the reasons why he thought his father had to feel disappointed in him and he came to the conclusion that it was not his father's fault. It was he himself. It was him who felt disappointed, it was him who thought the things that had happened to him were marked on his forehead for everyone to see.

He felt insignificant to the world, he felt as if something had been taken from him, something important that no one could ever bring back to him. The night of the assault two years ago was still fresh in his mind and no matter how much he wanted to forget and shake off the feeling of those hands on his skin, he could not. He still felt haunted, he still felt as if everyone could see and thought him to be weak because of it. He was aware that most of the time it helped to talk about certain things, but this was something he could never discuss with anyone. And how should he anyway? He was aware that something like this was happening all the time to women around the globe, but even them would often get shamed for it or pitied! What about him? Would he be pitied or would he be shamed? Both? Which was worse? Or would he maybe get accused to have enjoyed it? He felt helpless just thinking about it. He felt his skin crawl thinking about the mere possibility that someone could learn about this incident.

He was not willing to have his entire life ruled by the memory of those events. But how was he supposed to forget about them?

»You should talk to your father.« Shay said and ripped him from his thoughts once more. »Talk to him about how you feel. Maybe even a little distance would be good for you two. Ask him if he allows you to join me on my next voyage, alright?« Once again Shay patted his back lightly as he usually did when he took off to somewhere. At least Shay was someone who did not treat him like a child all the time. Shay was willing to trust him with his ship and he would take him along when he went on a quest for the order. His father never let him help in any way.

»I'll try.« He sighed before he tried a small half grin and saw Shay leaving his side to be swallowed
by the shadows of the streets again as if he had never been there. Usually, Shay would come inside first to talk to his father for a moment, but maybe he already did that. Maybe his father had even sent Shay after him to find Connor and bring him back. It would not surprise him either. His father only rarely took matters into his own hands. Maybe that was not fair, for he was sure his father had done more than enough in the past for the order. He must have done a great deal of things for the sake of the order, otherwise, it would not be as strong as it was now, but sadly his father never really talked to him about this.

Sometimes he wished he could have a look in this journal of his father. But of course, he would never intrude on his privacy like that. With a sigh, he finally entered the house through the back door again. He did not quite like to use the front door, at least not as long as he was running around half naked. Of course, he did not want people to tatter about his father only because of him. He did not wish to do anything that could smear his father's reputation. No, quite the contrary. Still, he only wished his father to be proud of him.

»So you've finally decided to come back home I see.« Of course, his father had to sit in the sitting room when he would come home through the backdoor this late at night. Of course, he would not grant his son a break and have already retreated to his room. No, his father was just as confrontational as he was.

»Shay convinced me to come back and give you another chance.« He groaned and walked onwards. He tried not to look at his father who sat in his usual armchair near the crackling fire with a book on his lap. By now the sight of his father sitting by the fire with a book became a familiar sight. Sometimes they would sit here together and enjoy a game of chess - though with his father there was not much to enjoy about this - or his father's friends would join them from time to time. Now however Connor noticed seemingly for the first time, that his father looked certainly a bit older in the dim light, as he noticed out of the corner of his eyes.

»You should take a bath.« His father replied.

»No, I'm fine.«

»You look like something the cat dragged in and I don't want poor Mrs. Taylor to have to change your sheets again tomorrow. Take a bath and then we talk.« He stood there for a moment, but then Connor left the room and walked upstairs. He did not feel like arguing with his father any longer, but he wondered if he should just take matters into his own hands. Of course, it took a while until he could lean back in the tub as much as possible and he remembered fondly the way his mother used to scrub his scalp when he had been little. He had loved this so much that he now painfully missed it. Even though he could hear his father's footsteps coming up the stairs after a while he did nothing to hurry up. And his father usually had no problem in invading his privacy anyway. It was not rare that his father would come into the room while he was in here washing himself to shave without any concern for his son.

»Living with me is not always easy for you, isn't it?« The old wolf did not disappoint him this time as he, of course, entered the bathroom without thinking twice. Connor found that he cared less and less about this. After all, they were both men and this particular man was his father of all people. There was nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of. Still, he was quiet for a moment.

»I just...« He began but stopped before he did even know what he wanted to say. »I get that you want to protect me.« He finally concluded and drew in a deep breath, as he mindfully kept his eyes down on the water and did not look at his father at all. »I know that this is dangerous, father. I know that this Assassin might be stronger and better trained than me, but I feel useless like this. Running errands is not enough. I want to help the order and I want to help you. I want to-« He
paused once again. »I just want you to be proud of me.« He already felt the blush creeping up his cheeks and ears and wished for a way to hide himself from his father now that the words escaped him finally.

»I get it, Connor, you-«

»No, you don’t, father.« Connor blurted out, because once the dam was broken there was no way of turning back. »You don’t understand. There is no place I belong to anymore and I don’t even know if such a place ever existed in the first place. My tribe is gone, my village is gone, mother is gone but even if they weren’t, I never quite belonged. And I do not belong here as well. I feel strange in this city. I don’t mind that people are staring at me, but I mind that you might mind them staring. I don’t want my own father to feel ashamed for me. On this land, I am torn, father. Part of me wants to fight and repel all outsiders. The other part of me is the outsider. I have no place to go back to, the only thing I can do is to march forward and focus on the goals I've set for myself. I thrive not only for revenge on Washington anymore, if that’s one of the reasons you won’t let me join. There are other things at stake, more important things and I do see that now, but it seems that nothing I do is enough for you to see the progress I made.«

His father was oddly quiet as he stood at the open bathroom door and leaned his broad back against the wooden doorframe. They were alone inside the house and Boston slowly sunk into sleep. Connor felt weird as he slowly looked at his father and was not yet able to tell what emotions he could read from his blue eyes as he stood there and stared in his direction. He did not stare at him, though. His eyes seemed to look at something that was in the past perhaps.

»My father, your grandfather was a pirate.« He suddenly began and a small smirk appeared on his face as he crossed his arms. »I didn’t know of course for a very long time. To be honest, I never knew my father or at least not as much as I liked to think back when I was a young man. All I knew about him was that he was a fine gentleman from Wales who somehow managed to achieve great wealth and move to London. For the first eight years of my life, that was all I ever knew about him and I was terribly envious of your aunt Jenny that she knew so much more about him and that she refused to tell me. It thought there must be a reason my father would not tell me the things my sister knew already and that I just needed to be patient and follow his instructions more closely and then, one day he would let me in on his secret.« Connor drew in a sharp breath as if to interrupt him, but his father was quick to continue on.

»It never came to this and years should pass until I would understand why he never told me his secret. You see my father was killed when I was eight years old in our own home and it took years for me to understand. I told you before about Reginald Birch who educated me about the Templar Order from there on and later welcomed me into the fold, but I never told you that my own father was - as I later discovered - not only one of the most dangerous and feared pirates on the West Indies, but also an Assassin. I must confess, when I learned about my father's true identity I felt just as torn as you now, Connor, for I already was too deeply involved in the Templar Order. That was who I was and who I thought my father wanted me to be. I never had a good reason to question Reginald when he taught me about the order and our enemies, although I myself was in fact the enemy. If my father would have lived, I would have become an Assassin. During this time I didn’t know how to feel about all of this. I felt the urge for revenge because of the lies which had been fed to me for years, but even if I would have killed Reginald then and there, there wouldn’t have been the chance of going back. I already was a Templar not only by title but by conviction and I felt terrible because of it. My father has always been a role model for me, I looked up to him and suddenly a part of me felt betrayed by my own father for not telling me about his life and the other part of me felt as if I was the one who betrayed my father. It took me a while until I understood that my father would not have held it against me that I became a Templar. There was always one thing my father told me that was the most important thing to him and that was to simply think for
yourself because no one but you needs to live with the consequences of your actions, whether they're glorious or tragic.

When I was still young I didn’t understand and all I wanted to do was to destroy the Assassins once and for all to climb up that ladder of success as fast as I could and I must confess that I never quite realized that we could have achieved our goals together as well without all the unnecessary death involved. I realized that my father only wished to protect me from the truth as long as possible and I realized that only when I learned about you, to be honest. It took me over Forty years to understand this, Connor, and I don’t expect you to understand it already. I just want you to know that I did not let you join until now because I did not know the dangers this new Assassin on the rise poses to us and I am willing to risk all my men when it means I don’t have to risk my own son in this war as well.«

Again he opened his mouth to say something as the information slowly started to seep into his mind. It was much to take in at once, and surely he would need more information soon, but his father did not give him the chance to talk as he moved away from the door frame and started to bridge the distance between them. He shoved his left hand into the pocket of his pants and pulled something out of it but did not show it to Connor, just yet. »But I reckon, since I know you, there is not much sense in drawing this out any longer, right? I realize that you will act on your own if I don’t give you what you desire the most now at this moment and since I don’t want to lose you as I lost my father, there is not much I can do but accept you into the order.«

It was a ring. The small item his father had taken from his pocket was a silver ring and one he only knew all too well. »Usually we have ceremonies on such occasions. But I don't think either of us is really the type for that.« Connor could not help but jump from the tub and wrap himself in a large towel immediately. He was not yet able to understand what was really happening, but slowly it made sense and his heart was thundering inside his chest as his father spoke up again with a smirk still pulling at the corners of his mouth. »Do you swear to uphold the principles of our order and all that for which we stand?« It was weird. This whole situation. He thought it would be more festive when he would be welcomed into the fold already. Instead, they stood in their bathroom together and he was only wearing a towel with his hair dripping and his feet sore from running around without shoes. Still, the words he had studied came over his lips without hesitation.

»I do.« He answered quietly.

»And never to share our secrets nor divulge the true nature of our work?«

»I do.«

»And to do so from now until death - whatever the cost?«

»I do.« It felt final. Just two small words, but it felt so final as if he was about to leave this world and join his ancestors in the afterlife.

»Then I welcome you into our fold. Together we will usher in the dawn of a New World. One defined by purpose and order.« He did not ask Connor to give him his hand; there was no need for Connor already held it to him though his fingers were shaking strongly as his father pushed the ring over his left ring finger. »You are a Templar.«
Chapter 13

June 1776

Connor had learned that sometimes one's morals could not be applied to every situation one would stumble upon. This had become a fact in his quite young life. Of course, his morals said that killing other people was wrong and that no one had the right to decide who got to live and who had to die. Of course, his morals said that stealing was wrong and that no one had the right to take away values from other people no matter if they were rich or poor. Of course, his morals said that lying was wrong, that planning someone's death was wrong, that spying on other people was wrong. However, he had learned that sometimes, to achieve something good for a large group of people one had to do something wrong at first. Sometimes bad people needed to be stopped so that good people could live. Sometimes valuable things needed to be taken from bad people so that they could not harm others with them. Sometimes people were not ready to hear the truth so one would need to tell a lie. Still, even though he knew all of this, every lie he told, every murder he took part in, every little bit of information he had stolen, was a new weight on his shoulders to drag him down more and more and more.

»Oh no, there's this look again, lad. Please do tell what's on yo' mind again.« Hickey was not drunk at least when he turned to look at him in this dingy room inside the house he was currently occupying, but Connor only crossed his arms as he was addressed like this by his fellow Templar brother. Only two years ago he had finally been allowed into the Order and that night he would never forget. The night his father gave him the ring of William Johnson, who had just recently died prior to the events, inside their bathroom. Of course, this was not the story he would tell if anyone would ever ask him how he had gotten into the Order. The official story was that his father had called for his brothers to assemble at the Green Dragon tavern a few nights after this incident and that he had taken Connor with him to do the same exact thing once more as if the first time had only been a trial to see if Connor would know how to do it right. The moment, though more festive, surrounded by his new found brothers, had been not nearly as special as this more private rite in their bathroom, but Connor had been proud nonetheless.

»I must say that I don't particularly like this kind of operation you have going on here, Thomas.« Connor finally replied as he leaned his back against a wooden pillar supporting the upper floor of the small building. He did not much care for what might be going on over his head, but knowing Hickey he was aware that it was nothing legal for sure.

»And I must say that you sound jus' like ya father, lad.« Thomas replied with this usual sly grin of his and his comrades silently snickered while they were going about their business. One dark gloom from the young Mr. Kenway sufficed to silence them, though. Four years ago he had just been the little bastard son of Haytham E. Kenway, just a savage boy who had run away from his master to find help with his father. Now he was Connor Kenway, he was Haytham Kenway's son and heir and no one would ever question this as truth. Joining the Order officially had come with its benefits truly. People had started to treat him quite differently, even those he thought had nothing to do with all of these things and would know nothing about the Templar Order. He had forged new friendships with some rather important men in politics and military structures. He was suddenly not just some random savage boy, he was someone to contact when things started to go south and Connor took great pride in that. Suddenly he was someone others would rely on for help in their causes. Suddenly he was the one to ask for advice. What he did not quite like was when someone would tell him that he sounded like his father.

»I just don’t understand what good a counterfeiting ring might be to our cause, Thomas. We are no
criminals, I thought my father made that clear in the past.

»Look who's talking now, boy!« Thomas wheezed as he continued to shove money into the bag he had prepared. »You think just because you wear good ol' daddy's name now you're something better, ey? Now tell me, boy, how is running around murdering your father's enemies better than what I do? At least I do not have the blood of some probably innocent people on my hands. You should stop making big speeches like your ol' man and just accept that you are nothing more than daddy's little hunting dog.«

He liked Hickey for the most part, now, however, Connor felt the urge to feed him his teeth, as his father would put it. Instead of shooting back some snarky retort, however, Connor decided to swallow his pride and brushed his hands over his dark coat as if to smooth out some wrinkles that were not even there. He needed to busy his hands, nothing more. And he needed to remind himself that it would take him just the flick of his wrist to slit Hickey's throat. Killing with a weapon like the one his father had gotten for him was easy. Too easy perhaps.

»I thought the reason for this operation was to plan the assassination of Washington, not to garner more money.« Well, he was not naïve enough to believe the world could function without money, but still, he was not a big fan of this project of Hickey's, because in the end, not the wealthy people of New York would suffer the consequences of this little fraud, but those who suffered enough already.

»Oh, Conny, how little ya know of the world never fails to amuse me.« Thomas laughed before he slammed his large left hand on Connor's shoulder like an old friend and drinking buddy would do. Connor, however, schooled his face into an expression of utmost dignity at this, like his father probably would, before he turned to face Thomas again with his entire body, his arms now crossed behind his back.

»My father will allow no more mistakes in this regard, Thomas.« He stated the obvious. »I think you are aware that he won't give you a second chance this time.«

Thomas sighed but it sounded more like a wheeze as he flung his hands up in exasperation and mumbled something along the lines of »As if one Kenway hadn't been enough already!«. His face clearly spoke of his current annoyance with the young son of his Grandmaster and Connor wondered if Hickey ever had felt regret for joining the Templars or if he maybe just joined them for the money and the opportunity that came with it. He was aware of Hickey's military career of course, but his time in the military as an honorable man was long gone and since Johnson was gone too, Hickey did not even have him any longer to work for. Of course, he would turn to such lucrative opportunities. »And I guess since he has his lil' lapdog now he don't even need to come 'ere himself anymore to remind me of that.«

»My father doesn't know that I'm here.« Finally, the truth did escape him and Connor relaxed his posture just a little bit, so Hickey would understand that he was no threat and that he was not going to run to his father to tatter about Hickey's secret operation. Instead, he turned and walked closer towards the large table only so he could have a closer look at the printing plates lying around.

»Oh, having secrets now, Conny? I'm impressed. Daddy won't like to 'ear about this though.« He smirked and at least his companions were wise enough not to join in on this but rather acted like they were busy examining the table thoroughly. »So why are ya 'ere then, boy? Don't think you wish to join my business.«

»I'm here because of Washington. You plan to assassinate him and I am very interested in killing him for burning my village to the ground twice and for killing my mother.« For enslaving me, for abusing me, for torturing me, for branding me, for having me raped by his men, for humiliating
me. All those things he was not able to speak, but it was what filled his mind constantly since he knew about Hickey's plans. Never a day went by without him thinking about the way he had been hurt or the things he had seen. For four years it was like this now and it seemed he would never find rest.

Hickey was just about to reply something as a loud noise coming from the back door had them all jolt in surprise, as the door slammed into the wall it was fastened to and nearly sprung out of its hinges. There was a large figure bolting inside the little house and Hickey's men instinctively jumped to gather the plates from the table as if their lives depended on it – probably because they did.

The man was wearing white and blue robes, his face obscured by the famously pointed hood he had pulled over his head and within a heartbeat Connor felt painfully aware that he was now, finally, coming face to face with the Assassin that had killed not only William Johnson two years ago, but also Pitcairn right on the battlefield last year to aid Washington in his cause.

»What the fuck is this?« Thomas growled turning towards the Assassin, while Connor wanted nothing more but to attack the man immediately.

»Thomas Hickey?« The Assassin's voice was deep and sounded oddly familiar to him, but the Assassin himself did not really notice him staying where he was in the open door as if he had not just burst into the room like a raging bull, his posture completely calm.

»Maybe. What's it to ya?«

Instead of answering the Assassin drew his famous weapon as a silent message of what was to come now if Hickey would not give him the answers he desired - or what was to come anyway. Really, this Assassin was just a brute. Storming inside this house in the middle of the day like this. »Ain't s'pposed to be none of your kind left.« Thomas stated his eyes shortly fixated on the hidden blade the Assassin had drawn. He was standing between Connor and the Assassin, maybe even shielding the young Kenway from the eyes of the stranger, but Connor would never dare to say that Thomas would want to protect him in such a way. Then again, Connor did not know if the assassins knew about him and if any of them would see him - a man dressed as he was in almost black robes with the Templar Cross attached to his collar as a small silver brooch - he would most definitely end up on their list too. But then Hickey, while still talking turned to shove him out of the way. »Suppose I'd best be rectifyin' that then.« He shoved Connor towards the other door through which one of his men had already fled with the plates before he turned to the other two men and shouted: »Get 'im!« before grabbing the sack with the money and jumping for the door.

Connor stumbled and almost lost his footing as chaos ensued in the small house while Hickey fled, with the Assassin right at his heels jumping right through one of the windows and onto the street. Connor's legs acted before he could even think, as he ran after them. He needed Hickey. It was not just that he was a brother in arms; he needed him to have his revenge! He was the only one who would help him in that matter!

When he burst out of the door himself and onto the dusty streets of New York, he only saw the Assassin swiftly dealing with two soldiers who were apparently in his way while Hickey was already running for dear life again. A part of him would have never thought that Hickey would try to get away from a fight like this, but there was really no time to worry about this he guessed because the Assassin was already running after Hickey again and Connor was following at his heels.

It was not easy to keep up with the Assassin and Thomas and when he finally was able to catch up with them he saw how the Assassin grabbed Thomas by the shoulders and slammed him into the
wall of a house. He was too far away to hear what the Assassin had to say to Hickey, but as he slowly crept closer he could hear at least some shreds of the conversation.

»You're a right fool, meddin' in affairs you know nuttin' about.« Thomas snarled, but he did not seem to have noticed Connor just yet, as the young Kenway slowly crept out of the narrow alley he had come through. Connor, however, felt the blood pumping through his veins, the adrenaline making his heart flutter. If he would be just silent and cautious enough the Assassin would not hear him and maybe then he could take out this nuisance once and for all.

»Washington's the only thing keeping the Continental Army together. You kill him – and you end all hope for freedom.« Freedom, he said! Connor would have laughed if the situation would not be so serious. It was clear to him that this man knew nothing about Washington if he spoke about freedom and this vile creature in the same sentence.

»Wrong, boy-o. Wit 'im gone, they'd have no choice but to promote Lee. And then-«

Connor was close enough and finally he drew out his hidden blade as Thomas' eyes flickered shortly to his face over the shoulder of the Assassin. It was brief, but the moment sufficed for the large man to react. The Assassin shot around, ready to strike whoever wanted to attack him but Connor was quicker and although he needed to duck away under the slash of the blade of the man he succeeded in slashing open his robes at the left side of the Assassin, drawing blood.

There was turmoil around them and Connor could already see soldiers running towards them. The Assassin fled with one last glare at the young Templar. He was gone before the soldiers could reach them. He fled into one side alley and Connor ran right after him but was grabbed from behind by one of the soldiers and flung back like a misbehaving cat.

»You are both under arrest.« The soldier bellowed and Connor noticed that Hickey too was being arrested on the spot. What insolent fools! Why would they not go after the Assassin instead? Wasn’t it obvious who the culprit in that situation was?

»Ah well, we were just havin' a scrap, officer. Ain't nuttin' wrong with two men settin' their differences the ol' fashi'n way. Can't we come to-«

»Quiet now!« The officer bellowed before Thomas could ramble on, while it slowly dawned on Connor that they were mistaken him for Hickey's attacker who tried to run away. After all, they had probably seen him with the blade, hadn't they?

»What are the charges?« Connor turned to the officer who had his hand still clawed into the thick fabric of his coat, but the only thing he could think about was that his father would be mad if he would find out about this.

»Counterfeiting.« Another man offered, showing the bag that Hickey had apparently lost on this flight from the Assassin. This idiot. A bag full of counterfeited money!

»I had nothing to do with that!« Connor immediately replied gesturing towards the bag, but the looks on the faces of the men spoke a language quite clear to him. They did not see the nice clothes he was wearing, they did not see the expensive brooch his father had gifted him with on his last birthday this April, they only saw a savage in a stolen costume.

»Course not.« One of the policemen laughed. They did not want to believe him - that at least was quite clear.

»Listen – there are more important things at stake here. I am-« But he did not get as far as to say
who he was hoping that his name would have at least any weight to it because the next thing he felt was something heavy colliding with the back of his skull knocking him out for good.

He came to in a fog. His head was aching incredibly and for a brief moment, he was not quite sure if he should even try to open his eyes or rather stay like this and play dead. The air around him smelled moldy and moist. It was hot around him and he was clearly lying on something cold and hard. He felt pain shooting through his ribs and back as he slowly started to start feeling his body again and wished he would not at the same time.

»You miss me, swee'art? Oi, sleeping beauty, get ya ass up.« To his luck, there was not much light coming into his dingy cell as he opened his eyes. At least not enough to make him flinch. The room was quadratic and small, a thin mattress was covering the floor in one corner of the room but whoever dragged him in here purposefully dropped him right beside it. Only through a small window with bars in front of it there was a little bit of light coming inside. However, when he looked to where he heard the sound of Hickey's voice he could see a hole in the wall and Hickey's grinning face looking down on him.

It took him a moment to notice that he was not wearing his dark coat any longer. He only had his undershirt and his dark breeches left. Even the shoes they had taken from him. He felt a bit naked and exposed like this and that was a feeling he did not like at all. Why did they take his clothes, but not Hickey's, he wondered, but then again, in the eyes of those wardens he was just a savage.

»Wat? Nothin' to say?« Hickey grunted as Connor slowly scrambled to his legs and stumbled closer to the hole in the wall.

»Where are we?« Connor groaned and grabbed the back of his aching head. His long hair hung loosely over his sore shoulders like a black veil.

»Bridewell prison, lad.« Thomas snorted but then he left his spot near the hole and stepped closer to his cell door at the sound of steps approaching, the sound of boots echoing from the stone walls. »But I believe I've just been pardoned.«

Connor stumbled to his own door and carefully glanced outside the door. Carefully, because he did not want the wrong people to seem him. Charles Lee was approaching the scene slowly with one of the wardens walking in front of him. Connor immediately shied away from the door, because for a second he had been afraid his father was right about to follow behind Charles like a big, oversized shadow. Gladly he was not. He could not have his father knowing about this situation. He could not have his father know that his son was in prison. He needed to find a way out on his own.

He heard how the cell door of Hickey's was being opened by the warden with a loud screeching sound that made him cringe violently before Thomas slowly stepped out of the cell. »Thank you kindly for the rescue, Charles.« Thomas grinned as he was freed from his cell.

»I should have let you rot in that cell. There can be no further mistakes, Thomas or else Master Kenway will decide upon your fate and not some little judge.« Charles spat immediately, while Connor was trying to watch the scene unfold through the hole in Thomas' cell wall, hoping that Lee would not see him like this. He watched how Lee was already turning to leave, but it was Hickey who stopped him.

»What about the lad?« He asked and as Charles turned around in confusion, he continued, although Connor wished he would not. Maybe Charles was his brother in arms, but they were still no friends and he would much rather not have Charles Lee seeing him in this cell! »'E's here. They put the lad in the cell next to mine. Guess good ol' Haytham would not be happy to 'ear that 'is sonny is in jail, eh?«
Why could this insolent fool never keep his mouth shut? Surely Lee would run straight to his father to tell him about this! For Charles, this was a very welcome situation to pick a fight with him again. Sometimes Charles seemed jealous of him, Connor thought. He never wasted too much energy in thinking about this, but he knew that Charles never liked his mother. Maybe he was jealous of his relationship to his father, maybe he was jealous of Connor's quickly moving career within the order and the prospect of Connor taking on the mantel of the Grandmaster if his father was to retire. Sure he always thought that he would be the one to succeed the great Haytham Kenway.

However, as Lee slowly stepped to Connor's door he seemed honestly surprised. »Well isn't that a surprise to find you here, Mr. Kenway.« Charles sighed, but there was not smirk pulling on his lips and no amusement to find him in jail. Not even the hint of satisfaction to see him incarcerated. »I'm afraid I cannot simply get you out of that cell boy, but I will write to your father about this. Surely you have nothing to do with the reason why Thomas is here.«

Connor was tempted to wash his ears, because surely he had not heard right. There was no way that Charles had really said what he had just heard. »No« Connor quickly silenced him and moved closer towards the door so he could lower his voice. The warden should better not hear what he had to say. »Do not tell my father about this. I will get out of here myself. Father does not know that I am here.« He whispered. No matter the differences between them, he was sure that Charles would never betray a brother of the order. The most he would do was to ignore his wish and tell his father anyway, but Charles would not sell him to the guards for sure and risk the safety of the son of his beloved Grandmaster.

»Then do tell, why are you here, Mr. Kenway? What brought you to New York if not your father's orders?« There was this distinct sense of critique lingering in the tone of his voice. Of course, Charles would never go against Haytham's orders.

»It's about Thomas' plans. You know what I mean.« He tried to clarify his words with a look in Lee's eyes. Of course, he could not speak openly about that matter with the warden in such close proximity even though he had his voice lowered to a whisper. »I'm in. I want to do it, but my father would never allow it, that's why you can't tell him!«

»You are expecting me to keep secrets from the Grandmaster?«

»Please, Charles.« He could not believe that he really needed to plea with this man! Oh how low he had sunken in the past few hours! It was all Thomas' fault of course. »If I won't do it now, I will never get the chance again to have my revenge.« The only thing he could try was to appeal to the guilt Lee had probably felt four years ago. He had never forgotten the way Charles had looked at him across the dinner table at Washington's house. For a moment Charles was silent as if he was pondering over what he needed to do, but then he silently nodded and turned to Thomas again.

»All in good time.« He mumbled. »For now we should see about getting you better accommodations here.« He glanced one last time at Connor and maybe he was just imagining things, but he was sure that he had seen worry flash in Charles' eyes, before he turned around and moved down the hall again. If he was indeed worrying than only for his own head if his father would ever find out about this whole situation and about Charles keeping a secret like this from him.

»What are you on about?« Thomas asked in surprise as he followed his fellow Templar down the hallway their cells were located at. As always Thomas gesticulated widely. »I thought I was getting' out.«

»I'm afraid you won't be leaving for a while, thanks to Benjamin Tallmadge. He's been running his
mouth, saying all sorts of things. You're being investigated for plotting to assassinate George Washington and if we are unlucky, so is Mr. Kenway Junior over there just because he has been spotted with you.« Charles informed Thomas as calmly as he could, but Connor could feel the distinct sense of dread protruding from him. Of course, if this was going to be discussed in front of a judge, the probability that Connor would hang just for being an Indian was high. And what if … What if Washington would learn about this situation and Connor's involvement in it? The thought of this came as sudden as the shiver running down his spine because of it.

»What a bunch of bollocks! I thought you was gonna handle that!« Thomas growled pointing at Charles in exasperation.

»We'll discuss this elsewhere.« Connor saw how Thomas was throwing one last glance over his shoulder at him, but then he moved on and followed Charles out of the hallway to leave him behind. Well, he thought grabbing the bars of his cell door, it seems now I'm on my own. Time to find a way to break out of a prison. Sadly, no one had ever taught him that lesson yet, but he guessed it might come in handy in due time.

But first, he guessed, he would befriend the moldy mattress in the corner of his room for he could see that the sun was already setting through his pathetic little window. Tomorrow was another day, he guessed and he could very well keep his escape to then. First, he would need to figure out a way to escape anyway and for that, the best way seemed to learn about the other prisoners and listen to the things they might tell him whether they did so knowingly or not.
Chapter 14

Getting the information he needed proofed to be not as hard as he originally feared it might be. When the next morning came, the sun was shining brightly onto his face through the little barred window. He was still lying on his mattress and contemplated whether he should open his eyes or play dead, as he started to hear something from the cell next to his; the very same one Hickey had been kept in yesterday when they both arrived at this place. His own door was still locked and he had not much hope that it would be unlocked soon. Apparently the guards in here were not too keen on the idea of letting him meander through the prison on his own all too soon. Briefly he found himself wondering if it had been a mistake to not let Lee handle the situation for him.

First, he did not pay much attention to the voices from the other cell, but when he grasped the first bit of interesting information, he slowly got to his feet and crept closer to the hole in the wall through which he had watched Hickey and Charles yesterday like a Peeping Tom.

»I'm tellin' ya, he's plannin' to escape. We should get in on it!« He heard the voice of a man whisper to his comrade, gruff and hoarse and as he dared a look he could see two men standing in the shadows of one corner of the cell. To him, it was quite obvious that they did not want the guards to see or hear them.

»Yeah? And what makes ya think that?« His comrade immediately replied, but his tone already told Connor that he did not really believe that whoever they were talking about had it in them to escape this place.

»Caught 'im carvin' something in the yard. Slipped it in 'is pocket real quick when 'e saw me. Looked like a key.« The first one replied and this time more pressing.

»Probably just a shiv.« What good would a wooden shiv be at such a place, Connor wondered, but maybe this was more common than he was aware, after all, he had never been to prison before. Although he had been behind bars for far too long already, he guessed. Already his mind was desperately craving freedom again. He felt agitated thinking that he was staying here for a while, not able to do as he pleased, in chains once more.

»Nah, Mason ain't a fighter. Always talkin' and trickin' 'is way outta trouble. Weasel Weems, they call 'im. Sneaky bastard.« The first one seemed serious about this whole matter and finally Connor could see his face a bit clearer in the dingy dim light. He was a big man with more fat than muscle but that did not mean he should be underestimated, Connor knew this pretty well by now.

»Come on, Finch.« The second guy pleaded. »He's not so bad. Even taught me some letters once. Gonna write a note to my lady.«

»What for? You think that whore's out there pinin' for ya? Savin' herself for when you get out? Hah! No doubt she's already moved onto the next fella. And the fella after 'im.« Finch exclaimed laughing, but still tried to keep his voice low.

»You shut your mouth, 'fore I shout it for you.«

»Easy now - was just a joke.«

»Yeah? Well, it wasn’t very funny.«

When Connor finally stopped eavesdropping, he was quite sure that there was nothing more of substance to hear from those guys, as they started engaging in nonsensical banter. He was not sure
what to do afterwards, for it did not look like his door would be opened soon so he was able to roam free through the building as those men seemingly were and there really was no one to talk to either. It would be better not to inform those two men next door that he was in here and could hear them. It did not even take him much time to further inspect his temporary little home, for there was nothing to inspect other than the dirty, moldy mattress and the bucket standing in the corner beside his bed, which probably was meant to be his toilet from now on. The window was too high even for him to have a look outside, so after a while, he sunk back down on his mattress with a frustrated groan. Until the guards decided to let him out he might as well sleep a bit.

Mason Weems was the name of the man he needed to talk to as soon as he would have a chance to. Right now Connor had no strategy in place or knew how he should approach him to get him to help him, if those idiots next door were even right that was. For now, he only had the hope that this Weems-guy might help him and that was not much, he guessed.

When the next morning came, Connor found himself lying on the dirty ground yet again, awakened by the loud shout of a guard who ordered him to get up and the shrill noise when his cell door was opened. It was a habit of his to fall out of bed anyway, so he was not all too surprised that he indeed was lying on the ground again, but he had a much harder time than usually to scramble to his feet. His back was sore and aching though not nearly as bad as during his time on the plantation. »Get up!« The warden shouted yet again as Connor shortly braced himself at the nearest wall and tried to sort out his head to fully understand what the hell was going on around him.

»Where are we going?« He managed to grunt with the sleep still clawing at his usually quite sharp mind. He was however not rewarded with an answer, only with a look of pure disgust for his person and utmost annoyance. Well, he was quite used to looks like these by now, but at least he was finally let out of his cell. His stomach was already growling and he did not even quite know how long he had slept.

»Stay out of trouble or you wind up in the pit!« Was the only thing the man grunted in his general direction as Connor managed to catch up with him. Unlike those guys from the day before, it seemed he was not allowed to roam free in these halls yet. He tried to walk in a fast pace, but the guard leading him down the catwalk and down the stairs was walking so slow he needed to stop from time to time to not run into him, which further agitated some other guards and gave them a reason to shove him quite violently forwards, grunting racial slurs at him which Connor was already well too used to hear.

He immediately felt the eyes of the other prisoners on him, as he reached the ground floor where the prisoners seemingly spent their free time in a big quadratic room surrounded by open cells and framed by the stairs leading up. There were only a few sets of chairs and tables all occupied by big muscular guys, except for one table, where only a single pale man sat playing against himself in a game of checkers. Of course, most of the gruff men started whispering about him and to know that Connor did not even need to hear it. Of course, they would whisper about the tall native guy, the new guy. However, he ignored them for the most part, occasionally throwing a dark glance at some of them when he heard something particularly disrespectful aimed towards him, and slowly made his way towards the man who played against himself. His guts told him that he was the man he needed to talk to and his guts were usually right.

The man was in his entire demeanor and looks unimposing, with dark kind of greasy hair hanging in his eyes, a sickly pale face and a slim stature, but the way he was sitting there and playing against himself gave Connor the impression that he was not at all to be underestimated. Surely he was not here for nothing. His shoulders were not slumped, his back was not arched. He was sitting straight and the way his dark eyes flickered over his fellow inmates from time to time told Connor
quite clearly that he was hyper aware of his surroundings and quietly observing what was going on around him.

The intelligent men always were more dangerous than the brutes. His father had always warned him about that. So Connor quietly braced himself before he moved towards the man hovering over the board game and lowered his voice as he finally addressed the man. »Mason Weems?« He asked, hoping he was the right man and on the same instant hoping he was not. It would be easier to deal with a brute than dealing with a clever man.

»Could be.« The man answered his eyes still on the board as he thoughtfully placed a white stone on the board. Connor, however, took that as a definite yes and took the chair opposite the man. In the fashion his father hated so much he turned the chair around and sat down front to back, folding his arms slowly on the backrest.

»I need your help.« Why bother beating about the bush? He did not have time for those things and sometimes it was best to leave the good British gentleman his father tried to make out of him, outside.

Still, the man did not look at him while he seemed to concentrate on his game, only producing an interested sounding »Oh?«.

»They say you know a way out of here.«

»They say a lot of things.« He said and as he was about to place yet another stone Connor grabbed his arm to finally get his full attention.

»I do not have time for games.«

But Weems seemed unimpressed as he took his arm back with a small jerk. »A shame, as I was hoping you might play one with me.«

Connor leaned back in his chair and raised his chin. He knew people did not like it when he would look down on them but considering his height he mostly did and could not help it either. »Fine.« He finally gave in and for the first time, Mason looked directly at him with those unsettling dark eyes.

»Are you familiar with the rules?« For a man in prison he looked too calm, Connor decided. Too much as if he was the one in charge here. A shark among goldfishes. Well, he apparently had no other chance as to play along it seemed. He wanted to get out and if getting out meant playing a board game with this man then so be it.

»Of course I am.« He answered as calmly as he could as Weems took his stones from the board and gave him the white ones.

»Seeing as you already know mine – what's your name?« When Connor set his first stone, Weems sounded a lot more cheerful and friendly and leaned one arm in a leisure gesture on the edge of the table. Connor, however, was still careful not to let his guard down.

»Connor.« He stated calmly. By now he was so used to this name and to calling himself Connor Kenway, that it did not take much more effort than drawing in a breath. It was not that he was thinking his family was so infamous everyone should know their name, but certain people did and sometimes it was better to keep a low profile, especially at such a place. His father had many enemies, after all.

»Pleased to meet you, Connor.« He grinned and placed his first stone on the board only to
comment Connor's next choice with a court »Well played!« As if he was honestly impressed. »So, what brings you to Bridewell?« Although he asked, Connor felt as though the man already knew why he was here.

»Treachery. I have been falsely accused.« Connor answered. It was the truth, after all. He had done nothing to deserve this. Well … he did deserve jail and the noose probably, but not for the things they said he had done.

»Of course you have.« Mason mocked.

»You do not believe me?« Another question, another stone on the board and like this it was going to continue as it seemed.

»Why should I? You’ve the look of a brute.«

»You misjudge. I am an honest man.« Connor snorted. It was true however, he guessed. He did look like a brute.

»And yet also a man imprisoned. Tell me how you found yourself in this place.«

»It is a private matter.«

»As is what you ask of me.« Well, what was he about to say now? What could he say to make Mason believe him? But Mason did deliver him something without even knowing it. »They say you are here because you and Thomas Hickey were planning to murder George Washington.« His tone was the one of a cat lurking for a mouse. Something about the way he said this made Connor's skin crawl and as he raised his eyes from the board game he could see that Mason was intently watching his face. This man seemed not fond of the idea of Washington dead in a shallow grave – unlike Connor of course.

»That is not true.« Connor said and placed another stone as if this conversation was the most normal thing in the world. »I was trying to prevent that murder.« Even though this lie made him feel even more uneasy. He needed to play along.

Finally, Mason seemed to have enough as he got up to circle around the table, seemingly enraged like a mad man, while he was breathing heavily through his nose. »You are not a very talented liar!« He growled at Connor. »If the others put you up to this, you should better watch your back from now on.« He spat and this time, Connor was sure that this man was a dangerous individual and one he desperately needed to believe in his story, if he wanted to get out of here.

»George Washington is brave beyond measure.« Connor found himself stating although it made him feel like he needed to vomit. »Loyal like a brother, peerless in character, and unshakeable in his convictions.« - A slave owner, a torturer, a cruel joke of a man, someone who would hurt innocent children to get back to his enemies – »That man is our Jupiter Conservator, destined to lead us not just to freedom, but greatness. Anyone who says otherwise is either a simpleton or a traitor.« He felt sick saying these things. He felt physically ill lying like this. But he had learned to lie. His father taught him, even though his father also taught him that he was a bad liar most of the time.

Mason just stared at him for a dreadful long moment in which Connor only feared that this man already looked right through his lies. What if he had seen Lee talking to him? If so, he would know that Connor knew Charles Lee, the biggest opponent Washington was facing as of right now! Even though Washington managed to become Commander in Chief, he was surely aware that Lee was not that easy vanquished. Of course, he was aware that Lee and his father would want to get rid of
him so that Charles would get his position and if Weems really was a supporter of Washington as he seemed to be, he knew these things too.

Connor felt his skin crawl and the little hairs of his neck stand up as Weems kept staring at him, before he finally nodded in an expression that clearly spoke of his relief to have seemingly found a kindred spirit in this brute of an inmate. »Yes, you are right. Exactly what I'm thinking too, Connor!« Weems agreed a bit too cheerful for his linking. This man did not know the man he was supporting, but Connor was careful to keep playing his role.

»Then you understand why I need to get out of here. If I don't help him he is going to die.« Finally, Mason sat back down on his chair and his brown eyes were serious and wide as he stared at him. He looked like a weird mix of a young boy and a fanatic man. It was hard to even guess his age. He might be the same age as Connor, barely even an adult yet, or even younger than that. »You're serious, aren't you?« He breathed but Connor thought sometimes silence was worth more than thousand words and he gave his best expression of a man with serious intentions as he again relaxed a bit in his seat in front of Mason. His father had been a good teacher. Surely he would be proud seeing him deceiving that man like this, though Haytham normally stated that Connor was the worst liar he had ever encountered, blushing every time he needed to lie quite feverishly. Now he seemed to have it under control but then again that surely was only because his life was somewhat at stake if he would be trialed for the planned murder of Washington and the counterfeiting.

»Very well. But it's going to take some doing« Mason started. »See - everything hinges on the key I forged. But that lout Finch stole it! Took me three months to make the thing too. You need to get it back or we're not going anywhere.«

Finch, Connor thought. It was the name of one of the two men he had heard talking in the cell beside his the other day. It should not be hard to steal from such a loud mouth like him. And with stealing - gladly - he had much more experience than with lying. »Consider it done.« Connor quietly agreed as he got up from his chair again.

As he expected finding Finch was the easy part of all this. Connor later found the brute of a man standing beside one of the open cell doors, but of course, the man could not refrain from spouting an insolent, dirty comment in Connor's direction as he walked by. Gladly though Finch at least had not noticed how Connor stole the key from him while he had apparently been busy staring at Connor's physique in a way that made him shiver with disgust. Even he had heard stories about prison life and to what men often resort at such a place when their bodily needs were starting to get the better of them. He needed to be out of here as soon as possible, before he would need to kill one of those men out of self-defense maybe. There was no way he would ever become a victim of such a heinous crime again even if it meant the judge would have a legit reason to hang him for murder then.

The next morning Connor got a chance of trying out the key he stole from Finch after a way too long and exhausting night in his cell. For the first time after he had arrived here, he had been glad that he was locked up for the noises he had heard in the night. He was lucky to have a cell to himself apparently and this probably only because the guards thought him dangerous to hypothetical cellmates. He had tried to drown out the things he had heard, but it was not easy. It had not been easy when he had still been a slave on Washington's property with women and men silently crying their nights away at times and it was not easy now hearing the most disturbing sounds coming from seemingly all around him and trying not to think of what they might mean. The men in here were predators and he should better not be their prey. Still, during the night he could not have helped but to think of the way Washington had laid his hands on him before he
managed to escape or the ways he had taunted him saying how beautiful he looked. Beautiful as his mother - as if that would be a compliment for a young man - but then again he, of course, knew that it had not been meant as a compliment.

To his great dismay, the wooden key did not work no matter how hard Connor tried and all he got was a nasty remark from a guard as he hastily hid the key again in the pocket of his pants. »What are you looking at?« The guard snorted as he hit his arm against Connor's door. »You in the market for a husband?« Well, he had expected that, still Connor did his best not to bare his teeth at the man and show him how furious the half-breed beast could get when he was being taunted like this. It too much reminded him of the people who had hurt him at the plantation and proceeded to mock him afterwards, a teenage boy who could not have done anything to stop them.

As he later was let out of his cell again, he immediately went down to confront Weems about the key. This time, the man sat near the same spot as the day before, but this time with a parchment and something to write. It was still weird to him how confident this man looked surrounded by all those brutes. Most of the men down here already looked angry for no apparent reason other than the one being here. Usually, someone like Mason would be the perfect person to pick on for those types of men, or at least it had been like that at the plantation. But Mason seemed not at all bothered and none of those men got near him too. Connor did not bother wondering about to whom Weems was writing and why as he approached him. He did not care. All he cared for as of right now was his freedom and for this, he needed Weems to finally become useful to him!

»Your key is useless.« Connor confronted him as quietly as possible as he grabbed the backrest of the chair in front of Weems again, but this time, he did not sit down. He felt agitated and nervous with each moment he had to spend here. Surely his father was already wondering where he was. He should have gotten home by now. It was only a matter of time now, that his father would somehow learn about Connor's presence here in Bridewell and that Connor could not have - at least, he wanted his father to hear it from him first and to show him right away that he was able to manage a situation like this on his own, because he was. He had already escaped a prison once, even though there had not been high walls to keep him in.

»What do you mean?« Mason replied but did not look at him while he continued to write, just as the day prior with the game. Slowly but surely Connor grew really tired of this demeanor of the other man.

»It did not fit the lock.« He hissed. He felt like a caged tiger once more and nothing he wanted more than just escape!

»It's not meant to.« Weems said, finally looking at him so matter-of-factly as if he was explaining a basic concept to a four-year-old child as if it was only natural that a key was not supposed to fit any lock.

»You forged a key that does not work?«

»Well that all depends on what you mean by work. It'll get us out of here, just not the way you expected.«

Not the way he expected, well, at least that was one true statement, Connor later agreed on. Weems had explained to him that the easiest way out of Bridewell would lead through the VIP-wing of the prison, where Hickey was kept anyway due to Charles' doing, and since Weems still thought that Connor wanted to hinder Hickey on killing Washington, he had assumed this way would be the best route for Connor to escape, killing Hickey in the process. So everything Connor would need to do was to swap his key against the key of the warden, but for that, he had needed to pick a fight and get thrown into the pit.
Well, needless to say, that he had not very much liked that idea or enjoyed the execution of that plan and still, as he came back to reality a few hours later, he did not like that plan very much. Of course, it had worked up to this point. After he had told Weems how much he disliked all of this, he had picked a fight with the other prisoners and had been thrown right into said pit. He could only hope that the rest of that plan would work just as fine, because otherwise, his future started to look grim. After the fight, which he had started, he should better not get back to the other prisoners again. Surely Finch and his friends would rip him apart if he would make the grave mistake to go back to the cells again one way or the other.

His head was hurting quite violently as Connor slowly tried to get back to his feet after lying on the ground for an eternity or at least that was what it felt like. He did not quite know how long he had been out of it this time, but he was sure that he had not been hit over the head so often for quite some time now. Well, he would not whine about it, if it meant he was going home again safely, even though he was quite aware that he would not be able to keep this predicament a secret from his father forever and his plan of killing Washington still very much stood. But for that he needed to get out first and maybe he could even help his comrade to escape too. After all, even though Hickey only brought him into this dire situation, they were brothers and they were supposed to help each other when a situation looked grim.

Of course, Hickey would not face the same fate as he would if he would be dragged in front of the judge because of his plan to assassinate George Washington, but even Hickey would not be able to charm his way out of this.

Connor was silent as he crept to his cell door. Inside the cell, it was quite dark and there were no windows to indicate the time of day. He could only assume that it was night by now and also he could only assume that this cell, the pit, was located underground. The only light came from a few torches alongside the walls every few feet. Down here it was a bit colder and he could not hear much from other prisoners. There were a few pained moans in the distance, but they sounded quite different from those he had heard during the last night, which somehow calmed him down quite a bit. Those moans down here sounded more like a man starving or living through torture. Well, of course, that was hardly any better, but … it was better in his book than the things he had heard upstairs. Well, then again it should not have come as a surprise to him to hear sounds like these when he was surrounded by thieves, rapists, and murderers.

He could see the warden standing ridiculously close to the cell door for a moment before he walked off. Surely he was patrolling the corridors of this section of the prison. Connor pressed himself close to the moist stone wall next to the door and waited. Waited and listened contently. He tried his best to drone out the sounds of pain he could here in the distance and rather focus on the sound of footsteps. The ground was a bit more like the dirt ground of the tunnel system underneath the city, so every step came with a sharp scrap of boots over dirt. For once, he was glad that he was barefoot, although he wanted his clothes back - especially the brooch his father gave him! He tried to make out a pattern from what he could hear, tried to find out if there was more than one person patrolling down here and how they moved. No matter how hard he listened, he could only make out the steps of one person, the warden, shuffling around. Well, that certainly made things easier and after a moment Connor could even tell how he was moving and what route he was going. Of course, he could only speculate that the warden would keep moving in this pattern, but it was the most logical thing to him. It took the warden almost ten solid minutes to come back to his cell, but to his luck, the man did not look inside it, only paused for a moment with his back towards Connor and that moment Connor used to quickly change his key against the one dangling from the belt of the man.

Under different circumstances, Connor would have screamed at the man for being so careless, but now it came in his favor, so he just fell back into the shadows and waited until the man moved
again, which he soon did. After he was around the next corner Connor had plenty of time opening the door and sneaking outside onto the corridor. For a moment he was afraid someone could hear the sharp sound as he opened the door to his cell, but there was no sign of alarm, so he carefully closed it again. He could not be sure that the warden would not look into his cell the next time he would finish his round, but at least the closed door would buy him some time before his escape would be detected. There were only two ways to go for him now, either left or right and considering that the warden had vanished to his left-hand side and would come around the right corner soon, Connor went left and was careful not to make any noise at all. Gladly he had learned from the best.

When he came to the end of the corridor, it opened up again to both sides. Right in front of him there was a narrow staircase and a guard to his left-hand side standing in the middle of the hallway. Connor could only assume that the steps were the right way out, for he had no time to explore the area to make sure it was. So he waited for a moment until he was sure that the guard was not looking in his direction, before he silently hurried up the first few steps. Before Mason had sent him into his doom he had agreed that he would meet Connor upstairs and now he could only hope that Mason would stick to his word. He still felt quite a bit dazed from the blows to the head he had received in such a short time. Three in a row in just the last two or three days if he had counted correctly. The guard that had hit him today had been quite vicious, hitting him over the head twice with his club to make sure he would stay down. As he touched the back of his skull he could even feel dried blood in his long mane and silently cursed under his breath. For now, he should try to stay out of trouble and out of fights for certain - at least until he would have made it out of the city.

Mason waited for him after Connor climbed the last stairs and carefully crept through a large doorway. He stood to his left-hand side in a shadowy corner right in front of another gate, looking so relaxed as though he was doing something like this any other day. Not in the least, he seemed nervous. When Connor got to him, Mason immediately took the key out of his hand and opened the door for him.

»You'll find Hickey through that door. It's where they keep the important prisoners. Nicer rooms, more space - those sorts of things.« Of course, there were certain things he did not mention, like the violent cellmates the other prisoners had to suffer. »It seems even in prison, who you know makes all the difference.«

Mason still sounded as cheerful and relaxed as if he was talking to a good old friend which he met strolling on a sunny day in the park. Connor did not ask how Mason planned to escape this place now, but considering that he had the warden's key now, he would surely soon find a way out. Weems was sneaky. Weasel Weems, was quite the fitting nickname and still Connor felt a chill running up and down his spine talking to him, but he did his best to play along still. Shortly he patted Mason's shoulder in a friendly gesture.

»Thank you, Mason - for everything. I will find a way to repay the favor when my work here is finished.« Stepping through the gate and hearing Weems closing it behind him somehow felt oddly final, like he was stepping right into hell, but he tried to shake off the feeling and move on. He had already wasted too much time.

Finding Hickey's cell was easy, after he managed to sneak through the VIP wing of the prison without alarming the guards. To his luck, it was oddly silent and empty in this part of the building. Well, that was what he thought at first, but after he was able to almost walk freely through the corridors, he felt a bit more alarmed and uneasy as if he was being watched from the shadows. It was too easy, he briefly thought, it was too empty, but he brushed the thought off and told himself that there just were not as many guards needed here for there were not as many prisoners.
Most cell doors were wide open and when Connor reached the first closed door he could see Hickey through a small window in the otherwise wooden door. He was lying face down on his bed and although his position felt odd to him, he tried the door to find it unlocked. In retrospect, he would have maybe said this was the moment he should have run for dear life, but he did not. Instead, he opened the door and inched closer, hoping Hickey tried an escape of his own and that the figure on the bed was not in fact Hickey.

The person on the bed was at least wearing Hickey's clothes and as he finally touched the man and turned him around he jumped back in surprise and horror. Hickey was dead and cold. There was no indication that a fight had happened, only a knife stuck in his throat. Connor's first instinct was to look at the window where he could see this night hang over New York, black as spilled ink. Maybe it had been the Assassin. The knife was a throwing knife, so maybe the Assassin had climbed the façade and thrown the knife at Hickey through the window, but for that, the man would have needed wings, Connor assumed bitterly. No, this was an inside job. Someone from the inside had helped the Assassin and surely that was the reason why he had not needed to pass as many guards this time. It was a trap.

»You really should not have tried to fuck me over, you know, Kenway?«
Chapter 15

He should have known that something was horrible wrong from the start and he walked right into the trap that had been set exclusively for him. Mason Weems was not alone as Connor slowly turned around. Of course, he was not; he was after all not a dumb man, as Connor had already noticed before. He was accompanied by Finch and his friends, the same brawny men Connor had picked a fight with earlier this day.

»What's this about?« Connor found himself growling as he cautiously stepped away from Hickey's lifeless body on the bed, feeling oddly calm seeing a friend and brother dead like this. He could not clearly see how many men were behind Mason, but he could only guess it were the very same four to five men he had fought with earlier. Still he tried his best to remain as calm as possible in this situation and tried not to act like a cornered animal. Surely Mason only wanted to scare him for some inane reason. Maybe this was Mason's way of fucking with new prisoners – promising them a way to escape prison and then tricking them like this to show them who truly was in charge. Maybe Mason did not even have a part in Hickey's death.

»Did you really think I would not know who you are after you have been prancing around town in your fancy little costume, with that ridiculous shiny brooch on your coat? Did you really think I would not know why you are here?« Mason asked, a broad grin blooming on his face, all teeth but no humor. Slowly Connor started to worry a bit for his own safety.

»I told you why I am here! I'm here because I was falsely accused of having part in the plotting of the assassination of George Washington!« Connor exclaimed enraged as he gestured towards Hickey, still wary to not alarm the guards that could potentially still be around, even though he had not seen them before. What if he would be found with Hickey's corpse? He would be the one who was going to be framed for this! Like this there was no way he could possibly escape the noose! Not to mention that he had tried to escape prison, but he would certainly not be believed if he would tell the story of how all of this had played out. And yet, Mason Weems was still in the possession of the warden's key and if Connor would just be able to get it…

»Oh, yes I almost forgot.« Mason snorted and nodded towards Hickey. »So I guess you killed him then.« Well, what now? Should he be honest? Should he lie? There was a knife stuck in Hickey's throat and clearly he had no weapon on him before, which Mason very much knew after he managed to get Connor to get himself thrown into the pit. What could he say to get out of this situation and what did Mason even want from him? »Don't stress yourself; we all know he was your friend. No, don't worry that job was done by someone I had more trust in, someone who really stands on Washington's side.«

»I don't know what you are talking about, Mason, but I must say that I do not find this situation any amusing. We should not stand around chatting like this. You wanted to escape, didn't you?« Maybe he still hoped that Mason was joking with him, maybe he still hoped that he would still be swayed to stop this nonsense if he would try to appeal to his wish to flee.

»First and foremost I wanted to see if you really were as full of shit as I suspected you to be as you started lying about your love for the commander. You see, Connor, I've got my own ways of getting information, even in here. I've heard Washington had had a native boy working on his plantation who nearly killed him and ran away four years ago. For how long have you been living with your father again?«

»Mason, this is not the right time for this!« Connor hissed. »Hickey is dead, that's great but I am sure that Washington could still be in danger! There are still others left who really want to see him
dead, you know?«

»You mean like your father? Or like his good friend Charles Lee? Or more like you yourself?«

»What? No! I-«

»You are clearly a man of many talents, Connor Kenway, but lying is not among these talents. I have heard many stories about you, you know? Kenway's bloodhound, which rips his enemies to pieces without asking too many questions.«

There was no point in keep trying to play along, he guessed, so instead he straightened his aching back and made himself as tall as he could. He was taller than Mason anyway, but he would certainly not stand here with slumped shoulders or make the mistake of pleading with the man to just believe him. There was no point in insisting upon his lies now, was there? »So then what now? Are you planning on locking me in with Hickey until the guards find us and can hang me for the murder of him too? Or are you planning on killing me right away to protect your beloved Commander – a man you don’t even know?«

For once Mason's face changed into a distorted grimace of anger as he stepped one step closer into the cell, but wary to not come too close to Connor as well as if he really feared that Connor could crush him like a nut between his hands. »I know that the people of this country wish to be free – and that Washington fights to make it so.« He had the eyes of a fanatic man and it was never clearer to Connor than in this moment, while he previously had only expected this to be true, now he knew.

Connor wanted to lunge at him as Mason was closer now. He knew it would not help much if he would tackle Mason and beat those stupid ideas out of his head, because he would still have to face those brutes behind him, but still, the wish was burning in his entire body. Oh, if this man would know Washington the way he did! If only he knew what Washington really thought of this so called freedom he proclaimed to fight for!

»Please.« Connor snorted. »Freedom. Does this freedom he fights for apply to the slaves he keeps on his plantation too? Or are they not equal enough to be treated the same as men like you?« He saw Mason opening his mouth to shoot back a response, probably a lie about the slaves he had heard before - That those were free servants maybe, not slaves, but Connor did not want to hear any of it. »This man is weak. He stumbles and stammers through each engagement, making it up as he goes along. His pedigree is pathetic – his military record even more so. I could go on and on but we'd be here for days, so manifold are his faults, so deficient are his merits, so perverted his nature of which men like you know nothing about. Take it from the boy who once nearly drowned your beloved General in his own bathtub: He must be dealt with. And you as well if you keep standing in my way like this.«

He saw how it itched Mason to punish him for his slander of Washington's character, but he did not, and while Connor still contemplated if he might be able to fight his way through the group of men and escape this place without getting caught, Mason bared his teeth at him in something that clearly should look like a menacing grin. »Here is how it's going to work, my dear friend. First, these gentlemen over here will pay you back for the little ruckus you made this afternoon and give you a little more insight in the prison life, which you don’t seem to value as much. Then we bind you und bring you back to your cell where you belong and as soon as the next day rises, you go before the court, accused of plotting to kill George Washington. Maybe they will pin the murder of good old Tommy over there on you too. You did kill him, after all, didn’t you?« It was blatantly obvious to Connor how much Mason enjoyed all of this from the content little noise escaping him by the sole prospect of what was to come. »Once that’s all squared away, well then...« He drew
his finger across his own throat as if it was a blade, but as soon as he made the mistake of turning his back to Connor to leave the cell, Connor did lunge at him.

Lunging at Mason like this with a group of raging bulls behind him to back him up was a great mistake, but what did it matter now anyway, Connor thought. His head was still a mess from the blows he had received that afternoon thanks to Mason's glorious plan and Connor was in no doubt about the fact that Mason and his friends over there would be the ones escaping this hell hole tonight as soon as they were finished with him. This was why Finch was in this too and he was not stupid enough to think otherwise. All of this had been set up in the first place, he briefly thought, or was Finch in on the plan only since Connor stole the fake key from him and thus his opportunity to escape? It did not really matter, he guessed. Mason had needed a scapegoat to send to the pit, to get the real key and Connor had been dumb enough to play along.

At least he managed to throw two blows at Mason, before he was tackled to the ground by Finch. The first blow struck him right to the left side of his jaw and made his head spin completely out of control instantly. After that, it was all but a haze – or at least that was what he would like to say, but sadly it was not like this at all. The first kick aimed for his skull and succeeded to hit the target which shortly made him see stars and let his world distort to pure darkness only to let him come back to pain and the distinct instinctual panic that came when one was on the ground trying to somehow protect themselves from the kicks they received. Connor at least tried to fight back as best he could, but as he could not get up to fight back and as the group kept attacking him and hindering from getting to his feet, the only thing he could do was to try and shield his head and face at least. He would not die in this cell kicked and beaten to death by those brutes – not after he had proven that he was indeed able to fight them all at once! Well, but that had been this afternoon and now he was overwhelmed by them as easily as a small child by a pack of hounds trying to rip it apart limb by limb.

It was hard not to cry out in pain as yet another kick hit his stomach, while he tried to curl up as much as possible to shield his body, acting on pure instinct, after everything he had been taught in the past. He cursed himself for not accepting Lee's help in all of this, that he had hindered this man on informing his father. He knew if his father would have known about him being in prison, even though he had done nothing wrong, would have led his father to rush here and get him out within just hours! Instead, he had valued his pride more than that, wanting to show how he did not need help and failing miserably once again in the process.

He was choking, as he was trying to draw in enough air to stay conscious, but on the same instant, he wondered if he should just risk it and hope they would stop soon enough to not kill him. But the fight was still in him, burning hot, and he still wanted to fight his attackers off. Surely Weems was already gone with the key in all this turmoil. A man such as Mason Weems would not risk letting lose men like Finch and his friends, who he clearly deemed criminals, violent beasts he could use to beat up a man he did not like. They were busy beating Connor half to death and he was escaping all the while, without them even noticing it.

»You're not so tough now aren't ya?« Finch spat as he finally stopped kicking him and instead buried his meaty fist in Connor's dark mane to pull his aching head up just enough to stare him directly in the face. »I bet'ya regret now fucking with us earlier, don’t ya?«

Connor coughed up blood as he was lifted up like this and tried to focus his eyes on Finch's ugly, red, meaty face before he forced his mouth into a grin, his teeth probably bloody and pink. »Go on then.« He breathed. »You do have all night. Seems that Weasel Weems is gone without you.«

His suspicion seemed to hold up, because as he was finally able to look at the men around him, Weems was nowhere to be found and that even Finch finally seemed to realize as he let out a
frustrated groan. Maybe pointing out to Finch that he was not going to escape tonight was not the best idea, but at least it gave him a little joy to see the man angry as he finally grasped how his own violence had betrayed him.

Finch threw him to the ground again and Connor almost laughed as he turned onto his back to draw in deep breaths. His whole body was exploding with pain. He was sure that he was not able to move even if he would try and focus his entire mind on it. For a moment he just stared at the ceiling and listened to the ruckus Finch made as he left the cell, nudging away his comrades, probably to have a look if Mason really did escape. He almost expected Finch to just go and leave together with his friends as he would realize that there was no way out now anymore and that they would just leave him here, but he did not. He came back instead and before Connor could even brace himself Finch was towering over him again and slammed down his meaty feet on Connor's unprotected stomach. This time, he could not suppress a scream and as he curled in on himself and again tried to shield his body Finch grabbed him once more by his hair, pulled harder this time even – so hard in fact, Connor could feel hairs ripping. He felt as though his scalp would tear off if Finch would keep pulling on it like that.

»Think you won, boy? Think again.« Finch spat again. »If we can't get out, you can't too. You just dug your own grave.«

He could feel the sizzling in the air that was announcing the thunderstorm that was about to come to New York and so were his comrades in this dimly lit room. The night was so dark that it would not be long until the sun would break through it again and only the gently crackling fire that was lit in the fireplace gave a bit of light to the room in the back of the tavern. »When exactly did you want to tell me about my son being in jail, Charles?« Haytham's voice could not be more venomous than in this moment when he glared at one of his two remaining closest friends. He valued Charles greatly, just like he valued Shay greatly. The same had been true for William and John as well. He could have always trusted in William's advice, especially concerning his indigenous born son, since William knew quite a lot about the native people of this country, especially the tribes close to the Kanien'kehá:ka. He still remembered how great an ally he had been back in the day during the Braddock expedition, as it had later been called. In John, he had confined in whenever he was concerned about the military situation of their cause, even though Haytham had tried to stay mostly out of all of this until he was needed to play an active part in this war of independence as it was called. This petty revolution. He did not much care for the independence of the colonies, though he, of course, saw the pros that came with it for their cause. This would be a young nation, easy to influence as soon as they got rid of the Brits. The whole world was in turmoil as it seemed. Even in France people were revolting against their monarchy. He had hoped he could stay out of this war for a bit longer, but now it seemed his son was an active participant and that he did not like at all. »Were you going to wait until he would hang from the gallows or what is it?«

»No, not at all! Quite the contrary in fact! I wanted to tell you right away, as I found out about the situation when I went to Bridewell to see after Thomas' accommodation, but your son refused and told me not to tell you.« Charles immediately erupted with red cheeks. He was still very much the loyal dog he had been when Haytham first came to Boston.

»And you decided to simply do as he asks of you? Since when do you two get along so well that you do as he asks? Where was the usual bickering between the both of you in this situation where it could have been futile?« Charles seemed to have no answer judging by how red his face had turned by now, but Haytham had the feeling that he knew the answer or at least some kind of explanation. Was he still feeling guilty over not having been able to rescue Connor from the hands of
Washington? Was he still feeling guilty for not telling Haytham everything he knew earlier than he did? Maybe this was it, he decided. He felt guilty and that was why he had done as Connor asked him to.

>Well<< Shay interrupted the conversation almost cheerful, or at least he tried to sound cheerful enough. >>I think there is nothing that can be done now anyway, can it? The Pup is behind bars just as Thomas and while the prison is a place Thomas is familiar with and probably belongs in anyway, the boy is innocent. So I guess we do already have a plan then, haven't we?«

Finally, Charles cleared his throat and pulled out a letter from his coat pocket. >>I managed to get the judge to set Hickey free in the morning, but I was not able to achieve the same thing for Connor, I'm afraid. The judge is looking for a scapegoat in this whole debacle with the counterfeiting and the assassination plot and he will gladly take it out on a boy like him. He is trialed first thing in the morning for the charges that had originally been Hickey's. I guess the judges in New York are quite flexible when they are presented with someone with slightly darker skin.«

>>He will not be trialed.« Haytham decided as he got up from his armchair and started pacing around the room. He did not pace usually, but this was no normal situation anyway. His son was in great danger, even behind bars. Washington had his men everywhere and with every hour Connor would need to spend behind bars he would be more and more in danger. >>He will be charged guilty and send to the gallows right away.«

>>But if he won't even be trialed, he will hang anyway.« Shay immediately interrupted.

>>No trial for traitors.« Haytham growled. >>And if he won't be officially trialed, his name will not be called out in public. The good people usually don't care who hangs from the noose as long as they have a spectacle to look at. His name cannot be registered in official court documents, Charles. Take care of this.«

>>But Sir, if he gets send to the gallows we-«

>>He will not be alone.« Haytham decided with a grim face and a tone so final he doubted his friends would dare to question him.

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He was in the forest again. He could hear the singing of the birds in the trees, he could hear the hooves of the deer running through the underwood, he could hear the sharp little noises when a rabbit was running and darting away from possible pursuers. He felt the warm light of the sun shining onto his face as he just lay on the ground with his eyes closed. He enjoyed just listening and feeling, letting the forest and the earth and the animals talk to him without interrupting them. Lying here like this all alone he felt safe again, he felt like he was finally back home again, he felt as if he was becoming one with nature and as if everything he had endured was just a bad dream. Surely, when he would open his eyes he would see the leaves of the trees towering above him blocking out a bit of the rays of sunlight and he would see all the little creatures crawling beneath him and all the larger ones living their lives around him as if he was not the most deadly predator among them.

He was the wolf and they were his prey, but as long as he held his eyes closed shut, they did not know and he did not care. >>Up!« A voice sounded somewhere in the distance, gruff and low, but Connor remained to lie here, where he was safe from harm. He could hear the groans of a bear in the distance, probably a mother with her cubs and he heard the howling of a wolf nearby. He should probably get up and leave before they would find him and try to rip him to shreds. >>Up
A kick to his side made him flinch violently and wince in pain as he was pulled out of this wonderful dream and back into the real world. The sunlight was gone, the warmth was gone, around him it was only dark and cold as his eyes flew open in shock. His body was aflame and he felt as if he could not even breathe without crying out in pain. All he really wanted to do was to curl into himself and try to go back to the forest in his dream. Instead, he was faced with an angry looking man, a guard, dressed in the usual, blue and red coat, a musket dangling from his back and before Connor could even begin to understand what was happening to him, there was another man entering the room, his dingy, cold, moldy cell. He did not quite know how he got back to his cell. Everything was just a blur, hidden by a red hue of agony when he tried to remember. He flinched away as the first man moved to grab his right arm to pull him up to his feet quite violently, but there was no way to escape and he had no strength left anyway. »I said GET UP!«

He heard himself screaming out something in his mother tongue in pain, but he could not understand it himself. His own voice, his own native language was foreign to him as the two guards got him to his feet and grabbed his arms to tie his hands behind his back. Almost instantly he slumped back to his feet because his legs were not able to support him anymore. This time, they pulled him back up even rougher and Connor distantly felt the sharp pang shooting through his body as his right shoulder plopped out of its socket by the sudden pull of one of the guards. His senses felt dulled and he himself, his brain, his mind, far away and detached from his body. He could feel that there was pain and he could hear himself scream, see the black spots in front of his eyes, feel that he was on the brink of passing out from pain and he logically knew that having his shoulder dislocated must hurt terribly, so much in fact that he started to gag and vomit a bit of stomach acid to the ground in front of his own naked feet, but he strangely did not feel the full impact. It was as if his mind was blocking all of this from him to keep him sane.

The guards did not seem to care for the injury they had inflicted upon him as they managed to get him back up again and shoved him forwards. His head was spinning and the longer he kept his eyes open, the more the world was spinning out of control right in front of him. He tried to shake it off, but that made things only worse as it seemed, so he squeezed his eyes shut, but even behind his eyelids everything was spinning and whirling around. More than once he lost his balance and almost fell, but the guards made sure he did not as they dragged and pulled and pushed him forward out of his cell and onto the corridor, their manhandling of him only accompanied by the occasional »Walk«, even though they could clearly see that he was hardly capable of doing so.

However the more he was forced forwards, the more seemed to come back to him, the more his senses started to wake up again and he really wished they wouldn’t. »Bye now!« A gruff man laughed at him the small procession passed his cell. He could hear some of them cheer and spit comments at him, but he could – gladly – only hear some of them. Everything was still a blur and he was thankful for that. He did not want to think. He did not want to function. Under different circumstances, he would try to hold his head high and walk proudly, but he could not do it now. He staggered and stumbled forwards at best. Walking downstairs was almost impossible without having him fall and break his neck, but since the guards seemed to see that at least on the stairs they grabbed his left arm again to keep him from falling down. After all, their prisoner should not die before he was officially sentenced to die.

The entire way at least one hand seemed always attached to his uninjured left shoulder and when they reached the doors, Connor was almost blinded by the sunlight. He felt as if his head was going to explode from the light. He could not see a thing, he could not breathe, he could not walk. His dislocated shoulder was pounding with pain and he wished just to pass out again. His knees were trembling under his weight but he was shoved forwards nonetheless and the next thing he knew was that he was being shoved into a carriage. Probably the very same he and Hickey came
with when they arrived at Bridewell. He was glad as the door of the carriage was closed and darkness had him back in its arms to soothe his mind. Lying on his uninjured shoulder hurt, but at least for the moment he could curl in on himself again and try to find a way back into the forest and away from all the pain that was ruling over his body.

He was not left in peace for long. Feeling every bump in the road, the vibration of the carriage driving through town made him almost gag on vomit again. He could smell himself in the small confinements of the carriage and that alone made his stomach reel in disgust, but funny enough he still could only think about the fact that he could not face his father like this and that he would not be able to disguise his presence in Bridewell now too. Surely by now his father knew. Surely he knew about Hickey's death as well. Surely he was disappointed with him once again. It was ridiculous really, and Connor had never expected to become that type of person – that type that only wanted to make their parents proud, in his case his father. Surely his father did not feel much pride now, as his only son was in jail, even though he did not commit the crimes he was accused of – or not entirely that was. After all, he had not partaken in counterfeiting and he did not exactly partake in plotting Washington's death either. It never really came to this, even though that was the reason why he had been there in the first place.

Finally, after what felt like a quite uncomfortable eternity, the carriage stopped. He could hear the frustrated neighing of the horse in front of it and heard the guard jumping down onto the cobblestones of the road, before shuffling around to the back. Rain was drumming quite heavily onto the roof of the carriage. Well, at least he would get a bit of a shower before he would need to face the court like that. However, when the door was opened and he was pulled out and thrown to the dirty ground right into a puddle of muddy rainwater, he found himself in the middle of town and not at all near the courthouse. At least that he could make out quite clearly, even with his brain turned to mush. Gladly once again he had landed miraculously on his left side, sparing his right shoulder from further harm. Surely the pain would have him black out once again if he had not and he doubted that the guards would have cared much for him then.

There were a few guards approaching him as he lay on the ground, not able to get up by himself and all Connor wished to see was a friendly face for once since all of this had started. There was none. As he looked up with his vision still blurry and cloudy, the men looked at him with disgust written onto their faces and none of them seemed eager to help him up again. In the dull world around him, he could hear another set of footsteps before someone crouched down beside him to help him get up again.

»'Ello Connor.« He knew this voice - that was the first thing his mind shouted at him. He knew this voice! He knew it! His heart was already racing in his chest just by this revelation alone; this stupid little thought that made him hope he would be safe at last. The man grabbed his shoulder, carefully to not inflict more pain, but rough nonetheless. Out of the corner of his eyes he could see the coat of a guard, but the man was none and Connor was wise enough not to speak his name out of pure surprise and shock and joy to have someone here with him who did not want to gut him alive for a change. »Didn’t think I’d miss your little party ’ere, did ya?« His tone was mocking, but Connor knew that it was just a charade, just like the strong accent the man used to disguise himself as one of those simple minded creatures, an accent he had in common with Hickey but which he usually did not show off as much for having been raised in the colonies just like Connor himself. Shay brought him back to his feet and although it hurt, it was not as bad as previously. The rain already drenched his clothes and the fabric was clinging to his skin. At least like this, the blood was finally being washed off his body. »I hear Washington ’imself will be in attendance.« When he stood he could see Shay's face finally and although the man was grinning at him in mockery, his dark eyes betrayed him. Strangely, Shay seemed to look older than usually in this moment, but that was probably just Connor's imagination and his brain playing tricks on him after everything he had endured during the last twenty-four hours. »Hope nuttin' bad ’appens to him.« Shay snorted.
»I thought there was a trial.« Connor was finally able to utter although his voice was hoarse and broken and he tried not to look at Shay as much as he wished to. He could not even begin to describe how glad he was that Shay was here, but he also knew that he had to play along, no matter how much he would have loved to just cling to the Irishman and be off to the Morrigan – surely she was lying in the harbor.

»Ah you know, no trials for traitors, I'm afraid. Lee an' Haytham saw to that. It's straight to the gallows for you!« He could only try and trust this man - that he knew. If his father had arranged this, then surely he had thought it through, hadn’t he? Surely there was something he was planning. Another guard was shoving him forwards again.

»That’s enough! Keep moving!« As they walked (or in his case stumbled) around the carriage, he could already see the waiting crowd that had gathered for his execution. Almost he felt a bit flattered that there were so many people interested in seeing him hang, but it also was frightening to him to walk past all those shouting and booing people, only accompanied by a guard to his right and Shay to his left both carrying muskets but leaving him nothing to defend himself with against the raging crowd. They passed a small fleet of stairs leading to a larger building but in his daze he could not think of what this building was called. It was the first time in years that Connor was confronted with Washington again. The man stood on top of the stairs, staring at him with menace in his ice cold eyes as Connor walked by and tried to avoid looking at him while shame and anger were burning in his mind. This was what Washington wanted and Connor knew this perfectly well. He wanted to see him humiliated, broken like this, he wanted the people to shout and scream at him, to throw things at him or spit at him and there was nothing to stop the people from doing so. He thrived in seeing the blood of one of his most hated enemies in such a state.

He had lost all his dignity apparently. He was nothing more than a beaten dog that was being dragged through the streets, paraded like a prize of war, which was oddly fitting he guessed, after Washington had made war on his people and burned his village to the ground, but surely that was a minor detail of which most people here were not even aware – or, which would be even more frightening, they did not care for the people Washington had slaughtered. Connor was almost amazed how vile those people were, how much they seemed to enjoy a display like this. He had expected to see the good people of New York, or what they claimed to be, to turn away in horror at the sight of a man as badly broken and beaten as him, instead they cheered and mocked him. By now he did not even know anymore if those people were worth the fight. They were savage creatures who did not really deserve to be free, a bitter part of him thought, or at least not if that was what they understood as freedom. The way to the gallows seemed to go on forever while Connor kept his eyes to the ground, but when he finally looked up he could already see the scaffold in front of him, towering menacing like a titan from an old legend.

To his surprise, he saw Lee standing up there together with the executioner. Shay left him at the end of the stairs to the scaffold and was gone almost instantly as Connor turned his head to see where he might have gone, but he had not much time to understand before the other guard was shoving him up and pulling at his left arm to get him to move up again. It was almost impossible for him to move upstairs on his own and the constant shoving and pushing and pulling did not help much either. All it did was making him lose his balance.

Charles Lee did not grant him a look even, as Connor was dragged to the noose and forced to stand right on the trapdoor that would let him fall to his death later. From here he had quite a good look over the crowd, but no matter how hard he looked, he could not make out the tricorn hat his father liked to wear. His father was nowhere to be seen and that, for the first time, really filled him with fear for his life now. He was sure that his father was in New York, after Shay had told him that he and Charles took care of Connor being sent right to the gallows. But where was he now?
»Brothers, sisters. Fellow patriots.« Charles raised his voice and his hands to calm the still jeering crowd. »Several days ago we learned of a scheme so vile, so dastardly – that even repeating it now disturbs my being. The man before you plotted to murder our much beloved General.« Charles was a good spokesman, Connor knew this and he was playing his part quite thoroughly. He wanted the crowd to hate Connor and although he still did not know why, Connor tried to remain calm nonetheless. »Indeed. What darkness or madness moved him, none can say. And he himself offers no defense. Shows no remorse. And though we have begged and pleaded with him to share what he knows, he maintains a deadly silence.«

Connor had not thought there would be a sack. He knew that there usually was, after all, he had seen more than one execution already, but he had not thought about it and when Lee stepped closer towards him and pulled the sack over his head, he felt frightened to the core, his legs trembling in fear once again. He wanted to be brave and to say that he was not afraid of death, but this simply was not true. There was so much he had to do still! But the world around him was dark again as he felt the noose being forced upon him. All he could hear now was his own breathing and the muffled sounds of the crowd and Lee’s voice.

»If the man will not explain himself – if he will not confess and atone – what other option do we have, but this? He sought to send us into the arms of the enemy. And thus, we are compelled by justice to send him from this world. May god have mercy on your soul.« There was a short moment when he thought that he would now be rescued by an army of Templar soldiers to grab him and lead him into safety, but there was only the loud noise as the trap door under his feet gave in and the sudden pull as he fell and hang from the nose, choking in pain, his whole body convulsing and spasming in pure agony. He felt bile rising in his throat once more, unable to spit it out. He was sure that no one would help him, that his father had finally forsaken him, when finally – he fell.
The crowd was jeering, they threw racial slurs at the prisoner that was being dragged and pushed and pulled towards the scaffold in front of them like a mere dog that did not deserve any bit of a kind treatment or even some level of decent human respect. They spit and threw rotten tomatoes and other vegetables after the young man, which they seemed to have hold onto just in case that there was an execution where they could use them as weapons to humiliate a fey man further on his way to face death. The prisoner could barely walk on his own. His naked feet were bloody as if he had been forced to walk through broken glass to inflict even more pain than he already seemed to suffer. He was stumbling and staggering along the path between the crowds that had gathered to both sides of the plaza, nearly falling with every push from the guards. His back was hunched, his arms bound tightly behind his back and his right shoulder hung unnaturally from his body leaving a disgustingly looking bump in the place of his shoulder. The face of the young man was partly hidden behind a veil of long dark hair hanging loosely in his face, but still one was able to see the blood clinging to his mouth and jaw.

Haytham Kenway usually did not feel much empathy for criminals or prisoners on their way to the gallows, but this very prisoner was his very own son and he had hoped to never see his own flesh and blood in a state such as this ever again. He felt bile rising in his throat and the flame of anger burning in his stomach ready to consume everything while he was walking through the crowd like a shadow, careful to not draw attention towards himself - especially not from his son. If Connor would see him, surely the boy would make a mistake, surely he would somehow show that he had seen him and that indeed would bring danger to this whole operation.

Shay was beside Connor. It was a small comfort, but it needed to suffice for now because there was nothing else to find comfort and solace in for the moment. Surely Connor was blinded by fear, even with Shay by his side, but Haytham's anger only grew as he had to look at the state his son was in. All of this could have been avoided if Charles had only talked to him sooner if Connor would have just swallowed his pride and let Charles handle it. But then again, could he really blame that insolent fool of a son for this ridiculous behavior? Would he have acted differently than Connor if their places had been swapped? Would he not have tried to get out on his own without drawing too much attention to his situation from his comrades or family? Maybe Connor really had this unhealthy amount of pride from his side of the family, but since he was his father Haytham felt in the right to blame him and be angry with this stupid kid of his. After all, Connor had ignored his orders, hadn't he? He brought all of this upon himself as he had not listened to what Haytham had ordered him to do. However, seeing his son, his child, his own flesh and blood, staggering and stumbling around like this, injured to the point where it was almost impossible for normal people to even stay conscious, as it seemed, he could not bring himself to be angry with Connor.

Thunder was rumbling in the distance as he watched Connor climb up the stairs, even though he almost fell. Shay had already vanished into the crowd with no one noticing the false guard vanishing into thin air at all. Of course not, after all, all eyes were glued to Connor, especially as Charles began to talk, his words perfectly chosen and crafted for the occasion. Haytham slowly crept closer, one of his throwing knives already between his fingers, as his eyes suddenly fell upon George Washington on the other end of the plaza. Surely George knew that Haytham was among the bystanders, but it did not seem like he had already seen him in the crowd. A wide satisfied grin was plastered onto his face and for this very second Haytham already contemplated throwing the knife at Washington instead. Focus; there is no time for petty revenge yet, he reminded himself, even though he was cursing himself. If Hickey would not have been caught, this whole situation could have been avoided and Thomas would have been able to act out his plan of killing George. Instead, Thomas was dead and his own son was held responsible for his death among other crimes.
that had not been his! It was an absolute and utter disaster this whole situation. He was, of course, aware that Washington was not completely innocent at the situation. Surely he had been informed about the assassination plot and did his best to frame Connor for it, only to see the child of his enemy hang. If Connor had never been able to leave Washington's plantation, Haytham was sure, he would have hung sooner or later from a tree in his backyard and George would have shown him the corpse of his son one way or the other. This whole situation must be like Christmas for him, after all, it was one of Connor's own brothers in arms who was to execute him now.

»If the man will not explain himself – if he will not confess and atone – what other option do we have, but this?« Haytham stared at the scaffold again as the sack and noose had already been draped over Connor's head. He could only try to imagine the horror shooting through his son's body. But surely he must know that Haytham and his brothers in arms would not let him hang, mustn't he? »He sought to send us into the arms of the enemy. And thus, we are compelled by justice to send him from this world. May god have mercy on your soul.«

The sound of the trapdoor being pulled was like thunder and no image to Haytham had ever been more horrific and paralyzing than seeing his own child hang from the noose like this. Connor's long legs were trashing violently, his whole body shaking and flailing like a fish. The gurgled sounds escaping Connor's tight throat cut to the air like shots. He acted upon instinct, acted without even thinking about it too much as he threw the knife, aiming for the noose. For just a split second he was sure he had seen something else flying towards the noose, but he was sure his eyes had betrayed him. His knife did not miss its target and the noose broke, letting his already injured son falling through the trapdoor and under the scaffold. The guards were shouting, but somewhere in the crowd a shot was fired, then another one. People started screaming and running for dear life and Haytham quickly sunk back into the shadows of the first narrow alleyway he spotted.

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The wind was knocked out of his body as he fell to the ground beneath the scaffold with no means of softening the fall in any way. This time, he had not the same luck he had before as he slammed down on his right side and howled in pain into the sack that was still attached to his head. Behind his eyes, white lightning bolts of pain were shooting through his brain. He was gasping like a fish on land and did not even know anymore if it was because of the enormous, mind-crushing pain, or because he had just been choked by a noose.

The world did not grant him long to regain his senses and understand what had just happened to him, because the very next moment the sack was ripped from his head together with the rest of the noose. The light outside the sack was blinding him immediately and he almost did not notice as the rope that was binding his hands together was cut to set him free. He felt as if he was on the verge of passing out again.

»Up you go, Connor!« Shay was back at his side again, crouching underneath the scaffold. »Come on, we have to hurry now.«

There was noise, screams, thundering footsteps all around, shots being fired, pure chaos ravaging the streets of New York, but Connor could only think one thing as his mind finally went back to work. He saw the pistol attached to Shay's hips and immediately his left hand shot forwards to grab it. »Need to kill Washington!« He gasped, though every word hurt, even breathing hurt, but Shay grabbed his hand and hurled him to his feet instead.

»Next time, Pup. Now is not the right time for this and if you do it now you will hang again and next time we might not be able to help you. Come now!« With that, Shay pulled his left arm across his shoulders so that he could support Connor as they crept out from under the scaffold at the
backside of the wooden construction. People were running in panic still and no one seemed to notice them really in all of the turmoil and chaos. Still shots were being fired and Connor still had no clue why that was or why that could be. Who was firing? Was it the guards shooting at the crowd? Was it his fellow Templars? All of this ruckus was only to help him escape, at least that he understood. As long as it would give them the chance to escape, it did not matter, he guessed. Within seconds he was soaked to the core after they were out in the rain again, and while previously it had only been a light drizzle, now it was a full-fledged thunderstorm raging over the town.

Connor did not really know how Shay managed to get them into safety. Everything was just a blur after they escaped from the plaza. He had wanted to look back again, to see if Washington was still there, but he could not. His head was lolling uselessly from side to side while he tried to stay conscious as they ran through the town - even though Shay was the one running and dragging him along pretty much. There was no way he could be able to run right now. The only thing he could do was try to stay conscious and move his feet so that his full weight would not weigh down on Shay.

Keeping his eyes open however got harder and harder and the pain was getting stronger and stronger, numbing each and every one of his senses completely, until only the basic instincts were left and the sole thought that he needed to function just a few moments longer, just a little bit longer. Only when he noticed that they had reached the harbor, only when he saw the Morrigan towering over all those other ships, his knees finally gave in.

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He did not look good at all. Big purple bruises had formed along his sides, his stomach and his back. There was a pretty nasty wound on the back of his skull and quite a lot dried blood glued to his hair. He could even see small patches of bloodied skin on his head where his hair had been ripped out by brute force. He had a deep cut underneath his left eye, probably from a punch or two to the face, his lips were cut and bloody too, and blue bruises were blossoming alongside his jaw line on both sides of his face, looking almost as if his jaw had been forced open at one point – a thought Haytham did not want to delve in further. Marks of large hands were printed onto Connor's skin all over his body as it seemed. Marks from the guards pulling at him, dragging him along - or at least that was what Haytham wanted to think they came from, because every other possible explanation for those marks would just be too awful to handle in this moment.

For the first time in years, Haytham wished he had talked to Connor four years ago about the things that had happened to him, about the wounds he had seen when the boy had been lying unconscious on Shay's cot for the first time, pretty much like he did now. But he had not. He had not wanted to confront Connor with his knowledge or bring him into this uncomfortable situation or force him to relive all of it again. Maybe it would have been better if he had.

He knew that Connor had had problems in dealing with what had happened to him. He had seen it in the way Connor sometimes behaved, in the anger that he quite frequently portrayed and which most people (including Charles) mistook for Connor's hot temper breaking through. But this anger and rage his son sometimes showed and experienced had nothing to do with his temper at all. He only felt overwhelmed by the injustice he had suffered, by the hurt he had endured and the inability to fully grasp why that had happened to him or why he had not been able to stop it when it happened. Of course, he could not bring up the topic years later, but he wished he had spoken to his only son earlier. Now he could only sit by his side and hope that something like that had not happened again.

It was Shay who had taken care of Connor's shoulder with great skill and experience.
the only few seconds Connor had been awake and that only because he had been awakened by the pain as had been evident by his screams as Haytham had held him down. He had passed out right afterward again and they had taken care of his wounds as best they could. Of course, Haytham knew how to fix a dislocated shoulder and had done it before numerous times himself, but something had held him back this time. He had not wanted to inflict pain on his own son maybe.

»He's going to be alright soon.« Shay informed him quietly as Haytham went on to clear the blood from his son's face and head as best he could without dozing him in cold water like a misbehaving dog that had played in the mud.

»Yes, he will. He is still young and heals fast, but soon he will be off again to collect some more scars. He is like a wild beast - never to be stopped. And he most certainly never behaves or listens to what I'm saying as if I would mean harm to him when I warn him.« It was not like he did not like Connor's behavior and his wild spirit, but it was this wild spirit that made it much more difficult for Haytham to keep him in check. He paused at this thought for a moment and barely registered the look Shay shot at him. »Is Charles here yet?«

Shay cleared his throat and straightened his back in the very way he always did when things took a more serious turn. »Yes, he arrived a few minutes ago. He is downstairs. If you don't need me any longer, I will go now and make the Morrigan ready to leave for Boston.« Haytham did not even look at his companion, only nodded quickly. For a moment Shay lingered at the door, after he bridged the distance to the exit, as though he wanted to say something else, but whatever it was he may have wanted to say, he did not and just left father and son in peace.

Haytham was a man of principle and he valued Order more than most things in this petty little world he had been thrust into. He liked to know the patterns in which certain people were behaving and he liked to be in control, either of the rules that were set in place or of the people around him. Because, he thought, as long as he was in control of the people around him, he was also able to protect those he loved. And fate had proven this thought of his to be right, hadn't it? Ziio had been well as long as she had been with him, but she died as he was miles away, forced out of her life. Same was true for Connor. He had been in great danger all his life until he had managed to get to him and only ever when Connor would escape his presence and follow his own idiotic plans he found himself in harm's way.

Haytham's eyes rested upon Connor's bronze colored face in the dim light of the oil lanterns Shay had lit in his cabin. Outside there was still a storm raging and the journey back home on board of the Morrigan would certainly become a bit rougher than usually during a weather as this. However it would also be much quicker, he assumed, than on horseback - unnecessary to say that Connor was in no condition to ride a horse anyway. His son's chest was rising and falling calmly now, which was much appreciated by Haytham in this moment. He was glad that Connor finally got a little rest. Even though he would rest for quite a while now, until he would be fully healed again. Other than this he needed to keep a low profile now until the people of New York would have all but forgotten him. Gladly at least Charles had been able to retrieve Connor's belongings so that the authorities would not be able to trace him through the clothes or made a connection to the Templars.

Maybe it would take months until Connor would be able to leave Boston again without drawing suspicion towards him and if it was for Haytham's liking, he would not leave his presence anyway. Maybe he was a bit too protective at times, he thought. Yes, he liked being in control. But then again, what he had loved most about Ziio was her wild spirit and the sole fact that she had been the exception to every rule Haytham came up with. He could have never controlled her and same was true for their son. Connor had his mother's spirit and he was painfully aware that Connor wanted to make him proud. Sadly that was almost always the cause for the danger he got himself into. Yet
his son also craved freedom and could not stand being forced to do anything. That was, of course, Washington's fault and the years as a slave still gnawing at the boy.

As Connor began to stir in Shay's bed, Haytham pulled his chair closer and placed a hand on Connor's hair for comfort. He seemed to be in pain, but since there really was nothing he could do about it, Haytham tried to coax Connor's body into relaxation. He found himself enjoying petting Connor's head like this after he realized he had done it for almost ten solid minutes even after Connor had grown calm again. He kept brushing his fingers through the long hair and wondered once again, how things might have been if Connor would have grown up with him. If he had gone to the village after Ziio's death to get his child perhaps. He wondered what kind of child Connor had been if he had been plagued by many nightmares perhaps, if he might have ventured to his father's chambers at night because he got scared by something he was not familiar with. Almost he could see those large dark brown eyes in front of him, but he shook those thoughts from his mind, because every time he would find himself fantasizing about this, he would also find himself enraged once again. Angry at those who prevented him from having his son with him.

Over an hour later the Morrigan was swaying quite badly and he could hear Shay's commands bellowing above his head across the deck, always only interrupted by the loud crashing of a lightning bolt or the roar of thunder. The oil lamps in the captain's cabin were shaking and dangling dangerously from their holders, the flames flickering and casting nightmarish shadows on the walls around. Only then Haytham left his post near his son and wandered towards the bull's-eye in the back of the cabin to have a look outside. The sea was in turmoil, waves as big as houses were crashing into the blue desert one after another, sending shockwaves at the Morrigan. He had never been a friend of storms, his son, however, seemed to be quite different in that regard, as Haytham recalled having caught Connor numerous times sitting by the window, watching a storm raging across Boston.

»Why am I naked?« A strained, thin voice came from the bed and interrupted his thoughts quite rude, causing Haytham to whirl around immediately at the sound. »Where are my clothes?« Another murmur and even a bit of humor were escaping his son. »Don't tell me you used the chance and cut my hair off, old wolf…«

But though he was joking, Haytham could hear the strain in his voice, the pain he was in and that was still engraved in his son's features, in the sharp, thin line that was his mouth. He was desperate to warm and maybe soften his father's heart with those comments and the little terms of endearment they found for each other in the cause of the last four years. In these terms, they were oddly the same. Ziio had been quite affectionate when she wanted to be, he and Connor, however, were much more careful and serious with those things. The truth was however that he loved his son, and dearly so. Imagining Connor getting hurt or even die caused him pain beyond belief - more pain even than he would have ever felt possible. It was not easy to be angry with Connor when he was hurt like this. Still, if anyone could manage that, it was he, Haytham Kenway.

»You know, Connor, you never fail to amaze me. Every time I make the mistake to think that you finally learned your lesson, you get yourself in even greater trouble than before. And really, I find myself wondering: Just how many times do you have to get your head bashed in by some random thug to learn your lesson? Honestly, Connor, how many times had it been this time?«

His boy did not even have the decency to not answer this question as he should. »Three times I think. Maybe more. But I think I got enough for now. I start growing tired of being hit in the head.«

A part of him was not even surprised that Connor would say something like this. Oh, this awful, awful child! »So!« Haytham clapped his hands as he tried to sound cheerful and mask his anger as if they were only talking about the weather. »How did you like your stay?«
»Not much.« Connor made a small grimace and pulled the blanket higher, pulling it directly underneath his chin. He would have looked like a child like this, wouldn’t it be for his bulky physique. »Hickey is dead.«

»He very much is indeed, son.« Haytham replied crossing his arms behind his back and watching how the boy squirmed under his stare a little more pleased than he should feel.

»It wasn’t my fault.« Connor immediately tried to defend himself.

»It wasn’t. Thomas had his own ghosts to fight and he made his own enemies and it seems one of them came to collect his debts.« It had only been a matter of time for all Haytham knew. Not only because they most certainly were all targets this young Assassin would want to eliminate.

»It wasn’t my fault that I was incarcerated.«

»It wasn’t as far as I can tell, but you still were. And you are aware that you brought great danger to the Order with this little misstep of yours, aren’t you? You can call yourself lucky that Charles managed to keep your name out of this whole situation otherwise you would have greatly compromised the entire Templar Order.« He kept his voice calm even though he felt like yelling at the boy, but yelling at Connor had never proven to be a great idea. Connor would only yell back at him and they would not talk to each other for weeks. He had learned that Connor was much more easy to scold with a quieter tone, for Connor was very much a boy who responded more to the feeling of disapproval and having disappointed someone he loved than anger.

»Well,« Connor started defending himself. »What was I supposed to do? I couldn’t do anything! I went after Thomas and the Assassin so I could help Thomas fight the Assassin off! How should I have known they would arrest us like this and immediately take all my belongings?«

»You should not have been in New York in the first place, Connor! That is the real problem! You just don’t listen to what I’m saying! You are incapable of following the most simple of orders! I am truly amazed that you- The Assassin was there?«

»Yes!« Connor groaned and threw up his left hand in exasperation which did not look as dramatic as it usually did when Connor was not lying down and had only one hand to move. »Yes, he was there! That’s what I'm trying to tell you, but you do never listen to what I have to say, old man!«

»Well I do listen now, so tell me everything, son.« His voice was sharp as he tried to ignore that insolent comment thrown at him for his age. He was by no means old of course, but he was not a young man either.

Connor sighed and pulled the blanket even higher as Haytham moved to sit on the chair he had previously occupied as if he really tried to shield his naked body from sight. Under different circumstances Haytham would have teased him about this, after all, he was his father and even though he had not been there when little Connor had been running around naked in the village or when it had been time to change his diapers, he still was his father and he still did not care at all if his son was naked or not in front of him. Weird, really. He had never thought he would ever be like this, but undressing his adult son, tending to his wounds, cleaning him up had not at all bothered him. He had not even wasted a thought about it. He had only known that he did not want anyone else to do it because he could imagine that Connor, who was even under normal circumstances not fond of the touch of strangers, would not like some stranger - even Shay! - to do all of this.

»There isn't really much to say.« Connor murmured. His eyes looked drowsy again and the way he blinked indicated that he already felt sleepy again. Surely because of the head wound. If it was true what Connor said and he had been hit over the head more than three times in such a short time
span, this head wound of his really got Haytham worried. »I was with Thomas when it all happened. He, the Assassin, bolted into the house and then Thom ran away and the Assassin followed. I ran after them and when I got to them I even managed to strike a blow to the Assassin's side, left a wound I guess. But as soon as the guards turned up the Assassin fled and I wanted to follow him, but was grabbed by the guards right away.« He scowled. »Of course, they would not listen to what I had to say.«

»And why, boy, were you with Thomas? Why weren't you in Charleston as you were supposed to be?« Haytham finally groaned and started to massage his temples. His son truly never failed to give him a headache as he had to confess.

»I heard about his plans for Washington and I-«

»You decided to join in.« He interrupted sharply, throwing a disapproving glance at Connor. Of course, he could understand this wish for revenge, but why did his son just never learned that his time had not come yet?

»Of course! How else would I ever get my revenge? You don't give me a chance to kill him after all!« His son snapped at him in anger, like he usually liked to, even though his voice sounded weaker than normally and even though Haytham could see how much effort it cost him.

»Connor, how often do I have to repeat myself? We are no petty murderers. Templars do not kill for personal gain or something petty like revenge! Leave that to the assassins and if you so desire revenge, maybe you should join them instead. I thought, after two years in the Order you would have finally understood this and found out where your loyalties rest!«

»I do!« He was already slurring his words again and Haytham saw that he did have a hard time focusing his eyes on his father. »That's why I wanted to help Hickey when the Assassin went after him, father! And Washington- He is... Don't act as if you have never done anything out of revenge! Please, father! Let me do it! I cannot-« He stopped himself biting his bottom lip as he always did when he was right about to spill something he much rather wanted to keep a secret, but his son's deep brown eyes betrayed him again as Haytham could see the wet veil that was lying over the brown.

Haytham's eyes rested for a moment longer on Connor's face, but then he stood again, crossed his arms behind his back and cleared his throat. »Fine. Go back to sleep, we continue this when you are feeling better.« And he ... Oh, he, had someone else he needed to talk to now.

Haytham found Charles, just like Shay said, down in the kitchen of the ship, while over their heads sailors were running up and down the deck, trying to keep the Morrigan steady as she was plunging through the waves determined to bring her passengers safely back to Boston. Haytham could not deny that he felt bad leaving Connor behind in his bed like this, but he simply could not stand being close any longer, seeing his son so distraught and broken that he even was on the verge of crying. He had seen Connor cry only once and that one time was more than enough for him.

The way Charles sat at the table down in the kitchen was quite unusual for him, with his back hunched and his shoulders slumped like a man who knew full well, that there was a storm heading his way. It was odd, really, because in this sense Charles and Connor had much more in common than they both were aware. After all, they were both quite eager to please. At first, he did not look at Haytham as the Grand Master of the Templar Order sat down at the other side of the table, but he did so eventually, as Haytham cleared his throat. Charles looked disheveled – clearly from the raging storm outside.

Of course, after the failed execution of Connor he had not been able to just leave New York on a
whim, first, he had to settle things and calm the situation, which was why the Morrigan had waited with her departure. »I organized a manhunt for the boy, to show my commitment to the good General.« He stated dryly with a sardonic little smile creeping onto his quite pale face. »Now every soldier inside New York is tearing the city apart in the search for Connor, but soon he will be forgotten by the public anyway. I think the same does not hold true for the Assassin. It appears as if Achilles' little lap dog has targeted us all. With Thom down, we are losing ground quickly. I think we should focus now on getting rid of that boy as soon as possible. I believe he supports Washington anyway so he will do everything that lies in his power to interfere with our plans.«

»I hope you are aware that the things my son had to suffer in prison during the last couple of days, are partly your fault.« Haytham finally stated, not even thinking about dedicating an answer to Lee about the Assassin or this whole situation. Lee, however, seemed not pleased by this.

»Sir« He began with anger dripping from his voice. Yes, he was aware that he was at fault for the things that had happened to Connor – just like he had been before as he had not told Haytham about Connor's mere existence. »I really don’t think that this is now the matter we should discuss. The Assassin could already plan his next attack on us. Who is next, you think? Benjamin? I? You maybe? Even Connor could be at risk now that he had been dragged into the limelight like this.«

»He was at risk being killed in Bridewell like Thomas, Charles.« Haytham kept his voice calm, cold even one might say.

»But he is still alive, Sir, and he will recover. I don't wish to offend you, Sir, but I do believe – and I am not alone in this – that you have grown a bit more … soft, since Connor is with you.« How uncomfortable Charles felt in this conversation Haytham was able to see quite well by the tone his face turned into.

»Soft you say.«

For a moment Charles seemed to be reluctant to continue as his eyes shifted everywhere but to Haytham before he finally seemed to have enough and slammed down his fist onto the table. The anger inside Lee, however, seemed not directed at his Grand Master and so Haytham did not do as much as to bat a lash at this. »The Haytham Kenway I met two decades ago was a risk-taker, Sir.« Lee started to clarify his previous statement. »Now, however, you risk hardly anything as long as it could endanger your son. I understand, Sir, of course, I do understand that you only wish to keep your own flesh and blood safe from harm as every father would in a situation like this. However, Connor is not a child anymore. He is a grown man. It was his wish to remain in Bridewell and find a way out on his own because he does not desire being protected like a child by his father. And it was not on me to take this decision from him. Your son decided to become a Templar and he very well knows what dangers came with this decision. If we are lucky the Assassin does not know who he is and that means we could use him as a joker in the case of danger.«

The rational part of his brain, of course, knew that Charles was right. He was a Templar first and a father second. He could not run around enraged like this only because his son had been hurt by some thugs. Connor needed to recover and he needed to keep focusing on their work. The Order was everything of importance and this Assassin was threatening them – thus threatening his son too.

»Maybe you are right.« He found himself saying. »Maybe we could use Connor.« It was true that he wanted to scold Charles. It was true that he wanted to leave out his anger at him, but Charles had a point and he could not make the mistake and go against his own people now when he needed their support the most because then he did not need this Assassin to destroy everything he had worked for in his life.
»Mason was right« Finch hissed, his voice gruff and deep, even though Connor's head had troubles processing the sound and assigning it to words and meaning that he could understand or even comprehend. »the best of two worlds, innit?« Connor grunted and would have barked at him in response, but he was unable to as those calloused fingers dug deeper into the skin of his overstretched jaw. He felt lightheaded and black clouds were framing his vision. The worst of this whole situation, however, was the taste, he mused and the knowledge what it was hindering him from speaking.

His fight had been broken a while ago. He had lost interest in thrashing around like a fish on land, he had ceased to fight back, to punch and kick, after every move of his became a harder to execute task. His movement had grown sluggish, his kicks undirected, his words slurred as he had barked insults as his attackers, the pain flooding through his whole body too much to bear at last.

When he was shoved face first to the ground again he could see Hickey's corpse on the bed, his right hand dangling from the mattress, close to his face - so close it would touch him if he would get shoved closer, because his body did not longer belong to him and he had no power over it. He could not move any longer, he could not fight. He did not even hear the laughter of the men above him anymore or their insults; it was all but a beep in his ears. But when he finally closed his eyes to embrace the darkness behind them and flee this horrible nightmare he once again found himself in, Washington was right in front of him again.

He could feel the large hand of the man on his left thigh, could hear and feel the vibrations of his voice, though he could not understand the words he spoke. He did not want to understand them. He wanted to close his eyes and be left alone. He did not want to feel or hear anything. But every time he closed his eyes Washington was there, grabbing him like a misbehaving dog by his neck, shoving his face into the dirt, pulling at his hair until he would have no other choice than to behave and follow his orders. There was nothing left for him anymore and he had not much more worth left to him than one of the pigs Washington owned. Surely it was only a matter of time until he would be forced to sleep with the pigs.

He heard himself gasping for air as he got the chance, but his own sobs were foreign to him as though they did not even come from him but from someone else far away. Still Washington's large hands burned on his body and he had no way to squirm away or to escape him at all.

There was Charles Lee again, right in front of him. He was back in the forest - and Charles Lee was towering above him, his cold hands wrapped tightly around his thin neck, squeezing the life out of him. It would be easy for the man to snap his neck, all it really took was a flick of his wrist, but it seemed he found more amusement in choking him. A part of him thought it may have been better if he had succeeded.

He was pulled back to reality as he felt something hot against his cheek. Spit, perhaps. He did not want to imagine what else and he had no strength left to open his eyes as another violent thrust pushed him forward again. »Look at that, Connor Kenway is just a common whore.«

A hand grabbed his hair again, but this time, the agonizing pull he expected did not come.

»Connor.« A foreign voice said, but it seemed too far away now to be of any help in this helpless state of his and the laughter grew louder around him, the shoves grew more impatient. He wanted to bite back the sobs that dared to escape his throat once more. He could not just lie here on the ground like this, he had to fight. He had to fight back, to try and do something, but his body would not listen to his orders any longer. He felt paralyzed, frightened to the very core to be found like that by the guards – frightened that Finch and the others would not stop, that the pain would never
start to dull, that his father would learn about his disgrace. Hickey's hand was dangling right in front of his nose this time and the next shove was thrusting the dead limb right into his face. He felt bile rising in his throat. »Connor!«

He jolted up as if he had been struck by lightning and immediately regretted it as pain shot through his entire body. With a low whine escaping from his lips he slowly sunk back into the soft embrace of a bed. It was not the dirty, hard mattress in his cell. The world around him was spinning out of control once again and the next time a large hand grabbed his shoulder Connor found himself flinching and scrambling away immediately until he hit a wall to his right side with his bad shoulder and almost howled in pain.

»Connor, ssht, Connor, it was just a bad dream.« It was his father's voice, but he needed a moment to really bring his mind under control again. Nothing seemed to make sense anymore and he was partly certain that this had to be another dream of his. He did not even know where he was anymore. Again he tried to sit up a bit straighter, for he did not wish to look like a cornered animal as much as he felt like one, but the spinning of the room only worsened and his vision was blurry at best and so he slowly sank back into the cushions until his back rested on the mattress again. The bed he was lying on was dipping quite heavily as someone sat down on the edge of the bed. He saw the hands coming and tried to fend them off out of instinct and fear, but he was unable to aim and surely looked more like a man plagued by a very persistent fly. His father's hands grabbed his face to both sides, cupped it gently to hold him in place and Connor let it happen with a racing heart. It was pounding so strongly he was sure it was going to explode. But it did not. It kept on beating and his father held onto his face. Slowly the world stopped spinning a bit and his father's own ridiculously white face came into his field of vision, a worried expression glued to his features.

»You have a concussion, Connor. Do you understand that?« He tried to nod, but his head was aching as he tried. He felt like the whole world was swaying from left to right as if he was on a ship in the middle of a storm. What insane man would maneuver a ship right into a storm? »You had a nightmare, son. You need to calm down, okay? I'm here with you, so nothing will happen to you, got it?« Again he tried to nod and did not even know if he succeeded. He felt as if his whole body was burning up, but as his father sat back and slowly took his hands away from his face, Connor's left hand closed itself around Haytham's wrist immediately as hard as he could - which was probably not very hard during the moment. He was not able to talk. He wanted to, but he could not do it. His mouth did not follow his minds orders, his lips felt like they were sewn shut, his jaw ached and would not move.

»I'm not going away, Connor.« His father promised and yet Connor could not let go of his wrist. With a sigh, his father reached for something with his free hand and a second later he felt a cooling sensation on his forehead, as little bit of water was dribbling down his forehead and fell into his hair. It must be a wet cloth or something like that to help with the concussion. Surely this whole running around town and nearly being hanged had not been good for his head injury. He had felt fine earlier when he woke up the first time, but not for long and it appeared his body had gone into shock much later than it should have. »I'll stay, alright? You can let go of me now. I promise to stay.« But he did not, although it felt harder and harder to keep his fingers closed and his eyes open. He did not want to be left alone with his nightmares again. He did not want to fall asleep again with no one there to keep him safe. The child inside of him demanded someone to watch over him with tiny fists beating the ground it was lying on, screaming at the top of his lungs for his Ista to stay at his side or for his Raké:ni to keep watch over him while he slept. He heard his father sigh and his free hand brushed shortly over Connor's right cheek. »Alright.« He stated. »I understand.«

It was only then that Connor did let go of him. There was a noise as something heavy fell to the floor, then the noise came again. It sounded as if it was his father's boots falling to the ground, then
he was shoved to the side a bit more and his body did not rebel against it. His father lay down next to him, on Connor's left-hand side, and draped his left arm over Connor's chest, pulling him a bit closer towards himself now. His father's body was resting on top of the scratchy woolen blanket that smelled oddly like Shay, as he shuffled closer and closer. It was a strange sensation as Connor felt his father curl around him a little bit more, like a dog guarding his cubs or his favorite toy, his chin resting on top of Connor's head, and his warmth streaming through the blanket and right into his clammy skin.

Connor let out a shuddering breath of relief as his father settled around him and even felt his jaw relax slightly, felt his lips untighten, but was still not able to talk. Instead, he tried to focus on his father's breathing and his smell, the way his large hand was rubbing soothing circles on his chest through the blanket, kneading away the pain and the horror that had grabbed him before. It took him a while to relax into the embrace and to start breathing evenly, but when he closed his eyes again, there was Washington, looming over him with a grin on his face. Connor Kenway was just a common whore.
July 1776

It was impossible to keep Connor in the house if the boy did not wish to. He was like a stray cat, always on his toes, always on the verge of bursting outside the door. That was indeed hardly anything new to Haytham of course, but as of late, it had proven to be even more difficult to keep him at least mildly in check. Even with only one useable arm, Connor was like a bag of extremely energetic and playful kittens. Even though the boy was yet to recover from his little stay in Bridewell, Connor still seemed adamant to get himself into even more trouble. The first few days after Bridewell, he had spent either in his bed or loafing around in the sitting room on his father's favorite chair, brooding like a child that was suffering house arrest. Haytham however, had been stern with the boy until Connor slowly got back to health and did not nearly fall over every time he had to walk up the stairs. His injuries had proven to be quite persistent and Connor, sadly, was not the most patient person.

As the second week started Connor was down in the basement again, training as best he could with only one arm, schooling his left hand, even though his left hand already was quite strong. The boy was remarkable; he had to admit it, but as the second week had gone by, Haytham could no longer tolerate the moody brooding one-armed young man in his house. He had sent Connor to the market this very day with a list of items he should purchase so that Mrs. Taylor would not have to, and a few things Haytham needed in addition. At least that way his son would be able to leave the house and should be able to not run into all too many troubles. After all, he was a sharp dressed young gentleman, wasn’t he? Sure, his skin was a bit darker, a bit more reddish, but for the most part, this fact had not proven to be a big disturbance - or at least not when Haytham would accompany him in the streets of Boston. It was an easy enough task he could give his son during his healing process, he had decided earlier that day. What could possibly go wrong? Well. Connor Kenway was a remarkable young gentleman.

»Well, son, care to explain?« Haytham did not even quite know if he should laugh about the state his son was in or rather hit him with the book he was reading over the head instead, while in the background Mrs. Taylor was still cursing under her breath about the young lad and the muddy footprints he had left on the freshly polished floorboards. She most certainly would prefer to use the book on the boy.

The job he was assigned with was easy enough. His father had handed him a list of things Connor should buy on the market and pretty much kicked him out of their house this morning, frustrated by his son apparently. It was true that Connor felt uprooted and antsy since he was back home and started to recover from his injuries. He was still not back to his old self. Some of the injuries he had suffered had been much more severe than originally expected and good old Ben Church had spent over an hour lecturing him about the state he was in - as if it had been Connor's fault. As they had arrived at their house in Boston he had battled with infection, not only from his head wound, but most severe from the wounds Finch and his comrades had inflicted upon him after Mason had vanished. To Connor's relieve, Ben had at least not told his father about these wounds after Connor had reluctantly told him what had happened to him. He had not wanted to tell him of course, but a man like Ben, a trained and seasoned surgeon, knew a thing or two about prisons and quickly pinned Connor down concerning this topic. After that, Connor had tried to avoid the man of course. He had felt terribly ashamed and horrified by the sole prospect Ben would tell his father all about this and why his health had deteriorated so quickly after his rescue from the gallows.
It had taken him almost one entire week to regain enough strength to wander through the house again, but to his great annoyance, he had needed to rest after just a few steps down the stairs every time he tried. With time he had grown more and more restless and worried. After all, he wanted to be an asset to the order, not a crutch. He had to recover faster, to start up his training again so his father would soon enough trust him with a mission of his own for the order!

Instead, he was here now, standing in the middle of the market and handing a few coins to a man behind a stall selling bread. He would have it delivered to their house of course, for he had only one hand to use and could not busy said hand with carrying around a basket full of goods. His right arm was still fastened to his chest in a sling so he would keep his shoulder from further strain to let it heal properly. It was not the first time he suffered a dislocated shoulder and if he would get his way he would already get rid of that sling, but his father did not allow him to take it off just yet. Well, it was not that he always did what his father told him to, but in the light of recent events, he thought it might be quite unwise to now anger him further.

This mission of his went rather smoothly. He did not run into many obstacles as he wandered across the market, occasionally greeting some people he had seen before in the friendliest manner he was capable of, but truth was, he felt anxious the entire time. Yes, he had felt as if the house was suffocating him, as he had been somewhat locked in the home since their arrival in Boston, but outside the house in the middle of such a crowd, he felt unsafe, he felt as if he was serving himself on a golden plate for every enemy of the order to grab him. And yet that was not his biggest worry. He was not able to look anyone in the eyes, because every time he did, he felt as though they could see right through him and see what disgusting things happened to him. Maybe that was what Ben Church thought too.

»Mr. Kenway?« The voice of a young woman caught his attention, but a flash of white made him shoot a glance over his shoulder, just in the right moment to see a figure dressed in white robes vanishing into an alleyway. »Mr. Kenway, is everything alright?« He nodded briefly as he handed the woman a few coins absentmindedly and could not at all even bring himself to spare her a glance. He was used to people calling him Mr. Kenway or even Mr. Kenway Junior, when he would walk through town. He and his father were known to their neighbors and they were always treated with great respect - and of course Connor had visited the market before on numerous occasions. Usually, it filled him with a bit of pride when people called him by his last name, as if it was the most normal thing to do and for them it probably was - but not to Connor. To him, it was still odd to at least have his own last name, let alone the one his father wore too. To him, it was still odd, that he did belong to a real family, that he did have a legacy to continue, a name to give to the next generation maybe. And every time people would call him by his name and treat him with the same respect they would treat his father, he was flabbergasted, because he was reminded that he finally was not the savage boy any longer, not one of Washington's slaves. He was a free man - one worthy of respect too.

He did not wait for her to bid him farewell as he already turned and looked after the figure in the white robes. He could still see them right before they vanished behind a corner. It was the Assassin, Connor was sure of it. It was the very same man he had attacked weeks ago – or at least it was the very same white and blue coat, he had seen the day Hickey had been attacked, the day Connor had been thrown into prison the first time in his life. Connor paused as he walked up to the alleyway the Assassin had vanished into. He thought about following the man. Until now the Order did not know much about him – not even Shay! – And maybe if he would follow him, he would be able to find out a great deal of valuable information they could use to shield against the threat this person meant to them.

He really doubted that he would get another chance of attacking him and since he was not even carrying any weapons at the moment – not even the hidden blade his father had have made for him
as Connor joined their Order. It was, of course, the signature weapon of the Assassin Brotherhood, but why not use it for their own goals as well? After all, Shay had one and his father had one too - stolen from an Assassin many, many years ago when he had been a young man himself. His father had even gone as far as to have Connor's blade custom made for him! Usually, Connor was never really taking the blade off, just like his father, but since he only left the house to go to the market and retrieve some goods, his father had not wanted him to take the blade. Clearly, he had thought if Connor would not have a weapon on him, he would not be tempted to throw himself into a possibly dangerous situation. The market was not far away from their house and his father saw no need that Connor would have to protect himself in any way. Surely there was no impending danger from the lady with the flowers or the man who sold potatoes.

Well, Connor thought that he should just turn around and walk back home as he was done with his purchases. He should maybe even tell his father about the Assassin near the market. Then again … Well … If he would later come home with valuable information … Maybe his father could profit off of them…

He was already diving straight into the alley while still thinking about the possible pros and cons of his actions. He had learned from the best, his father and Shay, he knew how to follow someone without being noticed, but he also knew that the Assassin knew this too. After all, they were the masters of stealth; as far as Connor was aware at least and Shay had gladly taught him all the tricks he had learned when he became an Assassin himself all those years ago as a young man. It somehow did not bode well with Connor to turn their own weapons against the Assassins, but what other chance did they really have?

As he arrived at the end of the alley he carefully glanced around the corners to both sides. To his left, another alleyway led back to a large street where many people were up and about, to his right-hand side the alley snaked deeper into the bowels of Boston. He just saw the last bit of the coattails of the Assassin swaying behind the man to his right, vanishing into another alley, so he followed as quickly as he could. Like this it went on for quite a while and as the narrow alleys wound themselves deeper and deeper to a more and more complicated network between the houses that formed Boston, along the backyards of narrow buildings with high wooden fences, Connor was careful not to be seen by the Assassin, hiding behind crates or corners, waiting until the man was almost out of sight sometimes until he followed. Somehow the Assassin did not seem to have a particular goal in mind as he meandered seemingly carelessly through town. He never stopped though and he stayed away from bigger and livelier streets and parts of town.

After four years living in Boston Connor knew the town quite well. He knew the little bookstores that were sometimes quite well hidden in narrower streets, and the teahouses he and his father liked to visit from time to time. In the beginning, he had never thought he would come to like living in this city or in a city at all, but now he quite often looked upon Boston with a fond eye - even though most strangers still eyed him with suspicion for his foreign looks, no matter his fine clothes or his good manners. They only saw his darker skin, which was sad to Connor, but since he could not help it, he tried not to care.

Still, even though he knew Boston well by now, he became uncertain of where the Assassin led him. His orientation was quite good and he knew exactly where he was as of right now, but there was nothing of particular interest in the direction the man went – or at least nothing he could think of. Instead, the town started to slowly thin out, the distance between houses grew larger, the town opened up to farmland and barns and to Connor that meant following the Assassin got increasingly harder without being seen by the man. Still, he managed to, sneaking behind him, hiding behind carts with hay, barrels or even a tree at one point. To his surprise not once the Assassin looked over his shoulder and Connor was struck with awe at the inattention the Assassin showed. How was it even possible that this man had managed to take out three of the Order's members like this?
The Assassin vanished into a barn and Connor, though hesitating followed. He thought for a moment that it might have been cleverer to sneak around and look what the Assassin was doing through the little windows perhaps, but instead, he followed right into the barn only to have the wind knocked out of his lungs almost immediately as he walked through the gate.

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He was sure that he had seen the boy before. Well, boy was hardly the proper word to use. It was a young man, surely not much younger than Kanen'tó:kon himself, as he pondered. Maybe he was around eighteen or nineteen. Much certainly not older than twenty. He noticed him walking around the market early in the day, but late enough already that the bells would soon sing of noon and call people to get their lunch. The young man was certainly dressed in fine clothes. He was wearing a fashionable dark blue coat, that was thin enough to not make the young man suffer from the heat too much and when he was moving around Kanen'tó:kon was able to see the fine set of clothing underneath, a neat and tightly fitted vest with a very modern plaid pattern in beige and brown, a simple white shirt with a high collar, and a dark red cravat and a pair of greyish breeches, all rounded down with the perfect pair of boots of course. The only thing that betrayed the young man's attire was the sling in which he was carrying his right arm. He had long ebony hair and slightly darker skin, but fairer than people of Kanen'tó:kon's tribe or even Africans. He was sure, last time he had seen the young man, he had worn black.

He remembered him being with Hickey and as his memory started to come back to him, his side was itching where the very same young man had sliced it open with a swift and almost deadly attack. Kanen'tó:kon had barely made it into safety afterward but had remained in New York to fulfill his duty. Achilles had never scolded him harder than after that little adventure when he came back to the homestead a day after Hickey's death. The whole of New York had been in turmoil afterward, mainly because of the escape of the man who had been framed for Hickey's crimes. If he had known that someone else would be framed for Hickey's crimes, maybe he would have stayed to prevent this failed hanging, but apparently, he had not been of much need for that anyway.

Somehow the young man in the fancy clothes was familiar to the Assassin and yet, as the young man turned around as if he had felt him staring holes into his back, Kanen'tó:kon swiftly vanished into the next best alley. He was pretty much done with the business that had led him to Boston anyway, so it was maybe time to leave and report to his mentor instead of pondering about this strange man. That was at least his plan until he noticed that he was being followed.

Even though the young man was silent as a cat and even though he was quite good at stalking him, he was not good enough to trick an Assassin, but Kanen'tó:kon found himself enjoying this little game of cat and mouse and led the young man farther and farther into the labyrinth that was Boston, while he wondered at the same instant, what it was that made the young man follow him in the first place. Then again, he had been with Hickey, he seemed to have been an acquaintance of Hickey's and he was too well dressed to be just one of Hickey's usual business partners. No, that boy was a gentleman clearly and that could indeed very much lead to the conclusion that he might even be a Templar himself - which could also explain the attack he had lunged at Kanen'tó:kon and which Kanen'tó:kon had previously shoved to the side as just a young man trying to play the hero and protecting a friend. Achilles had warned him to be more suspicious and maybe he was right after all. Then again, neither Achilles nor Kanen'tó:kon knew that there was yet another Templar in the Colonies. It was only six men, Kanen'tó:kon declared his targets and never he had heard of a young man within the Order.

Well, he guessed, if that was true, he could as well lead that careless kid into a trap and question him about all of this. If he turned out to be a Templar, Kanen'tó:kon could still kill him, he
reckoned. So he led the young man slowly but surely out of the busy streets of Boston and out into
the open to see how he fared in more open terrain. He was quite good, really, and if he would not
have already known that he was indeed being followed, he would have maybe not even noticed
him as he walked straight into the barn and positioned himself on the side of the gate, his body
pressed into the wall, before he grabbed a wooden plank leaning at the wall and waited.

Maybe he should have seen it coming, that much he would agree on. When one was following an
Assassin - any Assassin - one better should expect being noticed and hit with a wooden plank in
the stomach. Sadly the piece of wood did not only hit his stomach but also his right underarm that
was still pressed tightly to his body after all. Connor landed quite inelegantly on the ground in the
dirt. It had rained the last couple of days and the earth outside of the barn was muddy, as Connor
fell right into one of the puddles outside. Mrs. Taylor would rip him a new one when he would
come back home with those muddy clothes. If he would come home that was, because the next
thing he knew was a blade being pressed to his throat, nicking his tender skin right underneath the
Adams apple.

Wide-eyed Connor stared into the face of his attacker, already contemplating why he could not
follow his father's rules just once. Why had he needed to follow the Assassin? Why could he not do
what was asked of him just once? Now he would die and-

»Ratonhnhaké:ton is that you?« He had not heard his real name in a long time, and hearing it now
out of the mouth of the Assassin not only came as a surprise to Connor, but also managed to inflict
pure and utter shock inside his mind. His eyes grew even larger as he took in the face of his
attacker for the first time now that he was so directly confronted with it. It took him a moment, but
the longer he stared into the brown eyes of his attacker, the more clearly his features grew on him.

»Kanen'tó:kon?« He coughed as he began to realize who the Assassin above him really was. He
had not seen Kanen'tó:kon in years. Seven years to be more precise. Kanen'tó:kon had left the
village before Connor got to see his own prophecy, send away by that spirit just as Connor
himself. Maybe he should have expected such a bitter turn of events by now. After all, having his
best friend on the opposing side of that endless war between Templars and Assassins seemed quite
fitting, didn’t it? »You are-« He stopped himself right away because in that moment Kanen'tó:kon
already helped him get back on his feet. For one fleeting moment Kanen'tó:kon's eyes flickered
with what could only be described as joy. He did not quite know what to say really. Kanen'tó:kon
was the Assassin who had killed Hickey, Johnson, and Pitcairn. His once best friend which whom
he had played in the forests, which he had taught how to hunt, was on the enemy's side – and after
a moment of silence between them, it seemed understanding started to seep into Kanen'tó:kon mind
as well.

»You are Kenway's son.« Kanen'tó:kon finally stated his voice barely even audible to anyone but
Connor in this very moment. It sounded final, but there was no immediate hatred towards his
person as his friend looked at him. While he first had seemed surprised but happy to see that
Connor was still among the living, now sadness was slowly seeping into his brown eyes. »I
thought you were dead, Ratonhnhaké:ton.« Even though Kanen'tó:kon knew that Connor was his
enemy's son, after a moment of hesitation the Assassin pulled him into a brief but tight hug. They
never hugged and Connor was not very fond of hugs anyway, but yet they did now and Connor did
not flinch away from touch even. The moment did not last long, but for a moment he felt the
familiar sensation of having something from his past back he had deemed lost and forgotten
already.

It was already getting late as Connor walked back home, with his clothes muddy all over. They had
talked for quite a long time, talking about each other's lives since they had last seen each other and not once they tried to bring up that they were enemies. Connor avoided talking about Washington too. Yes, he knew that Kanen'tó:kon, that the Assassins, were supporting Washington, but he did not feel like talking to Kanen'tó:kon about the man. He had tried to keep his own past as simple as he could, leaving out everything that could sound sour and bitter, simply because he himself did not want to deal with the memories again.

Kanen'tó:kon told him about his very own prophecy from the spirit and how he had gone to go search for Achilles, his teacher, and mentor, the last Assassin left from the once strong brotherhood of the colonies. He was proud of his cause, that Connor had felt with every word of his friend and although Kanen'tó:kon knew that Connor himself had grown up to become a Templar, there was no fight between them, even when Connor would speak about his father, careful not to give away any kind of information that could endanger the order or his father and the few friends that he had left on his side.

As he reached home he was painfully aware that he had to tell his father about everything that had happened today, not only because of the state he was in, but because he came home so late. As he entered the house and had to face his father he was aware that the old wolf would torments him with questions of his whereabouts and why he was all muddy and dirty once again. For a second Connor thought that he would maybe escape the situation, but since Mrs. Taylor spotted him right away and began cursing over the muddy footprints he had already left on the finely polished floorboards, there was no way to escape his father as he already heard him calling for him from the sitting room.

Being with his father had been one awkward scenario after this whole ordeal in Bridewell. Connor had only said what he had to say, reported about the men who had beat him up – but no more than that. It was enough that Church knew it and that Connor still felt uncertain whether his father knew or not. He simply did not want to talk about it. The anger and restlessness he experienced were more than enough to deal with already. He did not need pity or - which would be even worse - to see the disgust in his father's eyes when Connor would finally open up to him. Of course that would never happen and of course, Connor would never speak to him about the day on board of the Morrigan, as his father had lain beside him in Shay's cot, his arms around him in gentle comfort. During that very moment it had been exactly what Connor had needed, but now thinking about it made him feel a little bit ashamed that his father had treated him like a frightened child.

And yet the nightmares still clung to him when he would go to sleep. He was aware that he would probably never get rid of them in his whole entire life and a part of him was even wondering if Washington's death would start to heal his mind, now that he seemed to be so much more damaged than before.

He found his father sitting in his favorite (very cozy) armchair near the fireplace as he entered the sitting room, a book on his lap like usually when his father was home and had a bit of free time on his hands. As of late, his father was rarely even here because their plans kept him on his toes at all times – partly because Connor was out of commission for now surely.

»Well, son, care to explain?« His father finally asked with his always much too calm demeanor. Connor just wanted to sit down, but the moment he approached the couch he could hear their housekeeper yell at him from the kitchen next door. »Don't you dare sit down in those dirty clothes, young man!« Well, standing it was, he guessed, for Mrs. Taylor was a foe he did not dare fighting - Or at least not as impaired as he was right now.

»You are aware that I only send you to visit the market to get some of the items Mrs. Taylor and I asked for, right? So how comes, that the delivery boys were already here dropping off your
purchases this afternoon, but you only come home now - and dirty in addition to you delay. Where the hell have you been, Connor?« The disappointment was almost comically dripping from his voice and never before Connor had more wished for Shay to drop by, but the captain was already gone again, still on his never ending search for this precursor artifact his father wanted to have for years now. Of course, he was aware that his father did not just wanted to have it, but wanted to protect it. He had told him everything about the purge of the Assassin brotherhood sixteen years ago and why they needed to protect those items. Items like the strange necklace his father wore around his neck at all times. One day it would be his to protect, Connor was well aware of that fact.

»I'm sorry.« He sighed. He would much rather not face his father but creep upstairs and hide in his room. Since that very day on board of the Morrigan Connor found it hard to look his father in the eyes, even though this was a portrayal of weakness he usually did not show to anyone. »I was at the market but then I saw the Assassin, and I-«

»You followed him.« His father immediately concluded and slammed his book shut before he rose from his spot at once.

»Well yes, I thought I might get some information about him this way!« He blurted out immediately as a response, even though he was aware that this plan of his had not been the wisest he had ever managed to come up with.

»Connor« He sounded almost as desperate as if he was talking to a mule. »Are you even in the slightest bit aware how dangerous that was? You had no weapons and only one arm in case you needed to protect yourself! Is it really so hard for you to follow the simplest of instructions? You behave like a stray dog, for Christ's sake! You could have been killed!«

»I know!« Connor growled as he took a step back from his father and Haytham too came to a halt when he noticed his son moving backward. Of course, Connor knew that his anger was not born out of annoyance with his disobedient son (not purely at least), but out of worry as it seemed now. At least that was what he wanted to think, no matter how childish it might be. »But I- I just wanted to help, father! I'm tired of being useless for the Order - I want to do something meaningful finally! What good is all this training when you won't let me do anything of meaning? I wanted to see if I could find a weak spot with this Assassin!«

»So? Did you find one?« He sounded not in the slightest bit more calm, but still, Connor began to retell his little adventure - not in detail of course - and ended with the moment he had learned about the identity of the Assassin. Even though his father had never questioned him much about his life inside of his tribe, he seemed to remember the name of his son's childhood friend, which at least gave Connor a bit of comfort in the whole situation and yet his father had this way of crushing his thoughts and hopes with just a word, with just telling him how things were and should be.

»You know that you have to kill him, right?« Haytham asked after Connor ended his little story time. By now his father stood by the fireplace and toyed with a small item usually displayed on the mantelpiece. Connor only bit his tongue at this. Of course, he knew. »If you want to get close enough to Washington to kill the man, you have to kill your friend first. The Assassins are on Washington's side, even though it is still an enigma to me why they support this man instead of Charles. As long as George has this Assassin on his side, he will be untouchable to you. You should not make the mistake and underestimate the man only because he was once your friend, Connor, you know that, right?«

»I know.« Connor murmured and cast his eyes down onto the floorboards and his dirty shoes. He knew, but he did not want to. He knew, but he did not want to accept it. Without him even noticing it his father suddenly bridged the distance between them silent as a cat and placed both his hands...
on his son's shoulders. The gesture was fatherly and maybe even a bit comforting for Haytham's
standards. Connor was well aware that their relationship was odd to most people around them, but
he himself did not really care. It was kind of working for them, after all, and that was all that
mattered, even though his father was distant most of the time. At least he somehow seemed to
understand and relate to him in a sense. He did not say or ask anything as he squeezed his
shoulders, careful not to put too much pressure on the right one, still mindful of his injuries.

»It's just…« Connor began with his eyes still lowered to the ground. »I'm aware that he has killed
three of our brothers already and that his presence and work in the colonies means a great danger to
our own work and goals, but Kanen'tó:kon is the last thing I have left of my tribe. Maybe he can be
swayed. He hasn't killed me after all, even though he would have clearly had an advantage over
me! It would have been easy for him to kill me right on the spot, but he did not, father. Maybe
peace with the Assassins can still be achieved.«

He almost expected a slap, but then again his father was a reasonable man, with reasonable
intentions. The Assassins were a thorn in their side for a long time and it seemed they were always
coming back like a bunch of cockroaches, no matter how efficiently they tried to destroy them, the
Assassins always came back. But Connor had never been raised to hate them and he really had no
reason to hate them too – not by default at least. Yes, he had a pretty good reason to hate
Kanen'tó:kon, after all, he was destroying what they – his father and the others – had built up, but
then again … He could not hate him just for being an Assassin.
October 1776

He should not be here. He was very well aware of that fact and yet he was. Of course, Connor was aware that his father was right in the things he had said and warned him about. Of course, it was very well possible that he was stepping right into a trap once again, but he knew Kanen'tó:kon for all his life, and even though it was perfectly possible that he wanted to gain information from Connor, he was still sitting here waiting for his former best friend. He would have liked it more to be up high for this meeting, to have the chance of watching over the town, but since he was still impaired, that was not going to happen soon. Instead, he sat down on the edge of the dock the Morrigan would usually lie in and watched the stars glistening on the ocean.

He wondered where Shay might be at the moment. Had he already reached France? Probably not. Surely he was still out on the Atlantic Ocean, enjoying the wildness of the sea, the freedom of traveling by ship.

»I am not so sure how wise it is to meet out in the open like that.« Connor had heard Kanen'tó:kon approaching him already because his friend obviously did not care to sneak up on him today. Of course, he was aware, that Kanen'tó:kon would be perfectly able to surprise him, after all he was a trained Assassin, and since he had managed to kill already a great portion of the Templar Order in the colonies, he surely was good in his profession also.

»I don’t think it will matter much. My father has his eyes all across town. I’m pretty sure he already knows that I have lied to him and that we are in fact meeting.« Connor found himself replying before he got to his feet in one swift move. He felt like walking and that way it would maybe be a bit harder to keep track of them - if anyone tried to, of course. »But don’t worry, my father is at Fort George at the moment, supporting Lee, I would assume.«

»And do you?«

»What?«

»Do you support Lee too?«

For the last four years, Connor had hardly questioned this, not because he had grown to like Lee, but because he was a brother and he was surely the better choice opposing Washington. Yes, Lee's views on things might have been a bit harsh sometimes in the past, but Connor was sure that he only wanted the right things for this growing and blossoming nation and at least concerning Washington they stood shoulder to shoulder. This man was not suitable for the position he had gotten, but at least they still had influence over the military with Lee as General within the continental army.

»He is a brother of mine and I do support him, yes.« As Kanen'tó:kon pushed back his hood and revealed his long black hair, Connor felt as if he had never quite seen his friend before. Surely, he was not the same plump teenager anyone who had left their village all those years ago, as was true for Connor too, but his face looked grim, his dark eyes like pits of mud. There was really nothing left of the former softness and warmth his features had always carried when looking at his best friend. Kanen'tó:kon was only a few months older than him and just as tall. Fighting him would be a problem, Connor was sure of it – especially with the training his former best friend had received over the years. Shoving those thoughts aside he began to walk along the water with Kanen'tó:kon following beside him without question. For a moment he thought about the days they
had spent together in the forest surrounding their village, the hours he had used to teach Kan'en'tó:kon how to hunt or fish.

»I was once a brother of yours too, Ratonhnhaké:ton.« Kan'en'tó:kon reminded him quietly as they walked and let their gazes flicker across the few people rummaging the harbor so late at night.

»You still are, but sadly you support the man who killed our people, who burned our village and who enslaved those that were left behind.« Connor hummed quietly.

Kan'en'tó:kon grew silent as if he at least could agree on that with him. »I don’t act as if he does not have made mistakes, Ratonhnhaké:ton. But his cause is the right to support. The people love him and he knows what's best for this country – I relay believe that. Our tribe may be gone, but we remain and we can still fight for freedom.«

»I do fight for freedom, my friend.« Connor sighed. Boston was a lot quieter now than it usually was, while they were strolling down the harbor as if they would not know a worry at all. »Tell me something.« He then turned to Kan'en'tó:kon again, tired of discussing Washington or Lee. A part of him was desperate to go back to their old selves again. A part of him was desperate for the forest, the warmth of the sun coming through the leaves, the little squabbles he and Kan'en'tó:kon had enjoyed. »You could have killed me when we first met, after this whole incident with Hickey. So, what stayed your hand?«

He could see the look of surprise Kan'en'tó:kon shot him, but even though Connor was already so used to his father's usually snarky remarks and almost expected a similar one from his old friend now, Kan'en'tó:kon was still very much the boy who had left the village all those years ago. »What an odd thing to ask, Ratonhnaké:ton - You are still my friend of course. I do not feel contempt for you.«

October came with cold winds and the first falling of the colorful leaves of the trees all around town. Connor liked this season, seeing the year dying and being reborn again in spring. But now the cold wind was grabbing at his bones through his thick clothes. He was wearing all black again, as he usually did when he was out of the house. For a moment they were silent and Connor just tried to sift through the information he got during the last few months, but Kan'en'tó:kon interrupted his thoughts with a question of his own.

»What is it the Templars truly seek, Ratonhnaké:ton?«

Connor stopped in his tracks as he turned to face his friend at this, a little spark of hope erupting from his heart that his friend might be saved at last. »Order.« He answered quietly, as he remembered the things his father had taught him after Connor had met him for the first time. »Purpose. Direction. No more than that, Kan'en'tó:kon.«

»You know, once I've spoken to one of your fellow Templars, my friend, and he told me that the freedom I seek, the freedom you proclaim to fight for, is nothing but an invitation to chaos and that it would not lead to peace in these times of war.« Maybe that Templar had been right, Connor briefly thought. Surely he was talking about Pitcairn, for he was the only one of their brothers who would say something like that – Well, with the exception of his own father of course.

»Well, I cannot say that this is untrue.« He murmured before he gestured to continue walking again. His knees were aching from the strain he put on them while training when he stood still for all too long. He had wasted too much time resting after Bridewell. »I mean, just look at this so called revolution your friends have started. Me and my father have stood before the Continental Congress and listened to them stomp and shout. All in the name of liberty – Men who don’t even know what true liberty means, men who gladly own slaves to work for them until they die with no
liberty at all. It's just noise.«

»And this is why you favor Lee?« He sounded skeptical as if he still could not grasp what Connor tried to say. He was blinded by the lies he had been fed by his mentor.

»Do not make the mistake of thinking that I would like Charles Lee, but he understands the needs of this would-be nation far better than the jobbernowls who profess to represent it. Men like Washington do not care for men like us, Kanen'tó:kon! They only care for their own freedom and comfortable lives, for their own thrive to power! They could not care less about the freedom of those they deem to be lesser. Washington does not care for you either, no matter that you support him. You are just a tool for him now and he will throw you away as soon as he has no need for you any longer.«

They stopped again and this time when Kanen'tó:kon stared and snarled at him, it was much more aggressive than before. »It seems your tongue has tasted sour grapes, my friend. Your father's views have tainted your heart and made you bitter, I can see that now. The people have made their choice – and it was Washington.« Kanen'tó:kon spat pointing the finger at him and at nothing at all in the same instant. Who was it whose mind had got tainted?

»The people chose nothing.« Connor growled. »It was done by a group of privileged cowards seeking only to enrich themselves. They convened in private and made a decision that would benefit them - and only them. Oh, they might have dressed it up with pretty words, but that does not make it true.« He did not want to argue with his friend. He wanted to maintain their friendship and brotherly bond. He wanted to cherish the years they had spent like brothers after his mother's death. It had been Kanen'tó:kon's parents who had cared for him the most next to his grandmother Oiá:ner, after all! He did not want to lose him as well, no matter what his father said. But he started to realize that getting through to Kanen'tó:kon, to find a way to build an alliance, would be a task so hard it was almost impossible to execute.

»It is wrong to compel obedience, Ratonhnha:ton, whether to the British crown or the Templar Cross.«

»Am I to believe the Assassins are better in that regard? Am I to believe your mentor does not compel obedience?« Kanen'tó:kon's mouth morphed into a thin line, but before he could blurt out another lie, Connor silenced him with a tone so sharp he almost could not recognize it from himself, a tone that almost sounded more like his father and not like him at all. »I know about the things the Assassins have done in the past, Kanen'tó:kon. I know about all the innocent people of Haiti and Lisbon that have died by their hands.«

»I don't know what you are talking about. We had nothing to do with those horrible catastrophes!« Kanen'tó:kon immediately shot back, horrified by the implication his former brothers which he never got to know might have had a hand in those catastrophes.

»Then you should go and ask Davenport! Ask him about Shay Cormac. Ask him about Lisbon and the purge and when we will meet next time, your eyes might finally be open.«

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November 1776

Working together with his father was never easy – but it was especially hard after the incident in which Connor had almost been killed by hanging. He was aware that his father would have never let him hang of course – Well, at least he was now – but the whole thing still stood between them somehow, even though they did not talk about it. However, even if they did not talk about it for
now, his father looked at him differently, treated him differently. He was more careful with him all the time – and Connor absolutely hated it.

His injuries had healed a long time ago already and yet his father seemed to think he needed to treat him as though he was made of glass. »Father, I can handle this myself, you know?« Connor sighed as he watched his father take his position on the roof beside him. They just stood there, watching down over the city like hawks preying on their food.

»I know you can, son, but since this mission is so very important for the cause of our Order, I thought it might not hurt to observe the whole thing.«

»I have done this many times before, father. This is hardly my first kill.« Under different circumstances, he might have thought about this. Under different circumstances, he might have mourned the loss of his innocence through his first kill. He was not killing random people for no good reason and he would never forget a single person he had murdered for sure, but by now it came easy to him. Too easy maybe.

»Yes, but you are hardly discreet boy and you are not just here to kill a man, but to get the information we need.« His father was quick to remind him with his usual sharp tongue.

»Just let me handle it!« Connor snarled, maybe a bit more aggressive than his father expected because the old wolf only raised his brows and then made a small gesture towards the edge of the roof. »Well then, son. Show me how you do it then.« Most people would have probably gotten quite offended by the nonchalant way his father framed his words with sharp gestures and this certain indifferent look in his blue eyes, however Connor had grown used to it by now - even though it still sometimes made him feel as if he was incapable of doing anything in his father's eyes.

Brushing off his father's behavior towards him as just one of his father's many quirks, Connor leaped from the building, leaving behind his father on the rooftop. There was no need to really think about what he was doing when he would climb down or jump down a building such as this one - his body did the work for him, trained by years and years of hunting in the forest and later of hunting in the city.

Observing and spying on someone was pretty much like hunting, he mused, as he positioned himself near a pile of crates and acted as if he was inspecting the various piled up boxes for tags, while he still got an eye on his target. The man was scrawny and nervous looking. He had not shaved in days apparently and his clothes looked worn down and were full of stains from sweat and grease. It was a costume, really. Connor knew the man. His name was Smith and he was one of Lee's men, but now he was on his way to a tête-à-tête with one of Washington's informants - or at least that was what they had been informed about. The man was either a traitor or a spy for Washington and it was Connor's job to learn what it was - and to get rid of him afterwards. Sure, Lee and Washington stood on the same side, at least officially. They were both fighting the fight of the colonialists, but behind the scenes, there was still one hell of a battle for power raging between the two men and Lee should better be careful if he wanted to keep his job at all - or his head.

Following someone around through a city as busy as New York was not that hard actually. He had more than one or two opportunities to blend in with the crowd of people who were still rummaging the streets this late in the day. The days had started to grow shorter by now as winter was approaching fast and without any sense of mercy. Soon the first snow would fall, he could already sense it. For a good two minutes, Connor followed Smith through the streets in central New York. It was the first time he visited this town after his failed hanging and he felt still a bit nervous about it. Maybe his father had underestimated the people of New York. Only six months had passed
since this chaos. This was not that long of a time to forget such a glorious escape from the gallows, he would assume. However, up until now he had not been faced with any kind of serious obstacle or had noticed weird looks directed at his person - at least no weirder than usually.

When Smith took position near a tavern and started to look around for any possible pursuer, Connor hid behind the corner of another shop, but leaned around it as soon as he deemed it safe, just enough so he could see the man, who was now nervously tugging at his collar as if he was aware of the wolf preying upon him. Well, he would be dumb, if he would not fear being seen by any of them, no matter by whom. There was another man approaching the traitor and Connor carefully tried to sneak up a bit closer so he would be able to hear everything. He hid behind the stall of a merchant who just gave him a funny look, but Connor quickly silenced him in dropping a few coins onto his table. To his surprise, the stranger did not talk to their man but walked off again. He was not sure if that was part of this whole game they were playing or if he just had not been Washington's guy. The traitor, however, remained on the spot he had previously occupied.

After a few more minutes Connor started to grow frustrated and antsy himself. If it was for him he would have just grabbed the guy and beat him up so severely that he would not dare to lie to him when asked about this whole ordeal. *Patience*, he warned himself silently cursing on the inside. *Patience*. Another man walked up to the traitor. He was a soldier of the continental army, easy to spot, really, but not with other soldiers and for that it was quite clear that this now had to be Washington's man. He did not walk straight up to the traitor, instead, he took position near him and acted as if he was inspecting the newspapers a little boy was selling right next to the corner they stood at. For a short moment nothing happened, but then Connor saw briefly how the traitor shoved a piece of parchment at the man. A letter perhaps? The soldier immediately tugged away the letter and walked off again and so did the traitor.

Instead of following Smith, Connor quietly followed the unnamed soldier. He needed to get the letter from him - not only to see what was written in there so they could later interrogate Smith, now that he indeed did know that Smith betrayed Lee, but for the most part so that Washington would not get to read it. God knew what was written in this letter! For all Connor knew this letter could mean Lee's death - and no matter how much of a slime ball this man was, that was something he just could not risk for the sake of the order.

The soldier possessed zero sense of caution as he was walking through New York with Connor at his heels, waiting for the right moment to strike and get back the letter. He could not just sneak up close to him and somehow magically get it without the soldier noticing it - after all, he was not the usual pale-faced, red-cheeked, nobleman walking the streets of New York. He was *exotic*, how Pitcairn had once put it. Connor had never liked the tone of this word. It sounded as if one was referring to an animal.

Together they almost reached the harbor, but Connor was forced to leave the soldier behind, as he witnessed him giving the letter to yet another man in uniform. Like this, it went on for a while. The letter went through quite a few pairs of hands and yet Connor was not able to steal the letter just once. This was getting ridiculous!

When they finally reached the harbor, Connor decided that he was about to just risk it and get as close as possible to the man, but it should never come to this as Connor was all of the sudden startled by the shrill screech of a woman coming from an alley not far from the spot he decided to hide from sight as the soldier had stopped by another soldier to have a little chat. He could not help but throw a glance to where he thought the sound had come from and apparently except for him nobody had noticed - or decided not to notice. He was aware that this little glance could have already risked the mission, for maybe he had missed the soldiers exchanging the letters, but he could not help it either. There was a woman - young, maybe not even twenty yet - pressed tightly
against the brick stone wall of one of the houses. He was not able to see her face, for most of her body was obscured by the large figure of a man Connor all too well knew.

From one moment to the other it hit Connor so hard he almost jumped back in horror as his stomach turned by the sight of Finch's meaty, red face in the shadows of the alleyway. All of the sudden his body felt hot and cold at the same time, cold sweat was coating his forehead in just a matter of mere seconds. He felt faint and as though he was standing on the deck of a ship during a storm that was ripping at the wood all around him and nearly made him stumble and fall overboard. His knees felt weak as though they were about to give in under his weight any moment now. But they did not. His stomach growled and turned, he felt as if he was about to vomit right here and now, but he did not. All he could hear was the sound of his own blood rushing through his ears and a faint but nonetheless disturbing beep, muting the rest of the world entirely.

The message was forgotten, the mission was forgotten, the man he was following was forgotten, his father was forgotten – and all of this just in an instant! The entire world suddenly stood still, as Finch lifted his face from the bosom of the squirming young girl where he had buried it just seconds before and stared right at him as if he had felt him staring and Connor moved without thinking twice. Where his body had been frozen solid just moments before, it now acted without Connor's approval.

Finch started running the moment he recognized him, leaving the young woman behind. Connor did not even look after her, as she just slumped to the ground, relieved to have escaped this situation somehow. Truth was, he did not care for this stupid girl. He did not care for anything right now. His mind had gone blank, he was not even thinking anymore as he ran after Finch and followed him into the darkness of the alley. He did not think as he extended his hidden blade with a flick of his wrist, he did not think as they left the alley and bolted onto a street. He did not care as he finally managed to jump Finch and threw him to the ground. He did not even think as he buried steel into the man's chest.

This was not a clean kill. This was not a swift stab to the neck as he had been trained to do. There was no mercy involved, there was no humility involved. This was pure rage. This was pure agony. He saw the meaty fists of Finch as the man tried to shield himself or throw him off, but Connor remained on top unmoving like a stone as he slammed down the blade again and again. He did not even care for the blood sputtering onto his face or on his clothes. The entire world was all but forgotten.

He did not even hear the panicked screeches all around him or the shouting of the men on the street, all he could hear was Finch's voice, his screams and cries as he seemed to finally understand that Connor would not stop, that he would not show mercy, that he would indeed kill him. He would kill every last one of the men who had done that to him if he could. He would hunt them all down and slaughter them just like this, with no mercy, for they had shown no mercy to him.

At some point, Finch's movements just stopped and there was only the wet sound left as he slammed his blade down again – and yet again.

»Guards! Guards!« The shouts started to grow louder and louder and louder, and finally, they even reached Connor's brain as he scrambled to his feet. He was swaying quite badly, his knees felt weak, he felt like just falling to the ground and sleeping. His head was empty. Differently than before. Previously, the emptiness inside his mind had been freeing, now it was crushing him. People were staring at him, blood was dripping down his chin. Finch's blood. It was slaughter, not just killing, this was slaughter. As he looked down on Finch again there was only a mess left where his chest had been. Scraps of bloody flesh, blood and gore oozing everywhere. He felt sick. Oddly sick.
Noises and sensations started to come back to him, he started to feel again, he started to understand again. And what he understood was that guards were coming for him. As he shot a glance down the street, he could already see a group of soldiers coming running for him. Once again his body acted without waiting for his mind's approval as his legs started running again.

He threw his body around and darted off into the next alleyway he came across with people still screeching when he came too close, the maniac with the bloody face and clothes. He was fast of course, faster than most people and he had not as much ballast as those soldiers and yet they followed him and yet they ran after him. Connor had a hard time bolting around corners, ducking into side alleys, trying to hide from the soldiers. He barely managed to get away as he threw himself over a fence, before he quickly jumped to the nearest entrance to the tunnel system lying beneath the town.

»What have I done?« He gasped as he finally had the chance to lean against the cold stone wall of the tunnel, after he had stumbled down deeply enough into the system that he was not able to hear the thundering shouts from the soldiers in the streets any longer. At least he knew these hidden passages well enough to navigate through them. »What have I done…?« He had forgotten all about his mission and the letter he should have stolen from these men before Washington could get it. He had betrayed the Order in following his own desire of killing someone who had caused him harm before. This was not the way to go through life as a Templar! He should know this by now, shouldn’t he? What would his father say? What would the others say when Lee would be demoted or even hanged because of whatever information that letter had contained? He had betrayed their trust in him. He deserved to be kicked out of the Order; he deserved to receive the highest punishment possible for all he had done wrong.

And for what? He did not even feel satisfied the slightest bit with Finch's blood all over him, as he slowly slumped down onto the dusty ground and buried his face on his knees.

The night was already pitch black, as Connor climbed through the window of his room in the inn, his father and him stayed at. The moon was shining through the dirty glass as Connor slumped down onto the ground. It was dark inside the room, but almost immediately as he leaned back against the wall he felt that he was not alone at all. It would have surprised him if he were anyway.

»So I see you have found your way back.« His father's voice was like poison as it cut through the air inside the room. It only took his father mere seconds to light a candle, after he had apparently waited for him surrounded by darkness. Surely he had known Connor would not enter the room if he would have seen the candlelight from outside. His expression could not be grimmer if he would tell a horror story to his only child on Halloween night. This time Connor could not even hold it against him. This time he had no means of arguing with his father in all of this. This time all he could do was to wait for his punishment, because he did deserve it.

»Whose blood is this?« His father then asked as he did not get a response out of his son immediately and gestured towards his face. Of course, Finch's blood was still clinging to him and with the blood the dirt from the tunnels. Never in his life had he been more desperate for a bath.

»Finch's.« Connor found himself muttering but his mind was still in this very odd state where it was not really able to process the information it got. Was he really talking to his father right now or was it automatism kicking in? All of this seemed so horribly unreal, all of this seemed to be right out of a nightmare.

»Finch.« His father replied, but stayed where he was, sitting right next to Connor's unoccupied bed on a stool. It almost felt as if they were worlds apart just now. His father would not come closer than necessary to him and Connor for once was glad because he did not know what he would do
»That does not concern you.« He tried his best to put as much venom and ferocity into his voice as he could possibly manage, but it did not seem to work. All it did was making his father angry apparently, as the old wolf rose from his spot.

»Oh I'm sorry, son, but I thought it would concern me after YOU ALMOST RUINED THE MISSION AND ENDANGERED THE ENTIRE ORDER!« His father rarely screamed or yelled at him. He was a man of great composure for the most part. He was able to keep himself in check pretty much all the time, now however he was foaming with rage as he stepped closer. Connor scrambled back to his feet but he did not want to flee his father, much rather he wanted to fight him, to scream at him. After all, what did this man even know?

»IT DOES NOT FUCKING CONCERN YOU, FATHER! NOTHING ABOUT ME CONCERNS YOU!« He found himself yelling back. Already there was a thump against the wall on the left-hand side of the room from an already annoyed and disturbed neighbor of his.

»I AM YOUR FATHER!«

»NO, YOU ARE NOT! YOU NEVER WERE! YOU WERE NEVER THERE FOR ME WHEN I NEEDED YOU! YOU HAVEN'T BEEN THERE WHEN MOTHER DIED AND YOU HAVEN'T BEEN THERE WHEN I WAS WITH WASHINGTON! YOU DIDN'T CARE FOR ME! TO YOU I AM BUT AN NUSEIANCE! A FAULT IN YOUR GREAT PLAN! A STAIN ON YOUR VEST!«

As his father stomped closer towards him, Connor knew that the situation was going to get out of hand - and it did pretty quickly. His father's hands were upon him in a matter of seconds, as he grabbed him by the collar of his coat and pulled him closer with rage clearly burning in his ice-blue eyes. »You behave like a savage.« His father snarled, his eyes narrowed to angry glooming slits. »You shout and scream and stomp your feet! You want to be part of the Order, but the first opportunity you get to be of use for us you go and slaughter a man who does not concern us instead of going after your target as you should have! And for what, Connor? For what?«

As Connor shoved his father away he put every bit of strength in the move he still possessed, fear clinging to the back of his mind. Fear and the memories of that night in the prison, the memories Finch had conjured up inside his mind once again. Every bit of bodily contact - even to his own father - was like acid burning through his fine clothes and seeping right into his skin. »He concerned me!« Connor hissed and already clenched his fist to punch his father, but his father was quick to deflect him and in just an instant he was behind Connor, pulling his right arm behind his back. Connor cursed in pain. Sure his shoulder was healed, but it still hurt.

»You are a Templar, Connor!« His father shouted as if he had suddenly forgotten all about discretion in this matter, or about their neighbors and the thin walls. »You do what I say and I didn’t say you should go and slaughter that man in such a brutal way for everyone to see!« Connor kicked back and managed to hit his father in the shin. The old wolf howled in pain and was forced to let him go, before Connor whirled around to land a swinger against his father's jaw. He could not even think straight any longer, as he watched his father stumble back. If he would be able to, maybe then he would have grasped that his father had witnessed the brutal attack Connor had launched on Finch.

»I am not your tool!« Connor huffed. He felt as if he was losing all of his strength already. »I am not your slave!«

»Nobody said you were, but you are behaving like a maniac - but not like my son! You are not
behaving as a Kenway, as a Templar should behave! I should have known that you are just a child still.« His father shot back immediately. This time as Connor lunged at him, his father was quicker and threw himself at his young son, managing to knock him off his feet. Connor landed on the floorboards on his back, kicking and screaming, but to no avail.

»If I am so much of a failure than why didn’t you just let me hang as you had the chance?« He finally screamed, but his voice sounded strained and hoarse even to him. He had no chance to push his father off of him, no matter how much he tried. Suddenly, he only felt like a child incapable of doing really anything at all. »Why didn’t you just let me die?« The burning sensation in his eyes made him feel disgusted with himself once again, but there was no way he would be able to hold back his anger, his rage, his hurt any longer. He felt as if he was suffocating under the weight of his father's body pressing against his, even though he was not. His father did not even use that much of force to hold him down and Connor was painfully, painfully aware of that fact!

This time, when his father spoke up again his voice was quieter, but not without anger. »Why didn’t you just tell me about what has happened in the prison, you fool? Did you really think I wouldn’t have known? That I wouldn’t have seen? How blind do you think I am? And to my own son's problems of all people!« His father did not sound hurt, he sounded honestly concerned, he sounded as if he could not believe what he had just heard from his own child's mouth and Connor felt terribly ashamed for the words that had slipped from his tongue.

As the realization of what his father had just told him started to seep in however, Connor felt how his limbs started to grow numb and he immediately stopped his struggle. His tongue felt unable to move even in the slightest. It felt heavy and weird. He could not say anything. He just was overwhelmed by his father's confession. And as if his father would know this he gently slapped him in the jaw, before he got up. The hit was sharp enough to make Connor flinch, but not hard enough to hurt or wake him from his stupor.

»You wanted revenge, I get it, son.« His father sighed as he brushed his hands over his clothes as if he wanted to brush away the wrinkles the little fight between them had caused on his clothes. »I understand how you feel.-«

»What do you even know?« Connor growled, but he did not dare to look at his father. He kept his gaze on the ground as he sat up and crossed his legs. He could not stand looking at his father. Already he felt the heat on his neck, the shame burning through him. »You don’t know anything.«

»I know that you were raped.« Even though his voice was not raised, Connor felt as if he had shouted the words, as if everyone could hear them. To him they were much sharper than any slap. He felt nauseous and the words coming from his father's mouth somehow did not make sense to him at all. »And I know that it was not the first time either in Bridewell, Connor. Don’t make the mistake of thinking your father to be blind and dumb. I have served the military for a great many years of my youth, Connor. I have travelled the world before. I have seen many things, you know? I can recognize certain kinds of injuries and I don’t need Ben to tell me everything after I have tended to your wounds already.«

By now the heat was trying to eat him alive. He felt as if his head was burning, but still he managed to get his mouth to move. »Why didn’t you say something?« He quietly asked, not sure if he really wanted to hear the answer or talk about it at all. Shouldn’t he be denying everything? But his father's tone of voice was so final, that he did not really dare to lie to him.

»I did not want to stir all of this up again. I wanted to leave you in peace, figure it out for yourself. I hoped you would come to me if you wanted to talk about it, but after today you did not leave me another choice. You are lucky I was there too, otherwise Charles would now be a dead man
The change of topic was welcome to him, but still he did not lift his gaze. Instead, he watched a tiny little spider crawl through the cracks in the floorboards. »You mean…«

»Yes, I finished what you should have done. I got the letter. Are you interested in hearing what's written in it?« he only managed a small nod as he started to realize that his father was not about to talk to him about the Prison any longer - or at least for now.

Haytham sighed as he slumped down on the chair again he had previously occupied and pulled out the letter from his boot, which Connor saw, as he carefully glanced his way. Somehow his father looked a lot older and grayer than before. »Smith gathered every bit of information he got about Charles. Every bit of information he knew about Charles’ - about our - plans of getting rid of good old George. With this letter Washington would have had enough ammunition in his hands to either demote Charles and have him thrown into prison until he would be hanged as a traitor or to know his patterns and send his little lap-dog after Charles. After all, Charles sure is on his list, right?«

»I'm sorry.« Connor murmured quietly and lowered his chin until his hair was almost falling over his eyes in the process. »I'm sorry, father.« He could have killed Charles with following his own thrive for revenge. He could have played right into Washington's hands with that. Revenge was dangerous and although he knew that … it was just so tempting.

»Revenge, son, is always a dangerous path, let me tell you that from experience.« His father sighed from his chair. »And even though I can understand your desire for revenge on the men who have harmed you, the next time you see one of them, you wait. You are a Templar, Connor - and more importantly a Kenway. You are not alone in this. If anyone dares to hurt one of us, they are dealing with all of us.«
Chapter 19

November 1777

The truth was that Haytham E. Kenway always looked at the sea with a heavy heart, when his son would leave Boston on board of his very own ship. He always did his best to appear as unfazed as possible when his son would grab his kitbag, put on his navy blue coat and leave for the harbor, as if he would not care for his son's journeys on board of the Aquila, this cursed ship. However, the truth was that he sometimes cursed Shay for this present he had made Connor to his twenty-first birthday only seven months ago.

Shay had come back from France aged by years, with the long lost precursor box in his hands, a few more gray strands in his thick dark hair, and the Aquila waiting for Connor in the harbor last April, just in time for Connor's birthday. They had not asked where Shay had found that ship or how he came into the possession of it, but Haytham's initial joy to have the box back safely in Templar hands after sixteen years of search for it had soon ceased as his son had almost all but forgotten about their original plans and spent every moment of free time he had at his disposal at the harbor to repair the old blue and white Brigg with a new found passion and excitement, Haytham had already started to miss. It was true that his son had lost some of his old passion and fire after his escape from the scaffold and the incident that had taken place in Bridewell and of course Haytham had not been the only one to notice that change in his son. Charles had already asked Haytham about Connor's sometimes aggressive, sometimes extremely passive behavior since it all went down, and he was not the only one who had thrown uncertain and funny looks at Haytham. The only person who had not done something like this and never asked Haytham about Connor's behavior, had been Shay. Even though he knew Shay for a shorter time than his other comrades in the colonies, it was odd how the Irishman tended to read the minds of the two Kenway men.

And since he came back with this rotten ship that seemed to almost break apart when looked at in a funny way, Connor's behavior had indeed changed again. To the better, as Haytham might add, though reluctantly. His son was a lover of the sea, just as his grandfather had been and even though Haytham had always known the day would come when Connor would get his own ship and follow in his grandfather's footsteps, he also feared the dangers awaiting Connor out there every time his boy would start making plans for yet another voyage again. He was hardly at home anymore since he and Shay had repaired the old Brigg with their own hands and the help of a few hired carpenters near the docks. Of course, Haytham had found his way to the harbor more than just a handful of times to watch his son out of the shadows and he could not deny that he had liked the expression on Connor's face when he had been working on the ship under the hot burning sun with sweat on his brows, a whole lot more than the haunted and gloomy look he had portrayed for almost a year.

Later this very same year, his worries had proven to be built on sand, as Connor came back successful from every single one of his journeys and each time proved himself to be an even greater asset to the Order, as he continued to aid their allies when it got rough out there and helped to sabotage the enemy. Of course, this filled Haytham with a sense of pride which he liked to hide from his son as best he could so that it would not get to Connor's head too much if he would ever learn about this warming feeling in his father's chest. His son's name no longer was just a footnote in the history of the Templar Order as the son of the colonial Grand Master Haytham Kenway, but instead, it became more and more a presence of its own, as a skilled seafarer and Templar agent. He was no longer just a son of - he was his own force to be reckoned with. Connor's success and ascent in the Templar Order had been quick - much quicker than that of a few others for sure and Haytham sometimes noticed that Charles had started to look at Connor with jealousy in his eyes.
because already speculation grew that Connor might become his father's successor one day. Connor, not Lee and of course speculations like these filled Haytham with even greater pride, wherein they made his dear friend Charles all the more angry and filled his son with horrors he did not dare to speak of.

As he had been a young man and first came to this land, he had never fathomed to have a family of his own and thus he had never really seen the appeal of having someone who could carry on his name and his convictions into the next generation. However, by now he could understand the feeling his own father might have had as he had started to teach him the ways of the Assassins. Having one's own son follow in their footsteps was a precious feeling to hold onto. It felt like he was passing on the torch to the next generation as if all his hard work had not been for naught as if his work would influence the future, even when he would not be around to see it. However, Haytham was by now quite sure that at least Shay knew of his fatherly pride, no matter how deeply he tried to bury this feeling behind a stoic mask and a cold face.

His feelings towards the Aquila and Connor's travels across the seven seas had not even changed that much, as Connor one day came back from a journey with the first piece of a map of which he had been sure it would lead him to yet another precursor item, hidden by none other than the infamous captain Kidd himself. Connor had never been too infatuated with those legends of the precursors or their cursed little trinkets they had apparently strewn all over the world, even though it had been his own tribe which had taken on the responsibility to protect the precursor sites for centuries, even though he had held one of those items in his hands before as the spirit - how Connor called it - had talked to him. And yet it showed Haytham a sense of growth to his beloved son. A few years ago, his son would not have batted a lash by the sole prospect of being able to find another item like the one his father was wearing around his neck at all times. He could not have been bothered by it, let alone started a hunt for those artifacts. Now, however, as he was an adult, he wanted to travel the world if necessary to find another item.

No matter how much he disliked the Aquila or Connor's potentially deadly voyages on board of that rotten ship, the Grand Master Haytham Kenway had cheered Connor on to find that artifact and bring it home safely so that the Templars could protect it from their enemies in the future, but the father Haytham Kenway always looked with worry at the sea ever since - Especially after Shay had told him about the Octavius, the shipwreck of Hendrick van der Heul which they had discovered at the Northwest Passage stuck in the ice. Though Connor had managed to find the first clue in the cold dead hands of the former captain still sitting in his chair in the captain's cabin, but he had almost paid for his glorious found with his life as the ship had started to sink and nearly dragged Connor down with it into the cold Atlantic sea to drown him in the icy waters. He was twenty-one now, a grown man, but still as wild and reckless as a whelp - at least sometimes.

Every time he came back from his travels he had a new adventurous tale to tell, but Haytham started to question if these precursor artifacts were worth risking his only child's life.

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When he found himself standing on the deck of his very own ship, looking back towards the familiar harbor of Boston, Connor sometimes found himself wondering if he would come back home to find his home in ruins. He had not seen Kanen'tó:kon after their little argument as last year had slowly started to die off, and as he had heard stories of the battles that were being fought and Kanen'tó:kon's involvement and nearly constant presence at Washington's side, he grew more and more aware of the fact that his former best friend was now his most deadly enemy. Needless to say, that this knowledge, no matter how suppressed it had been before, filled him with a certain kind of grief he was not yet too familiar with. It was the same sense of grief he started to experience, when he would hear other Templars talk about him succeeding his father one day.
Though he was not familiar with this feeling, he understood what it meant. It was the feeling of loss not yet experienced. The feeling of dread because he knew he would at some point lose his father - or Kanen'tó:kon for that matter. He was aware that he could only succeed his father if his father would die and that revelation always made him break out in cold sweat and left him shaking. It was the same with the knowledge, the realization, that he would have to kill Kanen'tó:kon at some point, no matter how much he wished he could avoid it. Sometimes he just wanted to look straight ahead at the sea, never to look back again and leave behind everything - only so he would not need to face the reality and another loss in his life.

*Life that is scratched*, yes, he thought, his mother had chosen a name that was eerily fitting for him. It was almost as if he had talked to the spirits herself and had known what would lie ahead of her son.

As he now stood at the wheel and felt the harsh wind blowing into his face he wondered if Kanen'tó:kon would try to kill him next time they would meet. Would Kanen'tó:kon rob him of his last remaining family only because his father's name was on this stupid list of his, while he was away hunting treasures to make his father proud?

He did not dare thinking too much about the answers to those questions. Next time he would see Kanen'tó:kon, he would need to kill him, there was no doubt about it - not just because he was an Assassin, not just because he meant danger to the Order and his family, not just because one of his targets was his father, but because this New World, the colonies and what they tried to build here, was more important than this old feud between their groups. And although he was able to see that and felt no wish to fight the Assassins any more than needed to, Kanen'tó:kon seemed not to see it. He would try to forge an alliance between them so that they could fight together for what was just and important, but his father's words were true and an alliance with the Assassins almost as impossible as to travel to the moon or grab a star from the sky.

»Connor« A voice to his left-hand side pulled him from his thoughts. »You are too young for such worry on your face.« Shay was by now almost always at his side when he would set sail. It was either him or Gist aiding him in his quests as experienced advisors and Connor enjoyed their presence on board of *the Aquila* and their know-how greatly. It was odd since he had been taught a lot of things by his father in the last five years, he had expected Gist or Shay to be more condescending towards him, when they would inform him about or draw his attention towards something. But they were not. They were quite pleasant presences to be around. Of course, he had known this before, after Shay had taken him on voyages on board of *the Morrigan* before and taught him everything about sailing a ship, but it surprised him nonetheless. His father's lectures had often ended in turmoil, a proper argument between them or Connor crying in anger buried in his room. But when Gist or Shay would say something, they never sounded as if they would question Connor's expertise or his skills as a captain. It was a most welcome feeling.

»I'm just wondering« Connor replied, his hands steady on the wheel as if he had never done anything else in his life, as they were crashing through the waves, and sometimes it really felt as if he had been born to sail a ship. Of course, since he knew about his grandfather and his legacy, it made a little bit more sense, but even as a child he had always felt pulled towards the shore.

»About the Assassins.« He added and Shay produced a low hum beside him while he was watching the sailors Connor had hired doing their job with a joyful tune on their lips, no matter how cold it really was and that they were surely freezing despite their thick wool pullovers and the hard work they were doing. Connor, who was just standing still up here for the better part of this voyage, could only watch his breath protruding in little white clouds from his lips. »How did you do it? Fighting against your own friends, I mean.«

Shay's eyes remained fixed on some point in the distance, as Connor noticed as he quickly glanced
at his face, somewhere in the blue desert they were traversing through. There was nothing else in
the endless blue around them - for now. Sometimes they would see the fin of a dolphin or even a
majestic whale but other than this they were alone. Soon they would see another ship or some
small island in the distance, for sure. Shay looked older since he came back from France and a lot
calmer too. He had the face of a man who had finally finished his life’s purpose, even though his
life was far from over yet. He had gained a few more gray strands in his dark hair, but he still wore
his usual dark clothes, which for some let him seem dangerous and frightening, but not to the boy
who had grown up alongside the man in the past years. The little wrinkles around Shay's dark eyes
betrayed the unfriendly mask he sometimes showed to strangers. They were wrinkles only people
who liked to laugh a lot gained with the years. Shay had a gentle heart and that showed on his face.
Now, however, he seemed lost in thought for a moment as Connor's words had pushed him back
into a Maelstrom of unwelcome memories.

»You see, Connor, sometimes sacrifices are necessary. Yes, they were my friends and companions
for a while and I loved them - and yet I killed them. They were blind for the truth. As I came back
from Lisbon, blinded by rage, they wouldn't listen to me and the things I’ve experienced. Maybe I
wouldn't have listened to me either and now I know that my approach back then might have been
wrong. Sixteen years needed to pass for me to see that. I was much like you back then, you know?
I was headstrong and had a bad temper, not at all like one would imagine an Assassin to be. My
mentor had a lot to criticize about me, just as my teachers, but they trusted I would become a great
asset for the Brotherhood as soon as I would have sown my wild oats. Back then I did not
understand that maybe this was to be expected, I was only twenty-four years old after all.« He
chuckled as if someone had made an especially good joke as if he could not believe that he had
once been a young man. »If I would have explained what had happened and what I have seen more
calm and more reasonable, maybe things would have turned out quite differently. But I just saw the
pain I was in and that I caused in Portugal, all those innocent people that died because of me, that I
killed while clinging to a creed that forbids the killing of innocents. I was wounded and I felt
betrayed, so I lashed out on those I thought responsible and paid the price. I don't regret joining the
Templars instead and I don't regret killing my former friends and comrades. Back then I did what I
felt was right, and that is all that really matters. I believe, we will never know who of us is right in
their beliefs or who follows the right path in life. We can only trust our instincts, Connor. The
Pieces of Eden are dangerous artifacts and Achilles was blinded by the loss of his family back
then. He was not able to understand what I had to say - I think he does now. I hope he does. I hope
those I killed did not die in vain.«

»But do you think peace with the Assassins might be possible? Even after everything that
happened?« Connor was careful to probe further. His father … Well, he was not sure if he could
ever talk to him about this matter the way he could talk about it with Shay. His father was just so
terribly bull-headed sometimes.

Shay thought about it for a moment before he spoke again. »Nothing is impossible,
Ratonhnhaké:ton.« Shay still seemed to find it funny how easy Connor's birth name rolled from his
lips, especially when they would be near his father, who after five years, had still problems with it,
no matter how often Connor had tried to teach him the right pronunciation. »You are evidence of
this, you know? After all, you managed to survive and escape Washington against all odds, after so
many before you have failed to do so, despite you being just a kid.« Connor did not like to think
about it. He did not wish to think about his years of imprisonment anymore. He did not wish to
think back to the night of his desperate flight ever again. He should have drowned Washington in
that dirty bathwater as he had the chance. »But sadly, those things solely depend on the leaders of
such groups. With you as Grand Master of the Colonial Order in the future and a reasonable
Assassin as the mentor of the Colonial Brotherhood, I could see a peace treaty being forged. It
happened before, it happens still. But with your father and Achilles? No. Not even with this friend
of yours, I believe. Too much blood has been shed already and this Assassin does not seem to understand what he is doing. He follows orders - nothing more.«

Somewhere over his head, a seagull was screeching. »Same as I.«

»Aye, but you do not shy from asking questions and that is what's truly important. Never believe what someone tells you blindly, Connor, not even your own father. He would never betray you willingly, but love and worry sometimes lead us to withhold information from those we wish to protect and that sometimes leads to betrayal or misunderstanding.«

»My father isn't always telling me everything.« Connor scoffed and he was very well aware that Shay knew that his was still an understatement. His father would tell him no more than the names he wished to be cleaned from this earth if he could.

»No, but I think he means well, at least in his sense.« Shay chuckled again and Connor was almost persuaded in joining him because he understood what Shay meant.

The waves were crashing onto the Shore of Oak Island, as the Aquila anchored a few miles in front of the small piece of land in the middle of the sea. The pieces of the map that they had already found during their little treasure hunt, had led them here. »And abreast the rock that doesn't fit.« Shay's voice sounded behind him, as they slowly walked through the shallow waters. It was the clue Connor found at the skeletal remains of Hendrick van der Heul, the first clue they had found after Connor got this odd letter from an old peg leg near the beach when they had to land there to pick up some supplies. Their boots were filled to the brim with salt water, producing smacking sounds with each step as if they were walking through a swamp as they pressed forward. »Close to a tree kissed by fire.«

»It's here.« Connor concluded and already felt the victorious glee rushing through his body as he took in the image of the glade lying open in front of him. The clues neatly fitted together now that he was here. He could almost feel that treasure calling for him, that Piece of Eden, that dangerous but oh so glorious weapon. But his mind warned him to be careful and not to act on impulse. The Pieces of Eden were dangerous items in the hands of the wrong people, he needed to remind himself constantly. Clearly, he was not one of those people, but - Well, wasn't he? Deeming himself to be immune to the effect of the item in itself told him that he needed to be extra careful and so he threw another glance at Shay, as the older man laid a reassuring hand on Connor's left shoulder, straightened his back and proceeded forwards.

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The item was glowing as Connor opened the small box he had put it into. It was a ring adorned with the same symbols and odd lines Haytham already knew from the amulet he wore around his neck at all times and which he had stolen from the Assassin Miko all those years ago. The disk-like object around his neck started to tingle on his skin, as Haytham looked at the artifact his son presented to him at this moment, but it stopped immediately the moment as Connor closed the box again with a small, but very final thud. Haytham had not noticed the sudden yearning, the sudden itch to grab the object and take it from Connor until Connor closed the box and broke the spell.

»I wonder what this thing can do.« Haytham rewarded his son's found after a moment of hesitation, which he had used to think about the urge he had felt right now. Connor had been gone for quite a while and of course, Haytham was glad to have him back in one piece - and alive too - but after he had entered the house Haytham's attention had rested upon the artifact more than he liked to admit - even more than on his own flesh and blood. Only now he noticed the gush in Connor's coat, as he took in the appearance of his boy, who was still clad in his naval outfit, the thick blue coat and the heavy boots. The fabric was torn at his left side, but he did not seem seriously wounded.
»It's able to deflect bullets and keep its owner from harm, apparently.« Connor sighed as he put the box down on his father's desk and slowly turned around to make his way towards the fireplace. Of course, he had not welcomed his son at the door as other parents might when their kids would come home after a long journey like this, but he had been waiting for Connor to find him up here instead.

Haytham looked at the box again and fought the urge to open it just so he could have a look at this marvelous ring again. Connor seemed to have noticed the itch in his fingers, but even if he had noticed, he apparently decided not to say anything about it, as he finally sat down on the armchair closest to the fire and began poking in the flames with the fire rake. He looked exhausted and ready to pass out any minute now. But surely he would wolf down the dinner Mrs. Taylor was preparing before he would fall into his bed. It was always like this when Connor would come back home - and though Haytham tended not to show it, he was glad that his son indeed had come back home safely again.

»As we retrieved the object we were attacked by a group of overly excited thugs.« Connor began his tale. »I was wearing the ring after I found it and climbed out of the narrow cave, and as they fired at me, the ring seemed to protect me.« He stopped for a moment to think about the things that had happened with a face as if he tried to remember a fleeting dream. »I have never seen anything like this before, father. It was like … like a net woven out of gold threads, that the ring draped over me and it sent the bullets flying right back at my attackers instead.« His brown eyes were large as he then began to retell the whole story, how they came to find the object. He told his father about the riddles he had found on his voyages and about the cave itself. He even talked about the wolves that had attacked him and Shay after they had made their way onto the island and closer towards the hidden entrance of the cave. And even though Connor seemed tired as he retold his little adventure, there was a weird look in his eyes as he spoke about the wolves.

»If we could recreate the ring's powers we wouldn't need to fear any enemy whatsoever.« Haytham answered after Connor was done and had sunken deeper into the armchair as if he was about to fall asleep right then and there, lulled in by the fire and its comforting warmth. He straightened his posture though immediately as he heard his father's words as if hit by lightning.

»This object is dangerous, father« He immediately replied with eyes as large as saucers. »No one should use it without the utmost care!« Connor warned and Haytham, though surprised about this sudden outburst of rationality from his son, felt the warm glow of pride once more. His son was still brash and wild in spirit, no matter what he had suffered through nothing had been able to break him, but dumb he was not. One day, maybe, he would even become a good leader for the order and a part of him hoped dearly that he would survive to see that day, to pass on the torch to his own son perhaps.

»Maybe you are right.« Haytham agreed and savored the surprise written all over his son's face, as he was clearly not used to hear his father agreeing with him for once. »We should make sure that it won't fall into unworthy hands.«

Connor's surprise seemed to falter quickly, as he scoffed and turned his attention back to the fire for a second. »But who decides whose hands are worthy of such power and whose aren't? We, father? Our enemies will think otherwise, I guess - any maybe not even without reason.«

And yet again, Connor managed to fill him with pride and the bittersweet feeling that this boy reminded him painfully of his very own father. This would be something his father would have wanted to discuss with Haytham, during the endless hours they had spent together in his dusty old study, as soon as Haytham would have been old enough to understand everything his father had wanted to teach him. Now he was indeed old enough to understand all this, but it was his very own
son confronting him with this question and the thought behind it, despite the fact that it should be the other way around. The older Connor became and the more he got to see of the world, he tended to become more and more like his grandfather, apparently. However, Haytham was not yet sure if that was a good thing or not, but it was odd to see how certain characteristics might leave out one generation of a family only to come back even stronger in the next. And yet, he thought if this was something his own father would have wanted to discuss with him then maybe Templars and Assassins were not so different after all.

»The ring is not the only thing you brought back, right?« Haytham answered, avoiding to answer his son's question as he took a closer look at the boy. It was not so much that he feared to answer him, it was just that he needed to truly think about it in earnest before giving a half-assed answer to his son. Even from his position at the desk, he could see little hairs on his son's coat, dark and thus hard to see against the navy blue fabric, but clearly not his son's hair and not invisible for sharp eyes like his - even though they had been sharper in his youth.

Connor seemed nervous for a moment before he got up from his chair again with a deep sigh and walked for the door. With a small nod, he asked his father to follow. »You see … He was all alone…« Connor started while they walked across the hallway and towards Connor's room, Haytham close to his son's heels, even though he already knew what Connor had to show him and Connor clearly knew that there was no point in avoiding to show his father the truth anyway. »He wouldn't have survived on his own out there.« He added as he opened the door to his room.

It smelled of wet dog and as Haytham managed to get a glimpse of the room over Connor's left shoulder, he only saw what he had expected to see after all, five years were more than enough time to get to know a certain person, especially when living together with them. Well, they were Kenways, and the Kenways had always been fond of animals. »Mrs. Taylor will not be happy to see that.« He began before his eyes fell upon his son again, who shrank away under his disapproving gaze ever so slightly. »He is your responsibility.« The pup on Connor's bed just yawned at this. It had only been a matter of time anyway, Haytham thought by himself as he suppressed a smirk at the sight of his son's face lighting up like that of a child seeing snow for the very first time.
Chapter 20

January 1778

The news of Benjamin Church’s betrayal of the Templar Order was a heavy hit for the remaining few Templars that were left in the Colonies still, but an especially hard one for Connor even though he was careful not to show his disappointment in the presence of the other Templars. Ben Church was no one Connor felt especially connected to on a more personal level. He did not feel connected towards him as he felt towards his father or Shay, but Ben had been the one person who had stitched him back together on more than one occasion in the past five years and, above all, kept his mouth shut about the nature of his injuries whenever it had been necessary. He had trusted the doctor since he had been a lad of only sixteen years that was the truth, even though he had found it hard to really trust anyone back then. It was true that Connor felt as betrayed as if his beloved dog - wolf - had bitten him.

»Church has stolen provisions from Washington and the continental army - but even though I would usually approve of the sabotage of Washington's troops, he betrayed us too and for that, he needs to be punished.« The wolf beside Connor gave a small noise as if he wanted to respond to Haytham's words, but then he put down his snout back onto Connor's left leg again. He had grown quite fast since the end of last year and he would follow Connor everywhere much to the distress of some people in town.

Those assemblies in candlelit rooms still felt odd to Connor, even though he should be used to them by now, after all, they belonged to his new life as a Templar to a great deal. Benjamin had deserted the order, before being sent to prison for treason against the continental army a few months ago actually. His reasons were still unclear to Connor though. The news had reached them only this afternoon and now they had met urgently in the dimly lit room inside the Green Dragon Tavern which they usually occupied for their meetings. The once heavily occupied wooden table seemed to become more and more empty, as he now noticed, watching his fellow brothers. As he had been sixteen and first met all the other members of the Order there had not even been a chair left for him to sit on. He remembered Gist joking about him sitting on his father's knees if he wanted to sit and how he had tried to hide his pout as he had sat down on a barrel instead. The chairs of William Johnson, John Pitcairn, and Thomas Hickey and now that of Benjamin Church were empty. When he had met them the Templar Order had been strong. Eight men, including Shay and Gist, of course, working together for the same goals and the same vision. Now they were only five and he was wearing the ring of one of his fallen brothers. How odd that felt. It was their custom to take the signet ring from each fallen Templar and store them away for future members to wear. Connor had always felt that this was a nice custom because this way the fallen brothers would somehow live on, just like he wearing the necklace his mother had once made and then gave to him before her death. Now he felt haunted by that idea and he could not even say why.

Connor watched the slowly falling snow outside through the small little window after his eyes had wandered from the table and his debating brothers towards the glass and the little ice flowers crawling above it. He was sometimes still in awe about the sharp contrast the snow build against the dark sky outside. It was only January. The New Year had just been born a few days ago and the days were still short and cold. The good people of Boston already had problems to get their carts and carriages from Point A to Point B through the thick layer of snow that was lying like a blanket over the town. It was times like these when Connor would find himself thinking back on the years at the plantation and the seemingly endless winters out there in the shed he had experienced, frightened that he would not survive another day or another week. Now he could come home after a long day to a warming fire and a hot stew. He could deem himself lucky, but there were many
others who were not as lucky.

He understood that his father wanted to punish Benjamin, but Connor thought about Kanen'tó:kon and Washington. If he would get the chance he would strike, but that was not what his father wanted. Connor, however, could not help but to think about what Shay had told him. He should keep asking questions, he should not follow blindly, maybe not even his own father. And yet he knew that his father was speaking out of worry for him when he would advise him not to do something. Or was it the worry for the remaining members of the order? Then again, if Washington would be dead, Lee would follow in his place.

Only with half of his usual attention, he had listened to his comrades discuss the matter, after his father had dropped the bomb. They had decided that they would seek Ben to punish him for his betrayal and after that conclusion, Connor had zoned out, because he had already known what would follow. Lee needed to get back to duty soon because he could not risk any backlash from his superiors now in this critical situation, and Shay was a better asset at sea than on land - even though Connor thought this argument was just a pretense to give the task to Connor. Shay had once been an assassin and though he taught Connor everything about this, he was still the more experienced one of them two. For Shay it would have been no challenge at all to hunt Ben down. Ultimately his father had given the order to find Church to him, of course. As they later walked home from the Green Dragon through the newly heavy snowfall, he wished his body would be warmed by ale too, but Connor was not fond of alcohol, which had lead good old Thomas to a few mocking jokes at his expense in the past. Now he found himself missing those jokes.

»You do understand why this is necessary, do you?« He felt his father's eyes burning on his face as they walked side by side through the dark and empty streets. His little companion, the wolf he had rescued, walked beside them, his fluffy tail wiggling from one side to another.

»I do.« Connor sighed. »But I have a hard time focusing my energy on punishing Benjamin while out there slaves still suffer under men like Washington.« He held his gaze lowered at the snow, but not because he would be afraid of his father's disapproving looks. No, it seemed he was growing out of this phase of wanting to please his father at all costs.

»But if you would manage to bring back the provisions Benjamin has stolen, you could arrange it so it would look like it was Charles who has done it.« Of course he should have known that his father would be quick to find a way to use Ben's crimes to their favor and Connor had to agree that this was maybe not the dumbest idea, but still, he was careful as he answered. »You think about sabotaging Washington and letting Lee shine and appear as the hero who has saved the soldiers from starving?«

»Well« His father breathed as he crossed his arms behind his back in the very fashion he so often did when lecturing his son. »I think it would need more than this for the people and the higher ups to acknowledge Charles' worth as commander in chief in comparison to Washington and to rethink their decision in that regard, but it would be a start.«

As Connor looked at his father now, he could see the cunning spark in his blue eyes that his enemies had learned to fear for certain. Connor, however, felt the spark moving over to him as well. This was something his father only shared with Connor and he knew that. He knew that there were certain things his father would only discuss with him and certain things his father would say only Connor could truly understand. Plotting together with his father was something very different than plotting with Charles or Shay. This was a whole other level and it made him somewhat proud that his father would share this with him. Then again, maybe it was their genes taking over.

»Maybe I should get ready for the hunt then.« Connor replied with a grin and gently patted the
gray fur of the wolf beside him as Fenris looked at him with his big blue eyes.

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The information he had gotten from the soldiers in Washington's camp at Valley Forge had lead him to an old abandoned church (of course the irony did not escape Connor) out close to the forest line. It had not been easy to come so close to the camp, to see Washington prance around between the tents and do nothing about it. He could have killed the man with one single well-aimed shot and then vanish into thin air as if he had never been there, but instead he did nothing and just listened.

After Benjamin had managed to escape the law and leave from prison early he had stolen the supplies for the troops and just vanished apparently. Already Connor grew aware that finding Church would not be too easy. He knew Benjamin well and he knew that good old Ben was a sneaky, clever man if he wanted to be. He certainly knew that Connor would get send after him, there was no question about it.

His wolf was the first to notice the movement above them.

As Connor had entered the abandoned church where Ben had apparently stored the stolen supplies, he had found it empty, but his senses immediately sprang to life as the wolf by his side started growling. Just as Connor whirled around, he heard the unmistakable thud as something heavy landed on the floorboards right behind him. He expected an attack, but the attack would not come, as he stared right into the face of the Assassin. Briefly, he thought that maybe he was not so alone in his wish for peace, after all, otherwise he would not be able to make that observation in the first place.

»Kanen'tó:kon.« Connor carefully spoke with a soft hum to his voice as if he was trying to tame a dangerous beast. Kanen'tó:kon had not (yet) drawn his hidden blade and Connor would not do it either as long as his friend would not force him to. Fenris, the wolf, stopped growling, but he seemed to sense the strain of this situation still, judging by the way he stood guard beside Connor.

He had wanted to let Fenris free after he had raised him for the last few months since he had come back from his little treasure hunt, but the wolf simply did not want to leave his side. Well, he was not yet an adult either and he seemed to have accepted him and his father, maybe even Susie and Mrs. Taylor, as his pack.

»Ratonhnhaké:ton.« Kanen'tó:kon replied just as careful. »What are you doing here? Come to check on Church? Are you going to make sure that Ben Church has stolen enough for you and your British brothers?« There was hostility in his voice as they carefully watched each other, ready to attack as soon as it would become necessary like two stray dogs circling around a heap of meat in the streets.

»Church is no brother of mine. No more than the redcoats or their idiot king.« Connor replied immediately, even though a part of him warned him to stay careful with his words. »How often do I have to repeat myself, Kanen'tó:kon? Has your mentor taught you nothing? The Templars do not fight for the crown, we seek the same as you: freedom, justice, independence. He betrayed us the same as he betrayed the continental army and your beloved Commander.« Talking about Washington would not be wise and they both knew this. He did not know if Kanen'tó:kon had ever decided to confront Washington about the things Connor had told him about the man, but he doubted it. His friend was not the type to do something like this and even if he had, Washington was a great actor, he would have had no problem to twist the story as much as he needed to.

Kanen'tó:kon took a step back, but still they were careful to not let each other out of sight as they
were slowly pacing through the empty room, ready to attack any second. »But-«

»But what?« Connor shot back. He could not help the aggressive tone of his voice, even though he tried to keep it down as much as he could, but seeing his former best friend here in this situation again brought up the old nausea again. He had decided that he would kill him the next time he would see him. He had decided upon it. Now they were here and he could not draw his weapon, he could not tell Fenris to attack. He could not do it.

He interrupted his friend before he could continue with his sentence even because he already knew what he wanted to say and he was not going to discuss this. Not again. »But what?« He shot back and now he himself sounded hostile towards his friend. He could see that Kanen’tô:kon contemplated drawing his blade or his gun to end this discussion once and for all. The air around them was almost sizzling. »Listen, Ben Church’s mouth is as big as his ego. You, judging as you are currently working for Washington, clearly want the supplies back he has stolen. I want him punished.«

»Your father wants him punished.« Kanen’tô:kon scoffed and finally he came to a halt and straightened his posture as though he suddenly could let go of the tension that had built up in his body, but his eyes quickly shot to the wolf beside Connor, before he looked at his fellow Indian again. Surely Kanen’tô:kon was thinking the same things as he did. Surely, he thought about being able to save Connor from his ways, but unlike Kanen’tô:kon, his mind was not poisoned. He saw the world how it truly was and he was not blinded by idealistic fantasies of liberty.

»Our interests are aligned.« Connor concluded, despite the comment Kanen’tô:kon had shot in his direction. Well, it was only a rebuttal for his previous remark of Kanen’tô:kon working for Washington. He was working with Washington and not for him, that was a fine but very distinctive difference and Connor knew this. Just as the Templars were not working for the crown, the Assassins were not working for someone like Washington.

»Then what do you propose?« Kanen’tô:kon finally breathed as he crossed his arms in front of his chest. Connor wondered if his best friend too thought about killing him in earnest. He wondered if Kanen’tô:kon might too have reached the conclusion that he indeed had to kill him even though Connor might not have been on his initial list before. Was he thinking about peace between their orders too? Or was Shay right and was Kanen’tô:kon too blind to see?

»A truce. You are – you were my best friend after all, and perhaps you could still be healed from your ignorance. Or I could kill you now, if you prefer.« For a second Connor thought that Kanen’tô:kon might reject his truce-offering altogether. At least he looked uncertain whether to trust his former best friend or not and Connor himself could only wonder if this might be because of his own phrasing of it. He was not as good in crafting his sentences as his father. He had no silver tongue. If anything, he was too honest all the goddamn time and that was probably only one of his many flaws, as Charles sometimes liked to point out when they would find themselves arguing about some benign topic. You are not consequent enough, boy. You are too weak. You are too trusting. What would Charles say now? That he was too focused on seeing something good in his enemy only because they had been friends once in another life? Because it was true! Surely, Connor was no one who would go to Charles Lee for advice, but he was not totally wrong when he would judge his character either. He wanted to see something good in his former best friend, while in the same instant he was aware of that and he was aware that they were not friends any longer.

Maybe, well, maybe a part of him even blamed Kanen’tô:kon for the pain he had needed to suffer. Kanen’tô:kon had not been there when the village had been burnt to the ground and when Connor and the others had been captured. He could not have possibly known about it either, but at some point, he had to have learned about the incident and he had done nothing to rescue any of them!
Even though he might not have known about his best friend being Washington’s slave, he had to have learned about the attack, about the capture of the survivors and about the enslavement. Not just now Connor found himself wondering if Kanen'tó:kon had thought about him in any way at all after he had left to become an Assassin.

But even if he would just put this all aside and try to forget about it, because after all, Kanen'tó:kon had been just a boy as well when all this had went down and he had not been able to possibly help any of them, there still was Bridewell gnawing at Connor's mind. Kanen'tó:kon had killed Hickey because somehow he had managed to get inside and because he somehow got in touch with Weems. He had known Weems, and Weems had helped him and then Connor had fallen right into the trap this weasel had set up for him. Kanen'tó:kon would have let him hang for a crime he had not committed and he would have not even bat a lash about a possibly innocent man hanging for the murder he had committed no matter if it was a stranger, just another Templar or a former friend.

If this was how Assassins dealt with the deeds they were doing, then they had no right at all to always claim the moral high ground, as they were so prone to do.

After a moment of silence, Kanen'tó:kon sighed and leaned his head back into his neck a bit, exposing his throat in a way that made it all too tempting to slit it. Connor almost gasped in horror at that thought. Had he already came that far? Was the thought of killing another man suddenly so appealing to him? »Do you have any idea where Church has gone too anyway?« Kanen'tó:kon then asked and it was nothing more than a silent agreement to Connor's proposal before.

»No.« Connor admitted, before he laid his left hand down on Fenris’ head, maybe even to calm himself down more than he really liked to admit. He would have killed Kanen'tó:kon, if the man would have kept his silence for a second longer and that thought suddenly scared him more than he was ready to admit. He would have done it without batting a lash. Fenris gave a small, almost reassuring whimper as if he would know what his companion was going through. »But I can track him. I have always been better at tracking and hunting than you.«

Finding Church had proven to be much more difficult than he had thought it would be. He had not thought it to be too easy of course, after all, he knew the old fox quite well and he knew at least some of his tricks, though of course, he would not tell Kanen'tó:kon about them. Their collaboration had been a weird trip for Connor - weirder than he would have assumed after knowing that man all his life. After Connor had managed to track down one of Benjamin's helpers with the help of his wolf Fenris, it had become clear to Connor how much he and Kanen'tó:kon differed from each other and how much different their training must have been in the last years.

His own father was a violent man, this was no secret to Connor and he knew that his father would never waste his time with witnesses or people that had already told him everything he wanted to hear. More than once, Connor had witnessed his father cleanly killing a man after he had spilled the needed information. Connor, however, was different. He could not do something like this so easily and cold-blooded, Kanen'tó:kon, however, seemed very well able to do as his father would have done in a situation as theirs. »We should not waste our time with useless information.« He had grunted as he had retracted his hidden blade from the throat of the man they had found down the road. His cart had been stuck in the snow and his horse too tired to carry on pulling it, but the stolen supplies had not been on it. A failure, but not the end of their little manhunt.

The information the stranger had spilled before Kanen'tó:kon had ended his life unnecessarily had led them to a small camp north from the abandoned church where they usually discharged their cargo apparently. The moment Kanen'tó:kon had killed the man without even batting a lash,
spilling blood from the stranger’s artery all over Connor's clothes, had been enough to tell the young Kenway that this whole mission and collaboration of theirs would not find a good end.

He was aware that at least a tiny part of him had made the mistake to see in Kanen'tó:kon still his chubby friend from the village, the boy he had played with all his life, the boy whose family had helped raising him after his mother's death and with whom he had spent almost entire days without anyone else around. Kanen'tó:kon had never been able to even hit a fly when they were children and when they had reached adolescence he had been a bad hunter and an even worse fisher until Connor had shown him out it worked. Unlike Kanen'tó:kon, he had never really had any problem with spilling blood, at least the blood of animals, but he had never killed without reason and never without feeling at least slightly guilty and in the case of the animals thankful for their sacrifice, even though they had not given their lives willingly. While he had grown up to become a man who still disliked killing if it was unnecessary, Kanen'tó:kon seemed to have no problem with killing whatsoever. He was no longer the chubby innocent boy one could easily underestimate. He was a killer, he was an Assassin. Killing was his profession and even though Connor had known this for quite some time now, it had never been clearer than when he had killed the stranger. Someday they would meet and then one of them would kill the other. He had known this before, but this one moment cemented this knowledge into his head and forced him to always keep it in mind with every step he would take.

When Kanen'tó:kon had decided they should split up and try to gather information without the other one around in hopes of being able to find out more than if they would stay together, Connor had originally protested, but then he had resigned and left together with Fenris in search for the camp. It had not taken them long to find the camp, thanks to Fenris’ good nose, but had he first only suspected that this day could only get worse than it became clear the moment he was caught lurking around the bushes. Well, if he would get to tell his father the tale of how those idiots had managed to grab him and drag him into camp, his father would probably demand an answer as to how it was possible for a young man accompanied by an overprotective young wolf to be captured like this without his capturers getting bitten by said wolf - and he would be in the right to ask such a question, how Connor mused as he indeed was dragged through the snow without resistance.

Well, snooping around the campsite and trying to infiltrate it had not gone as planned, which was the polite way of saying that he had fucked up big time. Maybe it was because he had been so occupied with his inner turmoil and conflict about working together with his childhood friend or the realization that he would indeed have to kill said childhood friend if he did not want Kanen'tó:kon to kill him first. Maybe it was the shock of seeing his chubby innocent best friend suddenly murdering someone as if it meant nothing, or the thought that he should not be as thin-skinned and sensitive about it. His father would have done the same and maybe he should think like they did. Maybe it was all of this which had led Connor ultimately to become a little too reckless and unheeding as he and Fenris had reached the campsite.

The bushes had been high enough for him to easily hide in them and unlike his own father he had grown up in the woods and he still knew how to move silently through the underwood. He would have climbed a tree, but he had not liked the thought of leaving Fenris behind on the ground, other than this his wolf was still young and he still started howling or whining whenever Connor would be out of reach. Well … Fenris was indeed quite protective and he indeed could not stand it whenever Connor would vanish from his sight, but as he had seen a hare nearby the spot they were hiding in the bushes, Fenris had suddenly jumped up and bolted away into the forest. His father would have probably said something along the lines of Fenris being a wild animal and that it was his nature, but still Connor cursed under his breath, worried that this idiot furball would not find his way back to him - or he would and would betray Connor's position with his barking.

It did not come to this, because the moment he had decided to get a little closer, there had suddenly
been hands grabbing him from behind and dragging him to his feet. Of course, this was not a story that would satisfy his father, Connor mused as he was thrown to his knees into the snow in the middle of the camp near a river bank. »Look what we’ve found!« One of the two men who had grabbed him snarled. He was still holding his arms in a tight grip and even though Connor could have probably fended them off (or at least that was what he wanted to tell himself) he did not even try. First, he had started a fight with them, but then he had thought that he might be able to get more out of them if he would just play along. After all, Kanen'tó:kon was still around somewhere - or at least he hoped he was, because the moment he was dragged in front of the man who seemed to be in charge Connor felt cold sweat creeping over his backside like a virus. Suddenly he did not feel as if he would be able to fend those men off, suddenly he was back in Bridewell again.

»He was creepin’ ‘round the camp all suspicious-like.« He forced himself to stay focused, to stay here in the reality, to not go back to Bridewell, to not think about the hands that had pushed him down, to not think about Hickey. Hickey’s cold, dead hand was dangling right in front of his face and in the next moment he could feel it against his nose and his forehead.

»Must be a yank’ spy!«

Connor nearly vomited as the man in charge finally came into his field of vision, as he leaned down enough to be on eye-level with his captive. He was a pale white man with stubbly cheeks and deep lying, colorless eyes like a fish. They were all wearing the same worn down sort of clothes, thick coats and heavy boots, but this man Connor could recognize and he knew that he had sometimes seen him with Benjamin. Behind the man’s broad shoulders Connor was able to see the roofs of a few beige tents strewn all over the glade between the riverbank and the tree line. How many more men were at camp, he wondered, as the nameless man started to speak.

»No.« The man suddenly interrupted his comrades with a gesture of his hand as he stared with his dead eyes into Connor's face, eying him up like a cat preying on a mouse, while Connor still tried to remember if he had ever heard Benjamin speaking the name of this man. On the same time, he felt his whole stomach clench and revolt as the man opened his mouth once again and Connor could smell his foul breath right on his face and see the few rotten teeth that remained in his mouth still. »He’s something else. Something special. Isn't that right, Mr. Kenway junior?« The mockery of the pet name he had been given by some of their acquaintances was dripping from his voice like acid ready to burn holes into the ground, but Connor tried not to flinch as he was grabbed by the chin or when his face was turned to the sides, up and down as if the man wanted to make sure that he had the right half-breed captured like this. He thought about Hickey’s dead eyes staring at him while he was being pushed closer to the bed and he could feel the acid burning in his throat.

»Church told me all about you.«

He needed to focus, but it was impossible. He needed to stay in the present, but it was the hardest task he had ever faced. He could not stay here. He felt like he was being dragged back into that cell again and he tried to cling to reality desperately, but it did not seem to work. The stranger’s words burnt themselves into his mind like wildfire and the hands of the men holding him down seemed to always grow hotter on his skin beneath the clothes. Church had told him all about Connor. That man had been a helper of Church. He knew. Connor could sense it. He could see it in the way the man looked at him, eyed him for any sign of weakness. He knew. Ben had not kept his mouth shut. This man knew. How many of them knew the truth? Had he laughed about Connor behind closed doors? Had he blurted out the truth about Connor Kenway over a pint at the Green Dragon maybe? He felt sick, he felt numb all at once and he could not even breathe in air properly any longer. Still, he could hear his own voice answering back at the man, but he briefly thought that he sounded a whole lot more like his father would sound. »Then you should know better than this.«
The following punch hit him right in the jaw on the left side of his face and came as a surprise, but also managed to pull him back to reality once more and away from the dingy, dirty cell, away from his friend Thomas, dead on that bed. »You’re not really in a position to be makin’ threats are ya?« The man growled and nearly poked his left eye out the way he was pointing his dirty finger at him. Connor snarled as he looked at him, but as he did, he was able to make out the beak of a white hood somewhere in the bushes behind the man.

»Not yet.« Connor spat with a grin, but the next punch managed to throw him off balance and into the snow. It was worth it, Connor thought. Kanen'tó:kon still had his back, he had not abandoned him. A small comfort during this horror he himself was conjuring up from the depths of his mind without any chance to fight them properly.

»Here’s what we’re goin’ to do, lad.« The man snarled as Connor was being dragged up again. »We wrap you up real nice and safe - Wouldn't want you to get hurt, right? - And then we send Daddy a lil’ letter, how about that? Surely, Mister Kenway senior will fork out a nice bit of cash for his only child, right? Maybe we send him one of your ears to underline the claim. Or your cock, maybe? I've heard you would not need that thing anyway.«

There was a noise behind him, a pained moan and then shortly thereafter another. The hands that had held him were suddenly gone. Before he even managed to get back to his legs he heard a loud growl and in a flash of gray fur Fenris jumped the man in front of him. It all happened so fast that Connor had not been able to see anything at all. He could only watch how the leader of that group of thugs went down screaming in agony as Fenris ripped him apart with not the hint of stopping now that his owner was seemingly safe. He could barely hear a few shouts in the distance and only when silence fell upon the camp again Connor managed to get back to his feet.

»You look like a dead man walking.« Kanen'tó:kon's voice sounded from the tree line, before Connor could even see his old friend approaching and he watched in a moment of confusion as Kanen'tó:kon came closer only to pull his throwing knives out of the throats of the men he had hit with them.

»You are a good shot.« Connor finally found his voice again as he congratulated Kanen'tó:kon to his success, leaving out the part where his old friend had rescued him from those men as if he would be nothing more than a damsel in distress. Fenris’ gray fur was stained with blood as he finally let go of the man in the snow and Connor found himself trying to avoid even looking at the ghastly wounds the wolf had inflicted upon him. Instead, he buried his fingers in the fur of Fenris’ head and patted him slightly. The wolf gently nuzzled his nose against the wet fabric of Connor's trousers in return.

»Well, you certainly looked like you could need some help I guess. Or wait, is it like back in the village? Let me guess, you did this on purpose, am I right, Ratonhnhaké:ton?« A smirk was playing on the Assassin’s lips and even though only moments ago Connor had felt like vomiting into the snow, he tried his best to play along and pull himself back together, while on the same instant he wondered what Kanen'tó:kon might have had heard and what he had gotten from this little conversation.

It seemed impossible to ever forget Bridewell - or the night in the forest and Washington. It was frustrating how those memories tended to come right back at him, the moment he started to find purpose and a sense of power over his own life again. Those voyages with Shay, the hunt for Kidd’s treasure, had helped him more than his father might even suspect. Out there he had been able to leave everything behind and just be himself, maybe even free for once. Out on the see he had not once had been plagued by a nightmare and not once he had felt the hands of phantoms all over his body like slugs crawling over his naked skin in the darkness, unable to move or do
anything about it. He was tall, taller even than his father even though not by much. He was strong and muscular in build. People on the streets looked at him funny and in suspicion when he would walk past and yet he was reduced to nothing more than a small child trembling in fear as soon as he would hear a comment aimed at him or see a face that would remind him of the horrors he had suffered through. He could not stand being held down. He could not abide having someone holding or tying his hands together. A part of him wondered if this was ever going to change.

»Yes.« He replied and forced his own face into a smirk. »I thought it might be best to test out what you are capable of, just to see what I’m dealing with, you know.«

Kanen’tó:kon patted his shoulder in a way he would have done back when they had been children still and Connor did his best not to flinch under the unwelcome and unwanted touch, no matter how shortly it lingered. »And of course you got captured on purpose, so that you would get more information out of those men.«

»No, that actually was Fenris’ fault.« Connor then chuckled as his wolf stared at him in disbelieve with wide blue eyes. »He saw a hare and forgot all about being sneaky and silent.«

»I guess he has a long way to go until he will have learned how to be a real Templar.«

»It seems like it. But he is still a pup, so he is forgiven for this little misstep.« Connor smirked before he took another look around. There was no sign of life around the camp now anymore. He did not know how many more men there had been roaming around between the several large tents and carts, but now it seemed they were all dead. Maybe a part of him was even a little bit impressed by Kanen’tó:kon's skills. »So, I hope at least you managed to find out something while I got myself captured like a little girl.«

»New York.« Kanen’tó:kon was quick to reply. »I was able to eavesdrop on a few of the men before. Apparently, Church is hiding in a brewery near the harbor in New York to escape going back to jail.«

»New York.« Connor repeated quietly. Since Bridewell he had avoided that town as best he could, though of course, he had been there a few times since, not only the one time he should have stolen a letter from a traitor and ended up slaughtering Finch. But especially after that murder on Finch, Connor felt a shiver running down his spine to even think about visiting New York again. »New York it is then.« He could feel Kanen’tó:kon's eyes resting upon his face in confusion, as he most likely sensed his old friend's distress at the mere thought of going to New York, but whatever Kanen’tó:kon was thinking about this, he would not say anything. Maybe, Connor wondered, he thought it was because Connor would still fear being recognized there after his failed execution – and Connor would not correct him, if it meant he would never have to discuss Bridewell ever again with anyone.

He had not forgotten about the little discussion he had had with his father after the murder of Finch. They had talked the whole night, which was rather unusual for them. They had talked about Bridewell and about the plantation, for the first time in earnest maybe. Connor had told him the things he had seen, heard, and experienced himself and his father had just sat by the fire and listened to him silently with a face Connor had never known he would be able to make. They had never spoken about it again afterwards and Connor was glad about it. Maybe talking about certain things helped, or that was what some people wanted to make him believe, but it was not the truth for him. He just wanted to forget and he wanted revenge.

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Connor had only directed a small letter to his father as he had shortly dropped by on his way to
New York if only to leave Fenris at the house, hoping that his father or maybe even Shay would take care of him. No matter how much Connor loved to have the wolf beside him during his little adventures, since he did not know what was lying ahead of him in New York, he had thought it might be best to leave him home. His father had not been there when he had come home to change clothes and grab a few things for the journey to New York. This was nothing unusual of course and yet he had slightly hoped to see his father before he would be gone again, maybe so he could even talk to him. Since he had left the camp behind and went back to Boston, he had felt the unusual urge and need to talk to his father, even though for once Connor had not even known about what he had wanted to talk to him.

Finding out more about the brewery Ben was seemingly hiding in had not been hard and finding the right brewery had been similarly easy - finding a way in however had not that easy. It had been days since he and Kanen'tó:kon had split up again with the promise of meeting at the harbor in New York as soon as possible and Connor had spent the last two days observing the area surrounding the brewery, the people that were coming and going and if he could make out any sign of activity of Benjamin Church. It had been hard to tell if Benjamin was still hiding there, but after two days at least Connor had been able to make out a pattern in movement and activity surrounding the building. If Benjamin was still in that building he was doing a very thorough job of not getting noticed or seen by anyone, but at least Connor managed to hear rumors around the area of him being there. It was not much, but it had to suffice for once and when the night of their infiltration finally came he had been prepared for meeting Benjamin and for executing his father's order.

He had not been prepared for fire.
The information I managed to gain leads me to New York. Rumor has it that Benjamin Church is hiding in a brewery near the harbor. I will investigate this further.

As Haytham threw the parchment into the crackling fire in his sitting room and leaned back further into the armchair his son usually liked to occupy, he wondered if this was how Achilles might have felt all those years ago. Over sixteen years ago, he had helped Shay to destroy Achilles’ little brotherhood and now, so many years later, the Templar Order found itself in the very same predicament and only because of a moment of weakness - or mercy, how Shay would call it. He knew that even now, Shay did not regret having spared his former mentor’s life, even though it might have been the more merciful thing to do back then. Now they were the ones who were being hunted down by an assassin who wanted to make up for the deeds the Templars had committed against them in the past. It was an endless war indeed - an endless spiral only leading them into devastation and darkness. It seemed that, at the end of the road, only sorrow was awaiting all of them.

He had found the letter on his desk in the study, written in Connor's hasty and a little messy handwriting. He had used Haytham's paper and Haytham's quill and ink to quickly scribble down the message for his father. Fenris had followed him from the moment he had entered the house and was now lying in peaceful slumber near the fire, though he was probably missing his owner. Only five of them were left now. Three of them were already gone and it did not seem like this Assassin was getting weaker. If anything, he was building up that wretched brotherhood again. Haytham had heard rumors about that man recruiting rogues from the streets of Boston and New York. He had been out investigating those rumors as Connor must have gotten home. A part of him cursed this awful curiosity of his for not being here to greet his son or at least to see him before he would have been off again. Maybe he would have even decided to join Connor on this journey. But, he guessed, this was the father speaking and not the Grand Master of the colonial Templar Order. Then again, he was not very good at being the Grand Master of this order. Reginald had been a whole lot different than him in many ways. He had been more the man to order other people around, but he had hardly gotten his own hands dirty. Haytham liked joining in on the action, unlike his former mentor. But the truth was also that he was not getting younger. His hair was getting grayer with each day and the old wound in his side ached more with every day that passed. He envied Connor's agility and strength, to be honest. Other than this, it would not have been good for him to join Connor on this mission. It would not have been good for Connor or their relationship - but the most damning it would have been for Haytham's reputation among the order. It was true that there were already voices being raised claiming he had grown soft since he had Connor by his side. If Connor would not be his son, he would have never even contemplated joining him on this, let alone worried about the outcome. Connor was an adult now, a grown man and a Templar.

But, and maybe that way he could explain his worries to the most satisfaction, he was on a journey with an Assassin, even though Connor had kept this a secret in his letter. He was not sure if his son was still so very naive as to think his father would not know already about that unholy alliance or if
he was indeed aware and had chosen not to mention it because he was aware that his father already knew. No matter which it was, it made him uneasy. Connor was not dumb, but he was still terribly naive and he would surely try to get this man on his side, so he would not have to kill a friend. He would learn the hard way how tragic those things tended to end.

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Getting into the brewery had proven to not be as easy as he had first thought. Church had interchanged the guards at the front gate, which was not so much of a problem for Connor, as he would have no problem to get inside anyway, but Kanen'to:kon was a whole other story in this matter. First, Kanen'to:kon had proposed to go search for another guard and steal his clothes, but Connor was quick to stop his old friend because he had already known that even if Kanen'to:kon would dress up like a guard they would raise questions - questions Connor was not willing to answer. He was not a very good liar and he had not wished to test out his abilities right then and there.

In the end he had decided to distract the guards as he had stepped in front of them and told them the password - not without getting ridiculed for his heritage of course, but by now he was used to this anyway - and before they had even known what was happening to them, they had been dead. Kanen'to:kon really was a good shot - maybe one of the best Connor had ever seen even, and they both had been quick to dispose of the bodies before someone would notice the murder. After this little incident, it had been no problem for them to get in, only to be stopped by yet another locked door, but this too had not proven to be of much hindrance, after all, Connor was skilled enough when it came to lock picking after years of training and living with his father. He could still very much recall the lessons his father had taught him vividly. One winter morning a few years ago, his father had decided it would be the best way to teach his son a lesson in lock picking when he would just hide all of his son’s breeches in his chest, lock them in and hide the key as well.

Needless to say that Connor had cursed his father with chattering teeth and a fiery red face while he had fought that damned lock for hours with Susie giggling somewhere in the background, as she had tried not to be caught gawking at the half naked boy in the house.

Maybe he should have known right from the start that all of this had been too easy. Maybe he should have known that this was a trap and that he had once again stepped right into it like a complete fool. However, as his world was suddenly ablaze Connor was shaken by the memories of the burning village, of the screams and the soldiers. It was only Kanen'to:kon who managed to get him out of his stupor as he pulled him by the arm.

They were both bloody and exhausted after their fight with the soldiers, but pausing now to catch his breath would be one deadly mistake to make, so Connor ran after Kanen'to:kon without thinking twice. I should have known, Connor thought as he climbed up one of the large wooden crates just to use a piece of broken down flooring as a ramp to the next level of the building, so he could escape the inferno beneath his feet - glad that he had indeed left Fenris home for this. As they had entered the brewery they had found what had appeared to be Ben Church alone at first. He had been standing with his back to them, but even in the moment Connor had started to talk to him, he had already known that something was simply not right at all. His whole posture had not felt right to Connor after years of working with Ben. And yet he had stepped closer, thinking that maybe Church was exhausted or maybe even afraid of his impending death after he seemed to have known about the Assassin at his tails - and Connor. He had felt his anger vanish for a second at this thought, but this fleeting feeling had quickly vanished the moment the man had turned around and revealed the trap. There had been half a dozen of armed men just waiting in the shadows for him and Kanen'to:kon to finish them off.
They had been terribly outnumbered, of course, but they had still managed to fight them off and even got the much-needed information of the man that had been posing as good old Benjamin. Had his anger at Ben not been raised before, it would have been then. Not only had Benjamin betrayed the Templar Order, he had also wanted to kill him and for that, he would bleed. There would be no merciful death for this wicked man, not after everything he had done, not after he had blurted out Connor's darkest secrets to who knows how many people! It had not been his wish to kill the imposter, but Kanen'tó:kon had once again portrayed the same ruthlessness he had shown to possess in the forest. He could not know if the two shooters would have fired shots at them if Kanen'tó:kon would not have killed the imposter after spilling the beans or if they could have taken him hostage to get out of the brewery unscathed, but when the shots had been fired he had only been able to pull Kanen'tó:kon out of the line of fire and only later realized that they had not even been aiming for them.

Now it was hard to breathe through the thick cloud of smoke and seeing where he was running and stumbling became almost an impossible task. He could not hear Kanen'tó:kon any longer, but he thought that the Assassin was probably already either outside or at least close to escaping the burning building while Connor was fighting through the smoke and the flames licking at his skin when he came to close. Visions of his mother filled his mind again and again as he was coughing and climbing. He needed to get out through one of the windows, he thought, or at least he needed to follow Kanen'tó:kon in the direction he had gone. He did not question if Kanen'tó:kon maybe knew a way out, but following him seemed like the most logical thing to do right now as he could hardly think over the screams in his head.

Suddenly he was able to hear voices again, an argument maybe, but it really was almost impossible to make out proper words. All around him, the building was starting to collapse as wooden beams broke off and ripped away the floorboards of the upper levels of the building and Connor managed to jump over holes, sometimes just with sheer luck. He could hear the voices clearer now. It was clearly Kanen'tó:kon fighting with the shooters perhaps. They were right above him. Just as Connor dragged himself up to the level where his former friend was, there was a loud noise as one of the large wooden beams that were supporting the roof broke and smashed into the floorboards beneath, crushing one of the soldiers and throwing the other into the arms of death. For a split second, Connor was certain that Kanen'tó:kon too was dead, but as he finally got his orientation back he found him hanging from the hole the wooden bar had produced. He was not able to hoist himself up as he was clawing at a wooden beam with all the strength he had left.

For this one moment, as Connor stood above the hole and looked down on his old friend, he thought about letting him fall. If he was his father, he would do exactly that, he mused. This now was the perfect opportunity to rid himself of his enemy. Kanen'tó:kon was the main thing standing between him and his revenge on Washington, because as long as Kanen'tó:kon would be alive, he would not allow Connor to kill off his beloved Commander in chief and instead he would continue to kill off the Templars, one by one, robbing Connor of his new found family once again.

If he would decide not to help Kanen'tó:kon, his friend would fall and die, there was no question about it. It was so easy, he just had to walk away. He just had to turn his back on Kanen'tó:kon as his friend had done so many, many years ago without ever looking back to see if Connor was alright. He thought about Washington's men raiding the village as Kanen'tó:kon had been gone already. He could not help but to think back how they had killed all the villagers, how they raped the women in front of their kids as if it meant nothing, how they slaughtered the children as if it meant nothing, just because they were too weak and small to be of any worth. He would never forget those images he had seen back when he himself had only been a child not older than thirteen, wounded and confused and lucky to not get killed. Lucky, what a joke that was.

All of this had not been Kanen'tó:kon's fault and yet he was supporting the man who had ordered
all of this, he supported a man who had held his former best friend as a slave for three years, who had done the most gruesome things to him and others. His back was itching as it so often did whenever he would make the mistake of thinking about the plantation. He should let him fall.

As he looked down in Kanen'tó:kon's brown eyes, he could see that this one second of hesitation had been enough for Kanen'tó:kon to notice that he indeed was hesitating. He saw it in Kanen'tó:kon's eyes, the sudden fear that Connor would let him fall. »Ratonhnhaké:ton, come on!« Kanen'tó:kon cursed, but no matter how angry he tried to sound, he could not betray the slight tremor in his voice either.

He should let him fall and yet Connor awoke from his stupor and hurled him up into safety - for now. »Niá:wen.« Kanen'tó:kon coughed as he straightened his posture again and looked around. They were now pretty much cut off with nowhere to go to. The windows were too far away for them to jump or climb too, and the flames were starting to eat up the entire building slowly but surely. Only a large wooden gate on the northern side of the building, where they stood on the last remaining intact piece of flooring, was a possible way out, but it was blocked with a large wooden bar and a lock holding the bar in place, as Kanen'tó:kon found out a moment later. »Stuck« He remarked. »Maybe we can find something to pry it open.«

But Connor already knew what they had to do. It would not be the first time that he would run in doors for sure and there was no time left to try any find anything to pry open that door either. On the other side of that gate had to be the inner harbor, if his sense of orientation had not failed him, after all, he had used the last couple of days to check out the location.

»Ratonhnhaké:ton, what are you doing?« Kanen'tó:kon did not sound afraid as he turned towards him and one look of Connor into his friend's eyes seemed to suffice for the other indigenous man to understand his maybe a little idiotic plan.

»What does it look like?« Connor grunted as he resisted the urge to try and imagine how this situation would look like if it would be his father instead of his friend.

»We don't know what's on the other side.« Kanen'tó:kon helpfully provided, but Connor only cocked his left eyebrow at that. Yes, the fire was scaring the living shit out of him, as Hickey would have framed it so fittingly, but oddly enough, after this fight and during all this chaos, he had not felt that alive in a long time now. He felt the adrenaline rushing through his system like lightning. Right now he did not need to think about the gruesome things that had happened to him. Right now nothing of this was important or needed thinking.

»Then let's find out.«

Together they were strong enough to break through the gate at once. He would have been able to do so alone probably too, but two bodies slamming into the wood was always better than just one. After a moment of hesitation, Kanen'tó:kon had joined him as Connor had walked back to the edge of the ledge before they ran straight at the door and slammed into the wood. Connor put all his weight into the hit as he slammed his left shoulder into the door and it worked - to his relief.

The fall was short and ended - to Connor's immense relief - in a loud splash as they fell right into the waters of the inner harbor of New York. He was swallowed by the icy waves after he fell into the water and for the moment being he felt oddly at peace with the water pulling him into a tight embrace and blocking out every sound and sense other than the coldness of the water itself, but then he broke the surface again and the magic was gone at once, while his blood was still burning and boiling in his veins. The world had him back.

»Well, now we know.« Connor coughed as they slowly swam towards one of the docks to climb
out of the water again. It was freezing out in the cold air of January. Well, maybe this had not been his best idea, but at least they were safe now while the brewery was slowly collapsing in itself like a house of cards during a storm. He could only hope that the fire would not flash over to the neighboring buildings because otherwise a catastrophe was bound to happen.

»I'm glad that my old friend is still somewhere inside of that dressed up fancy Templar.« Kanen'tô:kon laughed as he wrung out his white and blue coattails and for a second Connor was tempted to join in, but the latest events still clung to him and made him somewhat unable to let go of those phantoms in his head too easily. »Anyway, if it's true what this man said, Church has already at least a day on us, if he really bought passage on board of that ship. We must act quickly now, Ratohnnhaké:ton, if we want to catch him and bring back the supplies in time before the soldiers start rioting.« Connor suppressed the urge to say that he would have nothing against the soldiers rioting against Washington, but bringing back the supplies was in his mind also.

»I have a ship we can use.« Connor replied swiftly, even though a part of him felt uneasy to tell Kanen'tô:kon about the Aquila. The Aquila was the one place he could be free after all, where he could ease his mind and properly sort out everything. Shay would not be happy to welcome an Assassin on board of that ship either. Maybe he should not tell Shay and just take Gist. Still, inviting Kanen'tô:kon felt like tainting his ship with the troubles he needed to suffer through. »Meet me on the pier in Boston when you're ready.«

The news of the big fire at the New York harbor quickly spread out over the borders of New York and reached Boston at the same time Connor reached Boston too. He arrived in the middle of the night near his home and while the snow was silently falling around him to slowly cover up the streets, he found himself looking up to the window of his father's bedroom, right next to his. He could see the glow of a candle or at least that was what he thought he saw, maybe even what he wanted to see. For just a brief moment, he wondered if his father might appear in the window with his candle in hand to have a look outside, maybe even sensing his son’s presence outside, but nothing like this happened and Connor turned to walk ahead. He had no time to go inside and maybe meet his father or Fenris, no matter how much he would have liked to. They had already lost too much time with traveling between New York and Boston, but the Aquila was fast and the destination clear. Martinique it was, and he needed to prepare his ship.

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There were certain things Charles would not have expected he would ever get to see or do in his life. He would have never thought when all of this had begun so many years ago, that he would see the Templar Order crumble as much as it did in the past few months and all of this just because one young Assassin thought that they had no right to live. Just because one young Assassin could not agree with their morals or plans for the colonies, all for which they had been working for over twenty years started to break apart. Their interests were not that far off from each other and yet the Assassin chose the blade over the pen. They could have maybe even worked together in this war of independence as it might be called one day in the history books. Together they might have been able to achieve more good for this New World than they could ever do alone.

And now Benjamin Church was dead. From their original core group only he and Haytham were left now - and the boy of course. The boy, who would one day most certainly succeed his father. Of course, Connor did not want to hear any of this, or at least that was what he wanted everyone to believe. Charles was not too sure about his motives and if he was really as averse of this possibility as he tried to act. Charles knew Haytham well enough to know that his old friend found this possibility very appealing for certain. Of course, he did. Which father would not want to hand over the mantle to his own son? Haytham would be proud if Connor would follow in his footsteps and even Charles had to admit, that maybe the boy would be able to make a decent job - one day.
He still felt bitter about Benjamin’s betrayal, maybe even more so than he liked to admit and he knew that he was not alone with this either. But of all people in their shrinking group, Benjamin’s death and betrayal seemed to have had the most impact on the young Mr. Kenway, which seemed odd at least to Charles.

It was sheer luck that he walked into that tavern on this particular night. He was in need of a room before he would leave again for the battlefield. He had to say, that being the hero for once, was a nice change of tone in his military career. The boy had done a good job in bringing back the supplies and leaving it to him to bring them to Valley Forge where the soldiers were already at their wit’s ends because of their dire situation and shrinking supplies. Washington’s position among his soldiers was weakened now, and though that did not yet make him, Charles Lee, the new Commander in Chief instead of good old George (as Hickey would have said), at least it brought him a little closer to his goals for certain. Washington would lose his next battle. It was only a matter of time now when the battle of Mount Monmouth would finally erupt and Charles would make sure that Washington would lose this one too. The superiors would surely change their minds then.

He had arrived at New York harbor just a few minutes, maybe half an hour, ago and since he did not wish to bother any of his friends, for now, he had chosen the first tavern he stumbled across to rent a room for the night, have something nice to eat and maybe a warm ale afterwards. Well, that had been his plan at least. Because, after he had entered the tavern it had become all too clear that his plans would not see their fulfillment tonight. He had just walked up to the barmaid to ask for a room, as he grew more and more aware of the weird atmosphere inside the tavern and it did not take long for him to find the source for this. There were more than just a few of the sailors whispering or talking in hushed voices about something or someone, throwing nervous glances at one corner of the tavern and as Charles' followed their looks, he could almost not believe his eyes. Connor Kenway looked horrible. He had seen the young man in bad shape before, god knew that was true. Five years and he had more than once seen the boy beaten to a bloody pulp or worse, but this time, something about Connor was different.

He had not seen Connor at the designated area where the boy had left the supplies for him a few days ago after he had brought them back from Martinique. They had just been there for him to take, but no trace of the young Templar. Of course, Charles had written about that to Haytham immediately, foaming about the boy’s recklessness after he had needed to risk so much to get those supplies in the first place. However, now he could see why the kid had decided not to show his face around and why he had not gone home to report to his father - his Grand Master - as he should have.

His nose looked like it was broken, his ridiculously long hair hung loosely and wild in his face. He looked as if he had not washed his hair or himself in weeks. A deep cut was disfiguring the left side of his jaw as if he had been sliced with a knife quite badly for it just having been an accident maybe. He looked pale, but not as if he would be in pain. The dark circles underneath his brown eyes were quite telling of the sleep deprivation he seemed to experience and his dark brown eyes itself just stared blankly and dull into the void. It was impossible to say what he had on his mind in that moment and Charles for once did not know what he was supposed to do.

It was true that he and the boy had never been close, let alone friends. Connor was getting along quite good with Shay and Gist, he had even been friends with Thomas! But him? No. Well, Charles could hardly blame him. It was true that Charles had choked him when the boy had only been four years old, after all. The boy had all the right to hate his guts, especially after Charles had seen him on Washington's plantation all those years ago and never said a word.
It was not like he was a cruel, unfeeling bastard. The image of Connor as he had been when Haytham had brought him home, was still haunting him to that day. He could remember still the moment Haytham and he had run into his room to pick him up from the floor as the boy had been on the brink of death already from fever and infection, all caused by the gruesome wounds Washington had inflicted upon his frail body. He could still see that ugly cross burned into the skin of the young boy’s back every time he closed his eyes, and it was true that he felt guilty for this. If he had opened up to Haytham the moment he had learned about Connor’s existence, the boy’s life would not have been as dark and horrible as it had been. He was the one to blame for that, and that was something Charles could accept. There was no way he would ever be able to make up for this or even redeem himself, let alone to earn Connor’s forgiveness - and with that, he had to live.

It was also true that he had thrived seeing the boy grow after he had been united with his father finally. He had enjoyed seeing him grow stronger and not crumble and break because of the hardships he had been forced to endure. Now, however, Charles was not so sure about that anymore.

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Thomas was dead. William was dead. John was dead. Benjamin was dead. Kanen'tó:kon was dead.

Thomas had been his friend. He had been a loud mouthy idiot, he had been a brute, a thug, and a lame duck, but he had still been his friend, no matter the troubles he had often managed to get Connor into. William had been his friend. He had been a great man, a thoughtful person and he had always had the best in mind not only for himself but people like Connor as well. John had been his friend, even though they had rarely talked, but he had learned a lot from him when it came to military strategy and John had even taken him along from time to time to teach him battle strategies. Benjamin … He had trusted him. Benjamin had seen him literally at his worst. He had seen every inch of his body and every little scar or injury scattered across his skin. He had trusted him, but Benjamin had betrayed him. And not only that, but he had also told his men every ever so dark little secret he had known about the Kenways. He had sprayed his venom and he had not cared of the hurt he would inflict on the young man he had aided in the past five years.

His betrayal had weight heavily on his shoulders for certain, but Kanen'tó:kon …

»Your father is in search of you.« He did not even listen to the deep voice that was laced with an even thicker British accent than his father possessed, even though Connor had never thought this to be possible. Charles Lee. Of all people, Charles Lee had to be the one person to find him out here. It would have been almost comical if the situation was not so dark and gloom.

»I don't care.« Connor heard himself muttering, but his voice was thick and heavy and hoarse. Speaking felt weird to him and his tongue had a hard time moving. He did not wish to look at Charles, let alone to get up from his spot in the corner of the tavern. He much rather kept watching his breath fogging the glass in front of him on the table. He had never liked drinking, but now he began to start seeing the appeal ale had to some men. It helped, he mused. It dulled his senses and it made it harder for the memories to come back and haunt him.

»Well, you know, normally I would not care either, boy, but now that I have stumbled over you out here, I find myself in quite the predicament, actually. I could, of course, walk away as if I had never seen you here and go about my duties as I originally wanted to do, but what if you will drink yourself to death then? Or what if you will pick a fight and die? I tell you something, Connor, if I would lie to your father he would find out eventually and if I could have prevented your death it's my head on the chopping block. And I actually do like my head where it is.«

»I don't care.«
>No, of course, you don't.« Charles sighed and Connor almost expected him to walk off - not to leave, just to walk off and let him be. He wanted to go back to his sullen solitude. Instead, the next thing he heard was the scraping sound as a chair was being dragged closer and then he saw Lee sitting down out of the corner of his left eye. Even moving his eyes hurt. >But I do, actually.«

Connor snorted. >Yeah, of course, you do.« He managed to get out, despite his heavy tongue. >You only sit here because I brought you those supplies and all of this bullshit.«

>True.« At least he was honest. >I thought you didn't drink.«

>I don't.«

>Then it's tea in front of you I would assume?«

>It's none of your business. You people always wanted me to drink, now I drink and it's not right either.«

>Thomas wanted you to drink.« Hearing Thom's name from Lee did not feel right, somehow. He could have done more to prevent his death. He could have been cleverer. He should have been cleverer. He had thought himself to be such a great asset to the Order! Not yet twenty-one years old and already a member of the colonial Templar Order, he, Connor Kenway! Oh, he had thought to be so clever and so skilled and he had not even managed to see the trap that had been set up for him! He had not even been able to save his friend! He had reaped what he had sown. >I would normally never question your choice in that matter and clearly I can't name a single man - except for you - who denies a good ale in the evening after a hard day of work, but it's really the reason why you are drinking, here of all places, that concerns me a little.«

_Here of all places_, was a dingy little tavern near the New York harbor where sailors and other folks would be found in the evening hours, just like now. It was not a place his father or Charles would usually frequent. Shay or Gist maybe - but not them and most certainly not Connor of all people. Yet he was here. He had not gone home after they had discharged the cargo at the designated location for Lee to take and bring back to Valley Forge to play the hero. That had been a week ago actually if Connor had not already lost track of time.

He had not spent his time drinking since then, no, of course not. Drinking he had only started tonight actually after he had not slept in days. He did not wish to go home. He did not wish to face his father - or really anyone.

> I just wish to say that drinking out of sorrow or stress is never a healthy thing to do, boy. Your father is worried for you since you haven't gone home yet. At the very least you should report about the end of Church and-«

>I don't even know why I thought it would be different this time.« Connor finally broke his silence, but his voice was the most pitiful croaking sound he had ever heard and that revelation alone made him feel worse. >God damn it!« He buried his face in his hands, but he wished he had not. He wished he would be stronger. He wished Charles would not be here. Charles of all people! The man who had choked him when he had been four years old and left him alone in the forest with wild animals which could have killed him, the man who had known about him from the start but never said a word to his father! He could have helped him! He could have spared him from so much harm! »I should have known! Father told me that they would do this. He told me that Kanentó:kon would forsake me. He told me and I did not want to listen. So why am I so surprised it happened?«

For once, Charles Lee was silent, but Connor was startled all the more as Lee put a reassuring hand
on his shoulder. »We all need to get through this, Connor. We all don't like to see things as they are. So many people around us are blind for the reality of the world because the reality of things often hurts. Why do you think so many women much rather close their eyes from the adultery of their husbands and rather don’t know? Not knowing is easier, it’s less painful.«

»And what do you know about this? You know nothing!« He rose on shaking legs like a newborn deer, but he did not care. He could hardly stand Lee normally, but now? He was just sick and tired of this. He was sick of being his father’s marionette, but it seemed like he was never really free, just his master would change from time to time. He would never be anything but a slave. He had done as his father told him and now he did not know any longer what he wanted to do or how he could even think of marching forward. All seemed pointless. He was just stumbling on and on, leaving corpses down the path he was going and that path could only lead him into even greater misery. Five years had passed and Washington was still alive. And instead of killing Washington, he had lost his friends. »Just leave me be, Charles.« He growled as he stood and stumbled around his little table. He could feel that he was not at all in control of his body anymore. His legs did not listen to him and he felt like an infant making its first steps again.

Before he knew it, Charles was by his side to support him as he nearly fell over. »Come on, kid, you need to rest.« But Connor shoved him away and nearly toppled over in the process. The wound in his side hurt again and still seemed to refuse to heal. He found himself clutching his left side out of reflex and cursing under his breath, as he stumbled against a stranger. Of course, the man he had stumbled against began grunting some insult at him, but Connor was hardly able to process it anyway. He would have snarled back something, maybe started a fight, if he would have been able to focus on it. Again he felt hands on him. Charles’ hands or at least this was more logical than the thoughts he originally had as he felt the hands grabbing him.

It was hard to escape the demons in his head from time to time while sober, but now as he could hardly even stand or bring his tongue to form coherent sentences, the demons were slowly taking over for sure. He tried to fight off Charles, but in the end, he was hit in the face by a surge of cold wind as they stumbled through the door of the tavern and right into the harbor. He could smell the sea and for once, he wanted to throw up because of that very smell he had come to love in the past years. The Sea had meant freedom to him. The sea had meant so much to him. His new life had begun at sea after he had escaped Washington. He had been reborn a Kenway at sea. He had followed in his grandfather’s footsteps and he had been free for once! On board of the Aquila, out in the endless blue, there had been no one to tell him what he could and could not do. Now the sea was the grave of his best friend. The same friend who had attacked him when he had least expected him to. The same friend who had tried to slice open his throat and let him bleed to death or burn in the wreck of the Welcome right beside Benjamin. He would have taken the Aquila, maybe even killed Gist in the process. There had been no regret in Kanen'tó:kon’s eyes. There had been no doubt. Everything they had gone through had meant nothing at this moment. And he … he had killed him. He had killed the last person tying him to his village, the last memento of his roots. They were all gone now. Kanen'tó:kon and his mother and his grandmother. His whole tribe was gone. He had no home left anymore.

And all he could think of was that he wanted to visit Kanen'tó:kon's mentor and at least tell him. He did not know the man. He did not know what kind of a person he was, but he had taught Kanen'tó:kon for the last years since Kanen'tó:kon had been thirteen and now his student was gone and he probably did not even know about it. The Assassins were human too and he would probably grief the death of his student. Maybe more than Connor himself, as horrible as this thought might be to him.

»I’ll bring you back home, Connor.« The voice was too far away for him to really catch the words, but his mouth reacted nonetheless.
»No« He made, but he was slurring his words quite badly by now. »No, I don't want to go home.« He did not have a home. They were all dead and gone now. To where should he go now? Where should he turn to? It was only a matter of time now until Charles, Shay, Gist or even his own father would turn on him too. At some point, they would all turn on him and one would succeed in killing him. »Why pretend as if we’re friends, Charlie?« He then howled as he felt how Charles tried to pull him along. He had to give the man credit for managing to get him to move at all. Well, Charles was a soldier, but Connor knew that he was quite heavy. Shay was always laughing about the fact how big Connor had become and Gist was always glad to poke fun at him or at Mrs. Taylor for feeding him too well. Soon one of them would stab him in the back and a part of him could only hope that they would succeed. His father had warned him. And Connor was tired of losing people. He was tired of starting to trust someone only to get betrayed. Why couldn't he have just burned with his mother?

»Oh, we are no friends, Connor.« He heard Charles hiss and barely even felt his useless feet scrape over the dirty path below. »In fact, I find you quite annoying and obnoxious. You come along and take what I have worked for so hard in the last twenty years. You got everything that I had to work for just because you are the son of the Grand Master himself and soon you will succeed him, although it would be my turn to lead for once.«

> I don’t wanna lead!« He blurted out without even thinking about it. He did not want to lead. He did not want to give up his father now too! He did not want his father to die! He just wanted to curl up by the fire with Fenris and act as if nothing had happened. He just wanted a normal life and not the constant fear his father might get killed by some Assassin who wanted blood or revenge or whatever. But now … Shouldn’t he be glad? He had killed the man who wanted his father dead, so what danger was there left now?

His father would live!

> I would never argue with you about the fact that you are quite unfit to lead anyway, especially since you are behaving like an absolute fool now.« Charles scoffed and Connor wished he would just shut up.

He could feel how the world was swaying quite dangerously now as if his whole world had decided to go against him. Everything was turning and swaying as if he was on a ship while he was still trying to fight Lee off and at the same time, he tried to focus on moving forwards. It was a bit too much, to be honest.

> I’m not a fool!« Connor shouted as he nearly toppled over once again and stumbled over his own feet while he tried to catch himself. He would have fallen flat on his nose if it had not been for Lee catching him and grabbing him under his arms in the process. This time, Connor did succeed in throwing him off again. »DON’T FUCKING TOUCH ME!« He growled and hardly even recognized his own voice any longer or the pitch it had developed out of the sheer panic seeping through from the depths of his mind. He sounded strange even to his own ears. »DON’T EVER TOUCH ME AGAIN!« Finally, he was able to get some distance between himself and Charles Lee and for once he noticed that he was nowhere near the tavern any longer. They already were near the Aquila with people staring at him. His ship lay in the harbor, waiting for the young Mr. Kenway to finally decide he wanted to go back home.

He did not care what people were staring at them or why. He just wanted to get away from Lee, to get the feeling of hands on his body off him. He just wanted to rest and to forget. »I swear to god, Charles, I will cut your throat.« He managed to bite out, even though his stomach was revolting already and he was certain he would throw up any second now if he would keep staying on his legs. Charles ugly blotched face was getting in and out of focus, it was getting blurry at the edges
and looked horribly twisted and torn. He looked like a nightmare. »Connor.« The man said and he probably thought that his voice sounded calm and reassuring, but to Connor, it sounded menacing as it had back when he had been just a small kid in the forest, alone and frightened in front of this group of white men traversing their woods. His mother had always warned him never to leave the valley because within the valley they were safe from the white men, but he had not been safe from them there. His mother had not been safe either. They all had not been safe. Their safety, the mountains around them and the thick wall of forest, had been just an illusion.

Lee took a careful and somewhat uncertain step towards him, but Connor already draw his hidden blade, maybe out of reflex even, but it helped to scare Charles off at least for a second. »Connor, really, you are drunk. Let me help you. I bring you to your ship and there you can sleep.«

Charles’ face was a horrible, nightmarish grimace to Connor. He was the demon of his nightmares once more that had been haunting him in his childhood. He was suddenly four years old again and he was not able to fend off such a big and awful looking man. He was not able to protect himself against this man or really anyone and his skin felt as if it was ablaze where Charles had previously touched him. Connor took another step back, not hearing the shout of Charles, as his world suddenly turned upside down. For a second he had no clue what was happening, but then he felt the cold embrace of the sea again and for once he felt at peace and wanted nothing more than to sink to the bottom of the ocean like a stone.
He could only watch as Kanen'tó:kon thundered his fist was down in Ben Church’s face again and again, with the blood of the good old doctor spurting everywhere and soiling the Assassin’s face in the process. In this moment, as Connor stood in the doorway and watched how his old friend brutally assaulted the traitor, he looked like a real savage and a pat of him wondered why Kanen'tó:kon was the one so angry in this situation. Shouldn’t Assassins kill their targets as cleanly and emotionless as possible?

»Enough.« He heard himself say, even though his own voice sounded oddly hollow and empty to him. There was no power behind his words, no real emotion hidden in his voice. He felt oddly lost. Another Templar down and this time he even helped hunting him down – and even though he was just following orders from his father, he felt like he was doing the wrong thing. »We came here for a reason.«

Kanen'tó:kon flashed him a dark look over his left shoulder, his teeth bared like those of a ferocious animal that was about to attack, but finally he let go of Ben’s collar and rose to his feet. Ben slumped back to the ground fully, but he was not yet dead and it seemed Kanen'tó:kon would leave that to Connor. After the Aquila had crashed into the other ship, Kanen'tó:kon had run straight under the deck of the Welcome without helping him over deck against the attacking sailors. He would have done it differently. He would have found a way to sneak on board of the ship and end Ben’s life in a more humane way - not beating him half to death as Kanen'tó:kon had done. But his friend was wild and without patience. He had always been like this, so it really should not come as a surprise to him now, he mused, as he thought back to the hunting and fishing lessons he had once given Kanen'tó:kon. It felt like a whole life was between then and now.

As Connor bridged the distance between him and Church who was still lying on the floorboards of his vibrating ship, he could hear the turmoil over head still, the fight between his men and the crew of the Welcome. He could only hope his men would be victorious while he, their captain, was down here instead of aiding them as he should. Surely, Gist had everything under control and yet, as he brushed shoulders with Kanen'tó:kon and felt his dark gaze lingering on his face, he wished he had asked Shay to come along too. He knew that this would end in a bloodbath, he knew that this would end in a fight to the death, no matter how much he had hoped to be able to avoid it. If he had asked Shay to come along, he was sure that the Irishman would have argued against taking Kanen'tó:kon with them on this voyage – not because he was an Assassin, but because Shay surely would have been able to look right through him.

He kneeled down beside Church and sneaked one hand underneath his neck so he could hoist him up a bit, only so much that Ben could at least speak his last words in dignity, a gesture Kanen'tó:kon did not seem to be familiar with. Well, Ben and he had been comrades, brothers, he did not want him to leave this world without Ben having at least the chance to explain himself truly. But Ben grinned at him through bloody teeth as his fishlike eyes fell upon his face, death and without a sense of remorse, no matter how much Connor wanted to see at least something similar to guilt in those colorless eyes. »Where are the supplies, Ben?« He asked, but he had troubles already keeping back his anger and hurt for Ben’s betrayal at him.

»Go to hell, Kenway.« The man spat with a faint chuckle.

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Connor Kenway was like a bag of cats. Like a bag of wet, crazy, aggressive street-cats that wanted to scratch out everyone’s eyes who dared to come too close. This was a truth Charles had known
for a long time now, but it had never been clearer as in the moment he tried to drag the young man out of the Hudson River. He was heavy as a bear and almost as big as one too and the water did nothing to make it easier for Charles to hurl him up and back into safety. His fine clothes were dragging the young Mr. Kenway down like a stone, mercilessly even and Connor did not seem to be bothered to do anything to avoid his impending death via drowning like some drunken sailor who simply had one or two ales too many.

»Would you please help me here, you useless buffoon?« Charles groaned, fighting off the want of just letting him drop into the black waters after he so managed to get him closer to the pier again without jumping in himself into the cold waters, wishing he would drown and be gone forever. No one would know if he would do something like this. No one would ever learn the truth if Charles would decide not to help Connor but to let him drown instead. It would be quite easy to get rid of Connor and thus rid of his bad conscience and problems all at once. After all, it was true that Connor was interfering with his ascend within the Templar Order greatly, but then again he was his best friend’s and grand master’s only child too.

As much as he was sometimes annoyed by the presence of the boy at Haytham's side, he also knew that his friend would be crushed if he would ever lose his child, which he had known about years before Haytham himself, denying his closest friend the right to learn about his child’s existence. Haytham was a tough character to begin with. He never really expressed any form of emotion unless it was anger or amusement about something, or at least that was the way he usually acted among his fellow Templars and thus among Lee. He was one who sometimes acted rushed and he was just as hot-headed as his son, even though some might have suspected him to grow out of it with the years. Since they first met at the Boston Harbor, Lee felt that their friendship had enough time to develop greatly and even to the point where Lee could quite confidently tell how Haytham felt or what he might think even. Still, love, he had never seen him express to anyone or anything since they knew each other, not even towards his own child. Worry, yes, the one-time Connor nearly died of fever five years ago, he had shown worry in great detail. But then again, this worry had felt more like Haytham's usual, but rather irrational, fury – as if he had been mad that Connor even dared to be sick like that. And yet Charles was able to see right through that facade. He knew that Haytham loved his son dearly and that he would never accept losing him in any way.

So, all he could do now was to try and save the boy from himself and his very own stupidity. Hooray.

It took him a moment until he was able to pull Connor out by the arms and drag him up to the pier again until the boy rested with his back on the wooden planks, coughing out the water he had swallowed during his glorious stunt.

At least, he thought, he would not need to ask Connor if he was able to walk. It was most clear to him that he wasn’t. Oh, never in his life Charles had more wished for Shay to be there and help to get that idiot back to his ship, no matter how much he disliked the Irishman most of the time they were forced to work together. And where was Shay anyway? He was not the type of guy who usually got drunk in the evening, even though he never denied a good ale. And what about Gist? The Aquila was here, so where were Gist and the rest of Connor's crew? Shouldn’t they be with their captain to drink on their great victory over Benjamin? And what had Connor been doing all by himself in that pub anyway, except getting ridiculously drunk?

»How many drinks did you even have?« Charles found himself panting as he used this moment to get a hold of himself again and nearly slumped down on the wooden planks in the process. He was not a young man anymore and things like these surely were not part of his daily routine. It was right that he had lived almost all his life as a soldier, fighting wars all over the world, but after all, Connor was nearly twice as heavy as him with his wet clothes. Now the boy was just uselessly
lying on his back, like a thrown away bag of rotten potatoes. He was clutching the fabric of his woolen overcoat on his stomach and drawing in air sharply, only interrupted by a fit of coughs every now and then. Surely he was freezing now. It was still winter, after all, and the Hudson River cold as ice. At least *the Aquila* was not far off.

»Two.« Connor finally groaned and, out of irritation maybe, Charles nearly started to laugh. The boy was as strong and big as a bear, but he was a lightweight when it came to alcohol. Oh, how much fun good old Thomas would have had with him if he had ever had gotten the chance of learning this truth about the boy.

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Connor would have never thought that he would find himself sitting side by side with Charles Lee in the galley of his ship over a cup of steaming hot tea to have a nice friendly chat. Still, Charles Lee was one of the monsters keeping him awake at night, because his face appeared again and again and again on the forefront of his fragile little mind. It was inevitable and he could somewhat understand this. Yes, he understood that seventeen years were lying between the incidents in the woods of his valley and this current day. Yes, he understood that Charles had acted brash and hotheaded just the way he sometimes acted now that he was an adult too. Yes, he understood that Charles had told good old William to knock him out and leave him there because he had seen the fire and wanted to protect him. He understood all of this, but this did not take away the trauma he had suffered as a small child from Lee’s hands.

Maybe Charles would forever be one of the monsters in his head, one of the many faces his nightmares liked to wear. He could hardly remember a night in which he had slept thoroughly and without bad dreams since Bridewell. This only ever happened when he would tire himself out so much that he almost fell asleep while standing upright. It was not good and he knew that he was not getting enough sleep, but now … now, that Benjamin and Kanen tô:kon were dead, he could not even think about sleeping ever again. He had not slept since he got back from Martinique. He had delivered the supplies and stayed hidden from sight before he had ventured back to *the Aquila* and had waited for Gist to return, only then he had set sail to New York and in days he had not set foot on board of his ship anymore. He had rummaged the town, getting into minor little fights and brawls, hunting within the nearest forests, hiding from the entire world until, hopefully, the world would forget about him in earnest.

»You have done me a great favor, Connor.« Charles spoke up after a while. Connor’s long hair was still dripping, but he did not care. He had already changed his clothes against a spare set of dry clothes that he always stored in his cabin. The movement of the waves was soothing as always to him while above him Gist was carefully navigating *the Aquila* through rough winds and harsh waves back to Boston. Soon the sun would rise again and call in a new day. »I want to thank you for that.«

Connor’s response was quick, but he himself did not quite know if it was honest too. The words just escaped his mouth as if they had just waited for the right opportunity to do so. »It was my father’s idea. You should thank him instead. I only do what he tells me to do.«

»That may be right, however, you are not his marionette, Connor. We both know that you would never do something against your own morals or free will. It doesn't matter if he has ordered you to do this, only that you did. You and I are no friends, I'm aware of that. You have more than enough reasons to distrust or even hate me. It is not self-explanatory that you helped me in such a fashion, even though your father ordered you to help. After all, when everything works out the way we intend it to, I will rise to the position of Commander in Chief and-«
»And Washington will get dismissed and blamed. He will be in a much more helpless state then and thus it will get easier for me to finally get my revenge.« He had waited long enough, he thought. Five years had passed since he had escaped from the plantation and he was not willing to wait another year, not even another month. Still, oddly enough, he felt as though his path would lead him back to the Plantation soon enough.

Charles cleared his throat before he answered with a small shrug of his narrow shoulders. »That is true.« He agreed while Connor wondered if they had ever sat beside each other and talked like adults, without Connor cursing Lee's mere existence. He was quite aware that Lee would not have needed to drag him out of the Hudson before. No one knew that Lee had been to New York or that he had found Connor in that dingy little pub. »And yet you had to provide great losses to help me. You killed your friend, and I am sorry for that. I do understand how hard it must have been.«

Of course, by now everyone in the Order was bound to have learned about his short-lived alliance with the Assassin who had killed so many of their brothers before. He had never expected it to stay a secret for long – surely not when someone like Gist was involved anyway. »No, you don't.« Connor sighed and just as Lee was about to say something again, he continued. »It wasn't hard. It wasn't hard at all. It was easy.« Maybe that was the most frightening part about it. »I mean, I knew it would happen, right? I knew from the start that I would have to kill him at one point or that he would kill me instead. There was no room for doubt as it happened. I just did what I had to do.«

And yet he could not forget Kanen'tó:kon’s face as Connor plunged his blade into his abdomen, while Kanen'tó:kon had been hovering above him, his blade against Connor's throat. Around them, hell had broken loose, but Connor had not even noticed it then. Now, however, all the smells, the gunpowder, the sulfur, the fire, the noises, the screams and the vibrations of the ship, came back to him every night when he would close his eyes. He could not even tell what the look in Kanen'tó:kon’s dark brown eyes had meant to him. Had he been relieved that it had been him dying so he would not need to live with the guilt of having killed his best friend? Or would he not have felt guilty at all? Had he maybe just thought about his mission in life and about the things the spirit had once told him? Maybe that was it. Maybe in the moment he had died all he could think about was what was going to become of his life’s work. He had known from the start that Kanen'tó:kon and him were enemies and not just because they belonged to opposing sides in all this mess. He had known it, but he had refused to really see and understand it. The idiotic little boy that still sometimes ruled over his head, had wanted to believe that Kanen'tó:kon had not wanted to kill him, that he had only wanted to provoke him enough to end all of this instead so he could die with a clear conscience.

»I want to apologize.« Lee interrupted his train of thoughts and only then Connor noticed that his tea had grown almost cold already, but he did not care enough to gulp it down at once, as he glanced at the man sitting hunched at this small table. As Connor did not ask him or urged him forward, Lee continued on his own. »For everything, of course. I know that it was not right what I have done all those years ago and that I should have acted differently. Maybe your mother would have died anyway and maybe you too would have perished in the flames then, but no matter what had happened I should have written to your father about you immediately after I found out about your existence. If it hadn't been for me, you would have had a chance of meeting your father sooner, of growing up with him and you would not have needed to suffer as much as you did under Washington's care. I was a coward, Connor, I really was. As I saw you at the mansion and as I recognized you and noticed that you recognized me, there was no turning back for me anymore. I should have spoken to your father right away, I should have freed you from this place immediately, but I did not and because of that, you had to live through a horrible amount of pain. I still am a coward, I think, but I hope that someday I will be able to make it up to you somehow, though I don't expect to earn your forgiveness.«
For once, Connor did not know what he should say or do. Maybe Charles expected him to give in and accept his apology and though somehow Connor did accept the apology, he chose to keep his mouth shut. He could not say why he decided to do so, he just felt as if this was the right thing to do, so he emptied his cup instead of saying anything.

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His son had been off the radar for almost one entire week before he came back into the house like a beaten dog. Of course, quite fittingly, Fenris was the first to welcome Connor back home. The time Connor had been away surely had felt like almost an eternity to the young orphaned wolf, he was, after all, still a baby and Haytham doubted that this would change even in a few years. A part of him was glad that his son had found a friend in this animal, a companion who would probably never betray him. Well, he reckoned, the Kenways had always been great animal enthusiasts, yet the time with his son gone had been quite the pain in the arse, for Fenris had thrown one tantrum after the other like a little child, howling and crying as if Connor would never come home again, and he had only slept if Haytham had allowed him in his bed. Now he was jumping up and down in joy, after Connor had closed the door behind his back, snowflakes still entangled in his dark mane.

»It seems every time you come home after a mission I need to call a doctor or stitch you back together myself. What the hell happened this time?« If it had not been for Fenris scratching at the front door and bellowing ecstatically, Haytham would not have even noticed Connor's arrival. Maybe his son had even hoped that he wouldn’t. Connor was by god no one who would try to avoid confrontation or conflict, but it was also true that he liked to gather his thoughts when something serious would happen or when he was not certain how to face his father. He was a wild spirit, unbroken in nature and free in mind, but ever since Bridewell Connor had changed quite a lot actually. He was certainly not calmer, but he seemed more withdrawn from him or maybe even confused about the way the world functioned. Shay had told him he should not worry, that Connor was simply growing and needed to figure out everything by himself, but as a father, how couldn’t he worry when his son came back after a long journey with a broken nose and several other injuries on his face alone?

Connor stared at him out of haunted brown eyes and so Haytham stayed close to the staircase, one hand leisurely rested on the end of the handrail, the other behind his back. Before Connor had decided that it was about time he would show his face again, Haytham had been upstairs in his study, writing to his comrades in France and Britain. »I don't want to talk about it.«

»Sure. Maybe I should go and fetch Shay.« The answer came faster and harsher as Haytham would have thought it would, but somehow his tongue seemed to have decided to develop its own free will. Connor, however, only scrunched up his eyebrows at this remark and slightly squinted his eyes as if to look for a hidden attack in his father's demeanor, maybe even a hint of danger. He was oddly tense. Usually, when they would be home and alone, Connor would be quite relaxed, always with a cheeky remark on his lips, some endearing little tease to mock his poor old father.

»What is that supposed to mean?«

Haytham drew in a breath as he took the hand from the handrail and crossed his arms behind his back. His son hated it when he did this, or when he would raise his chin like he did now to look at him. »I'm just saying that you do not seem to have any trouble in trusting Shay with your thoughts and feelings.«

»Maybe that's because Shay actually listens.«

It seemed no matter how many years would go by or how good he thought to know his son by now, they would never be close enough to talk like adults. It seemed no matter how much he
showed that he trusted him, Connor would always find a way to twist his words in a manner that made it look like Haytham was the root of all evil in his life – any maybe even not without reason. Now they stood here again, facing each other in the hall of his respectable Boston home, snarling like two bulls with the little wolf sitting between them and wiggling his tail in utter confusion. Haytham could understand that feeling the wolf seemed to experience as of right now. With a deep sigh, Haytham motioned towards the kitchen door, instead of giving into the urge to start arguing with Connor in earnest because he could feel that this was exactly what Connor wanted right now.

»Look, son, Mrs. Taylor made pumpkin soup for dinner today. Maybe you would like to eat and sit by the fire first before we talk.« He proposed in hopes that Connor would drop his anger towards him at least for a moment. When his son was hungry – and hungry he surely was – he could be a real pain in the ass, as was evident by his next answer.

»I do not wish to talk.«

»Well, I cannot say I would be particularly fond of the idea of speaking with such an insolent and disrespectful creature too, but since you are my son, after all, I think it is about time that we speak.«

»I don't want to be a bother.«

»Connor, I warn you.« And this time, his voice was sharp as a razor. He grew tired of this back and forth. »Must I remind you that I am not just your old father? I am still the Grand Master of the Templar Order here in the Colonies and as long as you are a member of this Order you must answer to me, do you understand that?« He usually never went to such means to get his son to speak, but in this case, it seemed to be the only way he could break through that thick head of Connor. It did not sit right with him anyway. He did not like to use his authority in such a threatening way against his own flesh and blood and usually, he would not need to, but since Bridewell Connor was sometimes quite difficult to deal with. It seemed the demons in his mind slowly but surely managed to get the better of him.

He had seen men succumbing to their inner darkness before countless of times. He had seen how certain events could change even the strongest of men and making them weak in the process until they were only a shadow of their past selves, lost in despair and alcohol. His son was still very young and at his age, the darkness had it easier with a young lad as him than with a grown man. Haytham had seen horrible things in his life and to this day he would never forget about the family in Bergen op Zoom which Braddock had ordered to kill back in 1747. He himself had been a young man back then, only twenty-two years of age and thus only one year older than Connor was now and the death of those people had had such a big impact on his mind, that he still thought about them to this day. But, unlike Connor, he had had more time to be hardened by the fires of hardship, despair, and tragedy. He was firm in his beliefs and even the truth about his father and his murder had changed nothing about it. It was true, that Connor had been through a lot in his young life, maybe even through worse things than Haytham had been at his age, but his mind was still fragile. Connor had thought that he was firm in his beliefs and his mind, but now it seemed he started to see that he was not yet there. He started to crumble and Haytham knew that he could not allow this.

For once, Connor did not protest, he only got rid of his coat and scarf and then proceeded to do as his father had ordered him to with Fenris at his heels at all times.

There was this distinct sense of hope that he would be able to talk to his son in earnest after he settled down for a moment, had something to eat and a crackling fire to warm his body. He hoped that maybe Fenris’ presence at Connor's side would be soothing to his son's mind, but as he later entered the sitting room, he doubted that this really would be the case. Yes, his son was stubborn
as a Kenway usually was and the way he sat by the fire just reminded Haytham all the more of his own father and how he used to stare into the flames from time to time.

His mother had then warned Haytham that his father was lost in thought, that he was battling with his inner demons, and that Haytham should not disturb him. Now he knew that his father had recalled long lost tragedies when he had been sitting by the fire like this, that he had remembered long lost friends and hopes maybe. He had always looked a little older than he had been back then and Connor looked exactly the same as he now sat near the fire in his favorite armchair. Fenris slept to his feet, feeling contempt in having his owner back, even though Connor did not see himself as the owner of this wolf. To Connor, the wolf was a free animal that had chosen to stay as his companion and he would never treat Fenris as he would treat a dog he had adopted. This was actually something Haytham very much liked about his son. Yes, he loved all animals and Haytham could hardly walk with his son anywhere without Connor petting a horse or a dog or even a stray cat in the process, but he never treated animals like they were below himself in any way or as if they had no right to their own bodies and minds. To him all beings were sentient and he did not like to spill blood without reason, no matter whether it was human or animal blood.

Haytham wondered if he had felt like this one day too, but if he had, he could not remember. To him, killing was as easy as breathing. Maybe that was the most frightening part about it. He would have killed Benjamin Church, his friend, without batting a lash, a clean shot to the head perhaps. Connor however, seemed more broken than before, even though Haytham had hoped his son would regain some of his strength from this mission, that it might harden him for the future. Maybe it had, but if it had, he could not see it yet. All he could see in his son's eyes was regret and hopelessness.

»So, how has your mission fared? Charles already wrote to me that you delivered the supplies as we discussed before your journey, but he also said you haven't been there when he arrived.«

»I was.« Connor murmured but his voice was heavy and laced with sorrow and was so quiet that Haytham nearly did not catch it. With a sigh that he tried to suppress, he stepped closer into the sitting room and took his place on the large sofa. It was never easy to tell how he should approach Connor when situations got out of hand. He could not tell if Connor would need the father talking to him or if he needed the rough hand of his Grand Master because still, Connor was not only his son, he was also a Templar and as such he had to answer his Grand Master and his fellow Templars. His son needed discipline, but then again it was hardly fair to say he would be lacking of discipline, he thought.

»You were not, or at least that is what Charles said. So, one of you seems to be lying, the only question I need an answer to now is which of you is it?«

»And I reckon you still don't want to?« He was silent for a moment and that Haytham took to continue. »As your Grand Master, I demand a report, Connor. You are still obligated to answer me when I ask you a question and I demand an answer now. Why is it that you stayed hidden to avoid confrontation? Why is it that you did not come back to me right away but took a few days off to do god knows what? I would not have thought the death of our good old friend Benjamin would haunt you like this, boy. After all, he is hardly the first of us to die, isn't he? Death is our daily companion, Connor. I would not have thought I would need to tell you that. I thought you were ready for such missions already, but it seems I was mistaken by that assumption. I am disappointed, Connor, really I am. You have proven yourself to be an asset to the Order at sea without a doubt, but as it comes now to the real matter of things, you are lacking discipline and
care as it seems. The least you could have done is to send a letter to tell me where you are. For all I know, the Assassin could have killed you after you have delivered the supplies.«

If Connor was confused about the fact that his father was aware that he had teamed up with the Assassin, he did not show it. »The Assassin is dead.« Connor cut him off with a sharp glare and Haytham needed a moment to swallow what he had wanted to say next to provoke his son further and make him talk.

»Excellent.« He instead answered as cheerful as one would when their favorite dish was served. »Well, son, this is good news I would say.« But Connor's eyes betrayed him and his next answer made it all the more clear to Haytham that his son was still deeply conflicted about the deeds he had done.

»I killed him.«

»I expected something like this.«

»He was my friend.«

»He was an Assassin.«

»He wanted to kill me.«

It was only then that he heard the slight tremble in his son's voice and for once he was not able to say if Connor would start throwing things out of anger or even attack him or if - and this would be much worse to deal with – he would start crying in earnest. He could see the moist veil over his dark brown eyes in the light of the flames, but he also knew that his son was hardly one to cry. He had seen death in many shapes and forms already, but this time, it seemed to be different.

»Why was he even there?« Maybe, if he would be able to bring Connor to retell the story, he could distract him enough, he thought. He needed Connor to focus on the story as if he was retelling something out of a book he had been reading, but the boy seemed already lost.

»We worked together.« He finally breathed and lowered his gaze as if he was expecting a slap for this confession. »We had the same goal. We met near Valley Forge. He wanted the supplies back for Washington because he supported Washington and his cause and I told him that I only wanted to punish Benjamin for his betrayal of the Order, so we decided t could do us no harm if we would work together. I knew it would come to a fight. We worked together still and I thought that maybe I could bring him to see that we aren't so different after all, that maybe I would be able to get him on our side or at least to get him to see the truth about Washington and that a truce between Assassins and Templars could finally be forged. It felt good working with him again. He is the only one left of our tribe. I lived with his family after mother's death. He was like a brother to me and he- he-«

»He betrayed you.«

»Yes.« His voice sounded hoarse. »Just like Ben too. I trusted him and he betrayed me. He knew everything about me and he ran around telling everyone who liked to hear it the truth about me. And Kanen'tó:kon … he did not even seem to feel any remorse as he attacked me. He just used me to get to Benjamin, to get to the supplies as fast as he could and then he wanted to stab me in the back as if our friendship and past would have meant nothing.«

»To him, it had meant nothing, perhaps.«

»And what does this say about me then? Am I too weak, father? Am I too sentimental? If Kanen'tó:kon hadn't attacked me, if I hadn't been forced to defend myself, I would not have killed
him. I would like to say that I would have done it anyway, that I would have waited for an easy opportunity, to stab him, in his sleep perhaps or poison his food, but I know that I couldn't have done it. I had the upper hand, he was dependent on me, my crew and my ship and yet I didn’t do it. After I knew where Ben was, I would not have needed to take Kanen’tó:kon along. I could have gone on my own together with Shay and Gist. But he was my friend. I felt at home when we worked together. It felt almost normal again, almost as if we were back home again. But home is lost and forgotten. It would not surprise me if the white men had already chosen the spot where my village once was for one of their settlements.«

»You are not weak, Connor. You are young. It’s a good thing that you still feel the way you do even after everything that happened. You still have a heart in your chest and you still care for the people around you and that is indeed a good thing. Maybe I would have thought differently when I was your age, but now I see that you have something that I have lost long ago and that is compassion. This man was not your friend, Connor. He has lied to you and used you. He has tricked you and would have let you hang for his crimes. He has helped a criminal to lure you into a trap. He might as well have pushed you into a pit of monsters himself so that they could rape and torture you. To me it doesn’t matter if he hadn't known who you were back then, the sole truth that he had helped those thugs like this tells me all I need to know about him. And he would have thrown you to the sharks if you would have given him the chance. And in addition to all that he has supported a man who enslaves other people for his personal gain, who beats and tortures and humiliates and rapes other people without the glimpse of remorse. It's not your fault, Connor, for wanting to believe that there is still something left of your past you could maybe cling to and safe. You wanted to have something good left from your past, something you could use to find hope in, but it's not always that easy. I always thought, when I would just find my sister, when I would just manage to bring her back home and find my father's murderers, everything would be as it once was, that we could just go back to normal again. But I had to learn that this is futile hope. We can never go back to how it once was. Your mother, Ziio, will never come back, your village will never come back and all that was lost will never come back. All we can do is to build ourselves up from the ashes again and build a better future.«

Connor did not look at him. He had, while Haytham talked stared at him with the most intense look he had ever seen in his son's dark eyes, but now he stared into the flames again, his brows a bit more relaxed than before, but his jaw set like stone. Haytham could see only one tear running down his son's left cheek, glistening in the dim light of the fire, but Connor did not brush it away out of shamed. That was another thing Haytham loved about his son: he was not ashamed of his tears and tears to him did not mean weakness. He was mourning. He was mourning that loss of his best friend, of his childhood, of his past, maybe even of Ben – and it was good that he still mourned the dead, Haytham decided as he followed Connor's gaze into the flames and thought about his father. He had never been prepared to be a father and there were so many things he would like to ask his own father, but he could not and he had accepted that. And still, now was they sat in silence like this, he desperately wished for his father's large hand on his shoulder to urge him on and guide him.

However, there was no one to guide him left. His former mentor Reginald Birch was long gone and his father too. Now he was the person to guide others and as he looked at Connor again and noticed how his son's eyes were getting heavier, he thought that maybe he could guide him to become the man he was bound to become. Connor had more than once talked to him about the spirit and the artifact in his village, about the things the spirit had told him and Haytham felt as though this spirit was right. His son was meant to achieve great things, to be a good leader someday, but before this, he needed to suffer and to learn and maybe the hardest lessons still lied ahead of his son.
June 1778

The war was a messy business and a confusing one too, that Connor had already learned early on in his career as a Templar. New York had fallen back into the hands of the British Army after Washington and the Patriots had needed to evacuate due to Washington’s lack of skill on the battlefield - that was what Lee and his father would like to say if he would ask them. He did not make the mistake though because every time he would get them started on talking about the war or the battles involved they would not stop complaining about Washington's lousy little campaign. Of course, Connor would agree with them on that. He might not be as experienced as his comrades - especially Lee, who was after all a General and had served in many different countries all over the globe during his military career - but thanks to Pitcairn he knew a thing or two about those things.

»I cannot believe it.« His father hissed as he threw the newspaper to the side and interrupted the sound of his son’s clattering with the fork and knife as he tried to eat his breakfast in peace. Peace was a rare thing in this house actually, and Fenris seemed to be the only one who did not seem to mind as long as he got something from the table. Of course, he sat beside Connor now with his head resting on his left leg and big blue eyes staring at him desperate for attention and hunger.

»How could they ever have chosen someone like Washington as Commander in Chief? Failure after failure that is everything I see when I look at his military career!«

For a moment, Connor did not say anything, he just stared at his father instead and only as his father gave an annoyed sigh at his staring, he opened his mouth to talk. »Well, if Charles wouldn't have demanded to be well compensated, he would have had better chances in the first place. Don't forget that the people who have chosen Washington do not know him as good as we do. They don't know that he is a brilliant actor. Of course, he would act modest and selfless when facing off against someone like good old Charlie, father.«

»I don't say that I agree on that with Charles,« His father immediately clarified. »but it was his right to ask for proper compensation, after all, the job of a Commander in Chief is neither easy nor isn't it dangerous.«

»Well, and now our good friend is imprisoned and in the hands of the Brits. What are we going to do now, father? Do you want me to find a way inside the Fort and free him?« He would not like that option very much. It was true that Lee had helped him too not too long ago, but he would much rather not go on a rescue mission for Lee.

»That Lee has been captured by the redcoats only tells me that he wanted exactly that to happen. We both know how sneaky he can be if he so desires. No, this was his choice and I do believe that he did not do this without reason. He will probably give them information about the Patriots - enough to weaken and disgrace Washington perhaps. I do not worry for Charles’ safety, after all, he was once a member of the British Army and since he never deserted but just resigned his commission they will probably treat him well. He will get out eventually and I believe that he will tell us about his plans right away then.«

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It turned out that on his release from prison, Lee had returned to Congress where he had attempted to convince them that the Continental Army was not strong enough to match the British forces, though of course, he had embezzled the fact that this was to be credited to his sabotage and undermining of Washington. A fact he had been eager to sweep under the rug in front of his
superiors or Washington himself. He, General Charles Lee, was a man of honor after all.

To their luck, as his father had told him when he had read out Lee's report to him in the sitting room of their respectable Boston home one evening, Washington had prepared his armies in Valley Forge to stop the British march from Philadelphia to New York nonetheless. »There are rumors of native tribes allying with the British.« His father had read as he had lifted an eyebrow at this sentence of the letter. »But their identity is still unclear. After all, our good friend George had gone to great lengths of exterminating the villages of the tribes in this region.« Connor had hardly been able to contain his anger at this.

Of course, he still dreamed of the fire from time to time and to him, it was still an enigma how Kanen'tó:kon could have supported a man like Washington, a man who had killed Kanen'tó:kon's own family in this massacre a few years ago. He wondered if Kanen'tó:kon really had not believed him or if he had just decided not to, so he would not need to face his own mistakes. It was easier to think that someone else was on the wrong path than to look at their own doing and whom they supported. Kanen'tó:kon had helped a monster and had their places been swapped, maybe Connor too would not have wanted to see it. Thanks to Kanen'tó:kon, Washington had won the few battles that had been successful. Thanks to Kanen'tó:kon, Washington could fool the congress. Kanen'tó:kon had helped a monster to become even more influential and an even bigger monster perhaps too.

Under different circumstances, Lee would have taken advantage of the situation for sure, but now with the Kanatahséton village gone he had lost a trump – and maybe for good, in Connor's eyes. He was glad that his people could not become a play ball in this war. Like this, his people would not need to fear repercussions at least.

Following this event, a few days later, Lee had taken control of the contingence forces of Marquis de Lafayette, a figure Connor until now had only known from rumors and murmurs among soldiers, at Monmouth. Like this, their good friend was in full control over the troops at this crucial point in the battle against the British forces and he only waited for the right opportunity, which arrived at the battlefield in the form of Connor Kenway himself, dressed in the uniform of one of the patriot soldiers to not draw attention to his presence with a letter secured in his jacket.

After Lee's last letter had arrived at their house, his father had sent him out to Mount Monmouth to aid Lee in this pivotal situation. Of course, a man like his father would draw too much attention. No matter how good his father was in their business of killing and plotting, he was still a known man here in the colonies. Haytham E. Kenway had made himself a name and a reputation, not without reason he frequently received invitations to dances and festivities of the high society of Boston and New York and was a most welcome guest among the good and wealthier families around. He, Connor Kenway, however, was a lesser known character in this game and he tried to keep it that way too.

As he arrived at the battlefield, he was greeted with greasy, dirty looking men and the sound of explosions in the distance. It was not his first time at the battlefield, but every time he got to one was odd and maybe even a little terrifying. He guessed no one really liked being at such a place, faced with the very real possibility of impending death.

The Marquis was not hard to make out among the other soldiers. He spotted Lafayette from afar by a group of soldiers near the tree line, stomping up and down and ordering them around like a nervous dog. He seemed wary of their situation and Connor could clearly see the distrustful glances he shot towards one of the tents nearby. Connor did not need the skill to see through the walls of this very tent to know that it had to be Lee's. His father had already warned him that the Marquis and Charles had a long history of distrust behind them already. Lee was a man who
openly criticized others without giving too much attention to the consequences his words could bring and Connor was sure that he had let the Marquis know how bad he was thinking of his skills in the course of the past months at least. More than once, Connor had heard Lee complain about the lack of skill and authority of the Marquis. He could imagine how things might have been between them.

Connor was quick to move between the canons and nervous-looking soldiers that were wandering around with their muskets ready to shoot as he walked towards the tent, giving himself the expression of a man in a hurry to deliver news from the Commander, with a schooled expression on his face. As he entered the tent, he made sure that Lafayette would notice him going in just as he was pulling the letter out of his coat. It needed to look convincing, that was what his father had urged him to keep in mind at all times. The best thing that could happen to them was if Lafayette would read the letter instead of Lee.

His whole life, Connor had felt like a piece on a chessboard that was moved around by others, but now he knew that he himself was one of the players only dressed up as one of the less important pieces. As long as people did not know who he was, he seemed not important and like someone that could easily be sacrificed on the battlefield – which was the exact look he was going for – but as soon as his name would sound in whispers, people would know not to make a move against him. Right now, however, he was only a half-breed boy who was part of the Continental Army. A delivery boy, nothing more.

He found Lee inside the tent, leaning over a map of the area with tiny little figures on it to signalize the areas where their troops currently were stationed. It was a strategic thing to do as he had learned quite early on from Pitcairn. As Charles looked up across the tent to the door through which Connor had just come in he looked surprised, but Connor knew that he had surely already expected his arrival. His father had not sent a message to Lee that he was coming, simply because no one could ever know who would get their hands on a note like this, but Lee was long enough a part of all this to know his Grand Master and his plans.

»I have a letter for you, Sir.« Connor immediately began as he had practiced many times before, his voice firm but submissive enough to sound like the voice of a lower soldier talking to his superior. As he moved two steps further into the tent he heard the rustling of the fabric behind him and he was aware that it was Lafayette who entered the tent in suspicion of Lee and his plan before he even turned to look over his shoulder in feigned surprise. He really was not the best liar. He was not conniving like his father, but his father had always told him to do the least he could so he would not betray his own act.

»What is going on here?« Lafayette immediately thundered at them with his heavy French accent and Connor only stood a little tighter immediately.

»A letter for General Lee, Sir.« He repeated.

»A letter from whom?« The Marquis asked and Connor felt his stare drilling into his eyes, while he was unflinching and firm in his act. His father would be proud, Connor however, did not know if he liked this new development in his character. He was an honest man, after all, but it seemed this quality was slowly slipping away from him.

»Commander Washington, Sir.« Connor replied as he extended his arm and looked at Lee again. It was the general sign that Lee should take the letter, but, as expected, Lafayette ripped it from his hands instead. He studied the red wax sigil on the fold of the letter for a moment with his sharp, hawk-like eyes, before he ripped it open, seemingly satisfied with the sigil itself. It had not been easy to get his hands on that thing or to bring it back without anyone noticing that it had ever been
missing from Washington's quarters in the first place.

As the Marquis unfolded the letter, he threw one last long look at Connor and then at Lee as if searching for a tiny detail that would give away their charade and Connor wondered whether he really knew anything or just suspected foul play because he did not like Lee. Apparently, it was the latter, because after his eyes had scurried over the letter for a few moments, a loud unmistakably curse came over his lips.

»Merde!« He shouted and thanks to his father's teachings, he very well knew what it meant. In retrospect, Connor was a lucky man to have had a father who was so adamant in teaching his son everything he deemed important, which included several different languages. He had mastered French after a year of living at his father's house. German had taken him a year longer and he even managed to learn a little bit of Italian, just because he found the language so appealing to his ears.

»What is it?« Lee asked and tried to act as unsuspicious as possible though he probably already looked through that little scheme.

»The Commander ordered full retreat!« The Marquis shouted. »He is holding back supplies and backup! He writes, Monmouth is lost and that we shall leave it to the Brits immediately.«

»That is irresponsible.« Lee groaned, playing his role as disgruntled, but honest General good. »Outrageous! The British forces are already on their march to Monmouth! It's only a matter of hours now that we will clash and he is leaving us without backup and supplies! He is leaving us unprepared against the British forces as if he wants us to lose!«

»We cannot let this happen.« The Marquis shot back and threw a look over his shoulder. The cannon fire in the distance had become louder by now and Connor felt the unmistakable urge to flee the battlefield, though he knew that he could not possibly do this.

»We need to secure the retreat.« Lee then said as he moved towards the door and past the Marquis and Connor to have a look outside, throwing just one single glance at the young Mr. Kenway. Connor and Lafayette followed him like Lee's tiny dogs would as the General was striding over the battlefield, though he knew that he could not possibly do this.

»It appears I can never let you out of sight without you getting involved in some kind of battle or coming back with blood on you.« His father sighed as he walked in on Connor, sitting inside the kitchen with a bowl of water in front of him, while Mrs. Taylor helped him to dress his newly acquired wounds. His father had not been home as Connor came back from his journey to Mount Monmouth and Connor had hoped to hide his wounds from his father this time.

»It's only a few scratches, minor little details, father. The most important thing is that everything worked out just fine.« He replied with a little grin playing on his cut lips before he flinched as Mrs. Taylor applied alcohol to one of the deeper cuts on Connor's left biceps, where he had been grazed by a bullet.

»Your son is not made out of sugar, Sir.« Shay laughed as he returned from the storage room in the back of the kitchen to get the sack of potatoes Mrs. Taylor asked him for. It was pure luck that he and Shay had met on the streets and after seeing the blood on him, Shay had decided to come along for a little visit to his good old friend Haytham. Of course, Shay had been mostly occupied with playing with Fenris instead of helping anyone, after he came in, but Mrs. Taylor had immediately
ordered Connor to take a seat in the kitchen so that she could clean him up.

She was still a little strict towards him from time to time, but after the years he was here already, she had become more open and warm hearted towards him – maybe even a little motherly. Connor wanted to think that this might be because the one time he had helped her doing her work with Susie gone and him out of the game for a while because of his injuries after Bridewell. It had felt good to busy himself with good old hard work, though he had fallen asleep while doing it.

Of course, Connor, dressed up as a soldier, could not have just left the battle behind and take on his own persona without anyone growing suspicious, so he had stayed by Lee's side and fought with the soldiers against the advancing troops to secure their retreat as Lee had said. All of this had not gone down without him adding a few more bruises and cuts to his already existing catalog of old wounds. But there had been a few people that looked worse than him after everything had been over.

»I'm alright.« Connor huffed, but he was aware of the dark glare Mrs. Taylor shot him and then Shay as the Irishman sat down on the other side of the table. Shay looked ready to help Mrs. Taylor to peel the potatoes as he lifted the sack onto the table and already pulled a potato out of it. She did not say anything, only finished bandaging his arm and pulled maybe a little hard as she knotted the ends together. He almost expected a little smack against the jaw from her – it would not be the first time she would do something like this – but instead, she threw his shirt at him and turned back to her work, leaving the kitchen for now, but not without one or two little curses directed at him.

Only as the kitchen door had fallen shut behind her, his father, who had by now stepped closer towards the table, crossed his arms and looked at him in the way he always did when he was expecting his report, so Connor thought it would be best to just get it over with.

»Everything went according to plan, but I do believe you already know this.« He sighed.

»Prompted by Washington's behavior, Charles and the Marquis have gone back to Congress and revealed Washington's failure and his lack of skill as a Commander. Of course, they showed them the letter an unnamed soldier has delivered them with and Lafayette vouched for its authenticity in front of the Congress. Washington, however, tried to sell the argument that he did not know about the letter and that he had neither written it in the first place nor that he ordered the retreat like this.« With a subtle move of his left hand, Haytham urged him to continue and Connor did as he leaned back in his chair, still shirtless and perfectly contempt with sitting for a moment for a change. »As a result of the accusations General Lee and Marquis de Lafayette brought forward and in the light of the recent events concerning Washington's lack of foresight when it came to the stolen supplies which he was not able to bring back, the Congress ordered an investigation. If they find evidence against him - which they will - it will lead to Washington's court martial for poor command decisions and willful endangerment of his troops. Of course, Washington will have a chance to defend himself against the accusations, but in the light of the evidence it is likely that he will be disgraced, though probably spared an execution, which would be a shame.«

For a moment, there was silence in the room, only interrupted by the sound of Shay peeling potatoes as if it was the most normal thing a Templar and assassin hunter could do on a Friday afternoon in Boston in the house of the Grand Master of the colonial Templar Order. He did not even look out of place.

»Excellent.« His father then finally broke the silence and for just a heartbeat Connor not only felt the warm surge of pride washing through his body but also his father's right hand on his left shoulder. There was no »good job« or a »you did well, son« from his father and Connor did not expect anything like this either. He was perfectly contempt with the situation as it was. »So, I
Confused Connor looked at his father as Haytham retreated his hand again and instead petted Fenris' head, as the wolf sat down beside Connor. »What's happening tomorrow night?«

»We will visit the ball of Mr. and Mrs. Weatley and I am sure we will meet a few interesting personalities there.« For a single moment, Connor was not quite sure if his father wanted to play tricks on him or if he was serious about them visiting a dance as if there were not more important things for them to do - like plotting Washington's assassination.

»I cannot dance.« He immediately answered, hoping that this would indeed save him.

»Oh don't worry, you will learn quickly. Shay is an excellent teacher.«

Haytham had expected his son to put up a bigger fight than he actually did the next day. He did not quite know if it was because he was still exhausted from the battlefield or if he just did not want to displease his father, but after a little back and forth during breakfast, Connor gave up at one point and accepted his fate.

To Haytham, it was a primary to see his son as dressed up as this and not having him search for the nearest weapon to either kill himself or everyone involved in the scenario.

»I don't think this is a good idea, father.« Connor said while Haytham was straightening his son's cravat and then brushed his hands over his broad shoulders to make sure everything was sitting as it should. The dark blue of his coat suited Connor well, just as the red cravat and the new hat Haytham had gotten for him while Connor had been out playing soldier. Only his dark mane was a problem, but by now Haytham had accepted that it always was no matter what they tried to get it to behave properly.

»The feather? Yes, I do think you should take it out too.« Haytham replied even though he very well knew that his son did not mean the single feather that he had tied in his dark hair on which he pulled ever to slightly only to provoke his son to hit his hand and get it away. It was moments like this of which they had gotten way too little in the course of the last five years. So much had happened since he and his son had finally met and Haytham had always been occupied with little things or with plotting against Washington in some shape or form. It was not just Connor who desperately wanted revenge on the man. It was not just his son who wanted to see George bleed and it was not just Lee who wanted Washington's position. Haytham too was eager to see the man die for everything he had done and for every little finger he had laid on his son.

»No, not the feather.« Connor moaned as he moved backward and away from his father to look at himself in the mirror of his bedroom quite critically. Outside the night hung low above Boston and their carriage was already waiting in front of the house, as Haytham had noticed a moment ago as he had looked out of Connor's bedroom window while his son had put on his coat. »I mean this ball, of course. Don't you think it would be better not to show me around like this? Until now it was beneficial that I hardly attended those festivities. Surely, Lafayette would have recognized me otherwise when I went to Mount Monmouth. It's better if I would stay out of the spotlight.«

A little hum left Haytham's throat. Of course, his son was right and until now he had resigned from showing off his son to everyone and their mom, as Shay would say, no matter how much he had sometimes liked to. Connor was not as outgoing as his father sometimes was, clearly, and until now he had always respected this and used it to their advantage for sure, but this time it urged him to
take him along. He somehow had the feeling that now was the right time to do so and that, maybe, he would not get many more opportunities otherwise.

The people he would meet at such events already all knew that he indeed had a son and, of course, he was asked at every given occasion when he would finally bring him along – or rather when he would finally bring him out, after he was already twenty-one and thus in the eyes of every desperate mother a possible candidate to marry their daughters.

»You are right. Until now we profited from you aversion against socializing, but, Connor, I am not getting younger and you will become the head of this house sooner or later – I think we both would prefer later, in this case – and as such it's absolutely necessary that you will learn how to behave in social situations as this tonight. We are not born royalty or nobles. We are businessmen, for all the world knows. Your grandfather has worked hard for our Fortune and for the name Kenway to be known in the elitist circle. Assassins might prefer the shadows and to live in the shadows as well, but we are Templars, son, and as such, it had always been accustomed that we work in the middle of the society, don't forget that. One day you will have great influence and power, and you better start getting used to it. As you become Grand Master you will learn that socializing and networking is the most important skill you need to have mastered and that you will be swarmed with invitations for such events as this.«

He saw how Connor wanted to protest - the same way he always protested when his father would tell him that he was to become Grand Master, no matter how far in the future that might be, but Haytham was quick to continue. He had never been a great friend of selflessness or modesty because he had always felt as if it was feigned, an act from people to get others to think of them as good people although they rarely were. Washington was such a candidate. However, his son was a different kind altogether in this regard. He was honest in his modesty, for he had never been raised as people like Haytham were. Material goods had never held the same importance to Connor as they had to Haytham. He loved this about his son because when Connor would protest against becoming the next Grand Master, it was not because he wanted to appear humble and flattered or outraged, but because he honestly was and because he was terrified of the prospect of being left alone again. He would much rather be a foot soldier the rest of his life than becoming Grand Master if becoming Grand Master would mean that his father would die.

Mrs. Taylor once had said it very fittingly after Connor had helped her doing her work one day as she had been alone and he out of commission because of his injuries after Bridewell: he was sweet. There was nothing he would need to add to that. He was a fierce warrior, a capable hunter, a skilled craftsman, a genius strategist, a quick learner and an incredibly talented seafarer – but over all of that he was sweet and that was rare these days. Though Haytham was afraid that this sweetness would break his son's neck sooner or later.

»You have done well at Monmouth, Connor. You played your part in this comedy as I suspected you would and you have done more than you would have needed to. Washington is facing trial soon and even now he is of no danger to us any longer. Lee will probably succeed him soon enough and if you worry that Lafayette might see you there, I can assure you that he is not going to be at this party. The next time he will get to see you he has long but forgotten your face.«

He could sense the worry behind Connor's dark eyes and he could understand it. His son did not want to risk a thing in their little scheme because the moment there would be doubt of Lee's story Washington would be rehabilitated and then it would be much more difficult to get to him. Connor just wanted to kill his tormentor and though Haytham could understand this, he himself wanted to destroy Washington first. He would not let him die by the hands of his son only so his name would then somehow find its way into some history book to be praised as the great and humble Commander Washington who could have achieved many more great things for this would-be
nation. No, he wanted his name erased completely and if people would remember him they should do it with a dark frown on their face and spitting on the ground in disgust. They should see George Washington as the man he really were and not as some kind of tragic hero.

As Mrs. Taylor appeared in the door to tell them that their carriage driver was waiting, Haytham noticed how she quickly glanced at Connor as a mother would probably do to see if her boy was dressed nicely, but she vanished quickly again with Fenris at her heels. Connor was still unmoving and did not look as if he was going to follow him out of the room, the moment Haytham turned to the door to leave and with a sigh, he turned to his son again and gently pinched his nose to get him to focus. Connor absolutely hated it when he did so, but Haytham had discovered that this was the easiest way to get him to focus. In the past, he had needed to apply this technique many times when teaching him about history or languages.

»Shay will be there too. Come on, you can complain to him when we get there.«
The ball complied with Connor's worst nightmares about festivities as this one. If it had not been for his father, he would probably never have come and he did not know if he would ever freely accept an invitation to such an event in the future without his father brutally forcing him to do so at gunpoint. But, he guessed, his father was right and no matter how much he disliked the concept or probability of him becoming Grand Master at one point in his life, he would have to follow his father's example. If there was anything in the world Connor hated to confess, it was whenever his father was right with something he said. Shay liked to tell him that he should use his father as an example, and maybe he was right with this advice, but Connor, though eager to try and live up to his father's example, was desperate to not lose himself in all of this.

He was not as ruthless as his father was, after all. He did not just kill people just because they could turn out to be a nuisance in the future of some sorts.

The house of Mr. and Mrs. Weatley was quite big and located in the quieter and more exclusive part of the town. Their carriage had stopped right in front of the front door before their driver had driven off after they had gone off to enter the building. To his luck, Connor had already seen Shay the moment they had entered the house, standing not too far off and talking to a few gentlemen in fine suits. It was weird seeing Shay dressed up like a true gentleman, but it somehow suited him very well now that his hair started to become a little bit lighter with strands of gray. Sometimes Connor wondered when Shay would settle down and have a family of his own.

But of course, this was a topic that was of concern to him too. He knew that society expected him to find a wife and have children soon too, but as long as Washington was still alive, Connor was not able to even think of something like this. It was not like he was not attracted to women or that he did not care about having a family of his own, but every time he would meet a young lady, he could not help but to feel bombarded by the memories of Bridewell and the plantation. What woman would want to marry a man such as him anyway? After everything his father had told him, their family was not very lucky when it came to love and marriage in the first place. His grandfather had been married twice. He outlived his first wife, only to leave his second wife behind as a widow. His aunt Jennifer had never married due to her fate of which his father had once told him during one of the countless evenings they had spent together in the sitting room by the fire as Connor had been a little younger and curious about his family. He remembered that his father had not liked speaking about it and Connor had never asked him again to speak of his sister's fate, after he had first heard the tale. He would sometimes write to his aunt and she would sometimes answer him even, but the conversation was distant and yet Connor felt the connection between them in her very careful chosen words. They had suffered through similar hardships and he thought that if there was a person who could understand him if he would tell the details of his horrors, then it was her.

His father too had never married and that sometimes left Connor with the odd feeling of uncertainty. His father was an attractive man for sure and he was only in his early fifties. He could still find himself a young wife and have a few more children, maybe catch up on the things they never had as a family. But what if his father would marry? What about him? He would always be only his bastard and he would never have the same rights as a legitimate child of his if it would ever come to this. Would his father push him to the side then? What if he would have another son? Connor had never thought about having siblings and though the idea did never cause his aversion, now he felt uncertain about the very real possibility.

After they walked in through the large front door he had noticed already the looks some of the women would shoot at his father and since he accompanied him for the first time, it also was the
first time he grew aware of that possibility at all – and aware that his father indeed was a man with status and wealth. For the last five years, it had only been him and his father against the rest of the world and he had liked it in this little bubble of his, but now reality was starting to seep in. Soon they would have gotten rid of Washington and what would hinder his father then to start over again anymore? He would never want to stand in his father's way of course. He wanted him to be happy, just as his father would want him to be happy and yet he did not like the idea of having a stepmother. And what stepmother would not look down on him?

»Are you alright?« His father asked quietly at his side as they were walking through the crowd of people, closer towards Shay and shortly after that question, he felt the still rather unfamiliar sensation of his father's firm grip on his left shoulder. He was still a little bit in pain after the events that had unfolded at Monmouth a few days ago, but he did not want anyone to notice.

»Yes.« He was quick to answer as he looked at his father sideways, but Haytham's blue eyes already darted over the faces of the other guests as if he was expecting to see someone. A woman perhaps?

»Well, you don't look alright.« His father then replied still as quiet as he could. »You look like a scared ferret. Relax, no one is going to slit your throat or scalp you in here.«

Of course, Connor felt uncomfortable. How couldn't he? He felt as though his father was presenting him on a silver plate to a bunch of cannibals and there were so many things he had never seen before, so many sensations he needed to process first. The air was stuffy and smelled of the various perfumes the ladies of the evening had used to cover themselves in. It was a weird mixture of perfume, powder, and food lingering in the air, but also sweat and salt and – Connor did not like it. It was all the most uncomfortable smells combined. It was loud. The shrill laughter of some women came from apparently every corner of the house while the band that was playing in the ballroom seemed to have a hard time to drown the laughter and the conversations with music. The ladies wore the most colorful and pompous dresses he had ever seen with feathers and jewels in their hair or around their thin white necks. It appeared as if it was en vogue to be as pale as humanly (or inhumanly) possible at the moment and most of the ladies had not only powdered the faces as white as they could but also drawn red and pink blush on their cheeks to not appear dead while their mouths all were of vibrant colors to attract the attention of gentlemen interested in kissing these lips. The gentlemen too were quite dressed up and colorful. They looked like a horde of peacocks and all of them were showing off their colors to the ladies in a silent competition for the attention of the most beautiful women in this house. He and his father, and not to forget, Shay seemed to be the rare exception in all this colorful extravaganza.

»Ah, Connor! Mr. Kenway!« Shay's cheerful voice was like a beam of light on stormy seas as the Irishman waved at them to come over to him. Shortly, Connor looked at his father, but as he nodded they walked over to Shay quickly and Shay, his always cheerful, bubbly self (even without Gist as his sidekick), was quick to ease off the tension that held Connor in a tight grip.

»Gentlemen« He turned back to the men standing beside him. All of them had a glass of red wine in their hands and Connor could only hope that he would not be forced to drink some of that firewater. He had enough of alcohol.

Only now Connor noticed the lady that was standing close to Shay, a rather plump and tiny woman with a bright pink dress and even brighter red hair. She held an elegant fan in her left hand as every lady in this building seemed to do and was fanning herself with the utmost passion. It was an enigma to Connor how he had not seen her in the first place, but he thought he had just been too nervous and anxious to be blinded by that god awful clash of colors. Beside her was standing a large man with blonde hair, tied into a neat ponytail as was fashion at the moment. Connor was seemingly the only man inside this very building who did not wear his hair like this, not to mention
that his hair was a good amount of inches longer than that of any typical gentleman here and probably longer than was deemed appropriate anyway.

After Shay’s call for them, he was awfully aware of the eyes resting upon him now all of the sudden. Had there been just a few people staring at him before, now he was sure that absolutely everyone in the room was staring directly at him. Of course, even after they had entered he had noticed the looks and the whispers that had erupted upon their arrival and, of course, he was aware that he was drawing attention towards him with being so obviously not like any of the people here. He did not like drawing attention towards himself. In the past the people he had met had called him exotic for his darker complexion and that had never been exactly good. Being exotic meant a variety of bad things for him most of the time. Pets were exotic, carpets were exotic - humans, however, were only exotic in a matter of sex for all he knew. Now, however, the lady and the man beside her (probably her husband), eyed him up thoroughly and Connor would have rather be swallowed by the earth instead of letting that happen to him.

»Oh, Mr. Kenway!« The lady greeted his father with a tone as if her heart was about to melt by the sight of his (sometimes) very charming father. His father, naturally, did not waste time to greet the lady of the house properly with a chaste kiss to her outstretched gloved hand, while the gentleman beside her just nodded in a friendly manner and greeted his father with a hummed Haytham, like old friends sometimes did, as Connor had had time to observe in the past five years.

»Mrs. Weatley, Kenneth, it’s a pleasure to see you again.« His father said and as Connor quickly glanced at Shay, he could see the faintest of smirks pulling at Shay's mouth. Obviously, it was weird seeing his father behave like this. He was so … friendly. It was odd.

»Sadly, we see much too little of you, old friend.« Mr. Weatley, Kenneth, said. »You never come when you are invited to our little dinner parties.«

»Well, you know how things are, Kenneth. There is a lot of work on my hands. But now, since I have Connor with me, I can dispense a little of that work and give it to him. I'm positive that you will see more of me in the future.« As if, Connor thought and had a hard time not to snort. He did not like it when his father would put on an act like this. He himself was not so capable of putting on a mask to fit into their social environment and he did not want to anyway. He did not see the point of it. Why should he make people like him in acting like someone he wasn’t? If they would not like his true self, then what was the point?

»So« The lady began and moved a little closer as her green eyes drilled holes in Connor's face. »That is the famous son of Haytham Kenway, I hear the whole of Boston talking about.«

Famous, Connor tried his best not to be noticed most of the times – which was not easy with a figure as his. He did not quite know if he was supposed to say something, but his father was quick to answer anyway as he yet again placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. »Yes indeed. That’s my son Connor.«

»And why is it that you have not brought him to our parties until now? Look at that sweet boy, Mr. Weatley! It’s a shame!« She chirped as she pointed at Connor with her fan before she narrowed her eyes and leaned in a bit more. »Do tell us, boy, is your father locking you in?« He did not even know what that was supposed to mean.

»No, he is just a little shy.« His father supplied helpfully before Connor got the chance to say anything and maybe make a fool out of himself, and Mrs. Weatley seemed to like the answer as she produced a shrill laugh and moved back again.

»Shy!« She exclaimed. »A young gentleman with a physique as his! Oh, that is absolutely
delicious, isn’t it Mr. Weatley? Oh, we have to introduce him to the girls. I am sure they will help him relax and get rid of his shyness in no time!«

After this statement, Connor's nightmare became real. Mrs. Weatley did not care at all if he was protesting or not, as she had grabbed him by the arm (the injured one of course) and hurled him across the various rooms of her house – in search of her daughters, apparently. Following this ordeal, Connor had been forced to kiss at least five hands covered in white gloves and being eyed up by what felt like hundred pairs of eyes. The daughters of their hosts were all redheads except for one blonde girl, which was the oldest daughter of the household, a rather petite and beautiful young lady. Just like him, freckles were dusting the bridge of her nose and the skin underneath her eyes, although she had tried to get rid of them with an extra amount of white powder, as it seemed. She too was the only one of the bunch who was not loud and obnoxious but rather shy and polite, at first glance.

Sadly, her sisters were louder than her and just as fierce as their mother, as they decided they would force him to dance with each and every one of them, no matter his protests that were drowned in fits of giggles and nonsensical chatter.

Connor was exhausted as he finally got the chance to flee the ballroom and that only because of Shay who called for him after his third dance. Connor was quick to excuse himself from the group of women, even though they practically all sighed and wanted to convince him to stay. Shay was out on the balcony next to the large ballroom and Connor was glad for that bit of fresh air he could get this way. »You are my hero.« He huffed as he grabbed the balustrade and took a deep breath. For a second he wondered if he would get away with fleeing this party altogether in jumping down from the balcony.

Shay, however, gave him a small pat on the back. »Well, I saw you were in serious danger of getting devoured alive by those girls, so I thought a breath of fresh air could benefit your wellbeing.«

»That’s more than my father would have done to save me. Where is he anyway? I haven’t seen him since I was dragged off into the lair of those harpies.« Shay laughed as he took a sip of his wine and leaned with his back against the stone balustrade. Shay too seemed not to be the type of person who enjoyed festivities like this. He was only here because of his affiliation with Connor's family, other than this he was an outsider, but apparently one who was liked by everyone.

»Well, knowing Haytham, I would bet he is plotting somewhere. What he is plotting eludes my understanding, though. So, how did you like your first dance? Any proposal made yet?« Shay grinned as he gently nudged his right shoulder and took another sip of his wine.

»How does it come that you are not married?« Connor asked as he looked at his old friend and watched in glee as Shay nearly gagged on his wine as he was confronted by that question.

»Getting curious all of the sudden, aren't we?« Shay then laughed over his cough, as he patted Connor's shoulder a little harder than usually. »You know, when a man has to hunt down Assassins for the better part of his life, there is almost no time for finding a suitable wife. I am an old man now, Connor.«

»But you are not hunting anymore. To me it seems that you are bored, why else would you be here now?«

»I wonder where that sudden curiosity in my personal life suddenly comes from, good Sir. Is it possible that you have already fallen for a young lady inside that very room I just rescued you from?« Connor should have known that he should not start asking uncomfortable questions if he
did not wish to end up having it turned around at his expense.

»I was just wondering.« Connor sighed and turned his eyes from the man beside him to look inside the ballroom again. He watched the dancing couples for a few seconds before he continued. »Do you have any idea why my father hasn’t married? And don’t tell me it's because of the business, I don’t believe you. Father acted weird today and he almost threw me at Mrs. Weatley so I would get to know her daughters. Do you think he is planning to marry in the near future?«

»Are you afraid that you would have to share your father, lad?« Shay asked with a sly grin, but even though Connor felt his cheeks heat up, the Irishman did not dwell on his reaction. »Well, he has surely thought about it and I would not throw the possibility that he will marry at some point in the future off the table. He had been in contact with a woman quite regularly a few years ago, but that was shortly before he has met you - but before you get the wrong ideas, I do not believe that he had planned on marrying her anyway. Your father, well, I would say he is not the type to marry, you know? In his youth, he surely desired getting married and having a proper family, but I do think that your father has always known that a double life like this is not for him. I never knew your mother, but after all, I’ve heard, I’d like to believe that he would have married her, if she had given him the chance. If he will marry at one point it's because of financial and influential gain for certain. But perhaps he wants you to not make the same mistakes as him. He cares a lot about your future, Connor, and he wants to know that you are well off, when he will leave this world.«

Connor sighed. He did not even have the strength to blush any longer, so exhausted he was. »Even if I would have seen a nice girl here, I am not ready for something like this anyway. I just … As long as Washington lives…«

»You know, Connor, even when Washington is gone, there will be another and another and another. You will never settle down and ease your mind, because you will always find someone who you think you need to take care of first. You will waste your life saying 'as soon as this is taken care of I will…' and that is exactly what has happened to your father. He is so invested in your life, Connor because he knows that it’s sheer luck you even exists in the first place.«

Connor knew that Shay was right and he could not say that he particularly liked that. It was hard to discuss things with someone who was always so painfully right about everything. It was the experience Shay and his father had and that he was still lacking due to his youth. »I promise you, as soon as this is over, I will get married right away.«

»Well, Susie seems to like you.« Shay then laughed and this time Connor even joined him.

»No, Susie just likes to stare at me when I change.« He then grinned sheepishly. »But back to you. I think you should not waste any more time, Shay. You are not exactly getting younger and your hair is already turning gray…« Just as he had said this, Connor was faced with the reality of things again and for that with the end of his little break from getting involved in all of this matchmaking, as one of the red haired girls - he believed her name was Anne - came to collect him and reminded him with a cheerful tone that it was her turn now and that he had promised to dance with all of them. Needless to say that he had done no such thing.

Connor threw one last look over his shoulder at Shay who appeared quite amused by the scene unfolding in front of him, a silent plea for help in Connor's brown eyes, as he was being kidnapped by Anne. Well, at least he could say that the daughters of the family Weatley had a fire burning in their hearts - or at least they had when it concerned their hunt for a suitable husband. »You are so shy!« Anne giggled as she pulled him back to the group of sisters. To Connor's luck, it would take a moment until he would need to dance again and at least two of the five girls were on the dance floor as of right now.
"It's rare that young men are so shy!" One of her sisters, Mary, had to throw in and the giggling only grew in volume at this, while Connor hardly knew what to say to this. To his luck - and surprise - he was yet again being rescued, but this time by the only odd one in this family.

"Maybe he is not shy" The blonde sister intervened quietly and with a little smile on her lips. "Don’t forget, mother told us that Mr. Kenway has never been to an event like this before. I believe he is only careful not to behave improperly and it is of course quite easy to mistake this caution for shyness."

For a few seconds, Connor just stared at her in awe with his mouth open, until he remembered that it was impolite to stare at people like this and averted his eyes immediately.

"Oh, Jo, you are always such drag!" Anne sighed just as the music stopped and applause erupted around them. Connor felt how his guts clenched as he grew aware that he would be forced back to the dance floor yet again. His father had been right and Shay was indeed a good teacher when it came to dancing, but Connor hated it nevertheless.

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His son was not the only one of them who disliked occasions like this one. Haytham too was not a big fan of events such as this one here. It was loud and noisy and the people around were not the best to converse with. But it was as he had told Connor: a necessity in their business. If Reginald Birch had taught him anything, than that it was the job of the Grand Master of the Templar Order to be known in society, to network and make business with other influential people. The Assassins might live a life without profit, but the Templars could not deal with nonsense such as this. They needed money because money meant influence and influence brought them closer to their goals. Connor would need to learn that and it would be best for him if he would make a suitable match as soon as possible.

The Weatleys were one of the richest families in Boston and although Haytham was not very fond of Mrs. Weatley and her daughters, Mr. Weatley was quite bearable. In addition to that Mr. Weatley's father, Harold, had been one of them too, but his son had never followed in his footsteps. It was no loss for the Order for he was lacking the intelligence and wits his father had possessed. Haytham had only met him a few times when Mr. Harold Weatley had already been an old man, but he had been impressed nonetheless. The only member of the Weatley family that seemed to have inherited the old man's spirit was the oldest daughter, Josephine. She was intelligent without a doubt and Haytham had already read a few of the stories the newspapers published of hers - though of course under the alias of Joe Weatley. It was a man's world and Miss Josephine had already understood this and managed use this to her advantage as it seemed - after all, the job of an author was unseemly for a young woman.

Connor was a big fan of these stories, now that he thought about it.

The next time he saw his son was on the dance floor with one of these god awful girls and he found himself engulfed by the image that was unfolding in front of his eyes. His son was a good dancer, but that was hardly surprising. Haytham had had five years to watch his son and he had noticed early on how skilled and light-footed he really was. Shay was a good teacher and Connor trusted the Irishman completely, and Shay’s good teachings now showed as Connor skillfully moved over the parquet while this girl looked like a cow on ice.

Haytham had not much time to look at his son however because he was pulled into yet another conversation with a few gentlemen. Almost an hour later, he saw his son the next time, standing by the group of girls and talking to Josephine as it seemed, but as one of the other girls pulled at Connor's arm to get his attention and force him back to the dance floor, Haytham decided to
rescue the poor puppy-eyed boy as he called for him. It was sheer luck, that he had met one of his old friends here this evening. He had thought Benjamin was still in France, but, as it turned out, his old friend was visiting Boston for a few weeks and would return to his family in Paris shortly after. Surely Shay would enjoy meeting Benjamin again too and as he spotted the Irishman walking in from the balcony he waved for him too while Connor was apparently apologizing and slowly coming towards them through the crowd of people.

Of course, people stared at him and watched every step the unknown young man made. The name Kenway opened quite a lot of doors here in the Colonies, but also in Europe too and that not only thanks to Haytham's work but to his own fathers work too. Edward had been good in the things he had done to improve his situation for sure. In here, people whispered about Connor and of course he was standing out of the crowd because of his skin color. Within the tight woven net of the high society, things never stayed secret for a long time - especially not as scandalous things as Connor's heritage. In this very house, everybody knew that Haytham Kenway had never married because more than enough of those attending this ball had tried to get him to marry in the past twenty-one years. And since everybody knew this about Haytham, they also knew that Connor was a bastard, not to mention a bastard with darker skin, which in itself would be absolutely scandalous. Because of this, Connor was always wary of social gatherings and he probably still thought that not a single girl that came from a proper background would find interest in him, but tonight he would hopefully learn that skin color did not matter, as long as the name was the right one.

»Ah, Connor.« He grinned as his son finally reached them with slightly flushed cheeks and his face a stoic mask that was supposed to cover up his uncertainty - to no avail. As Haytham put his hand on Connor's shoulder, he turned back to Benjamin again who already eyed Connor curiously. »Connor, that is my good old friend Benjamin Franklin. We know each other for over twenty years now - in fact, he was one of the first people I got to know as I arrived in Boston for the first time. Benjamin, that is my son, Connor. And I believe you remember Shay.« He said as the Captain of the Morrigan came to the group and eagerly shook Benjamin's hand with a grin on his face.

»Of course, how could I ever forget Shay Cormac?« Benjamin laughed with a little wink directed at Shay. »How did you like Versailles?«

»It was nice for a change, but not exactly my cup of tea.« Shay grinned. »Too many people and way too big for my liking. I still prefer the life at sea.«

To Haytham, it was delightful showing his son to the high society of Boston tonight, even though he had never quite expected to feel like this. His son was well educated, he was polite and he was handsome, so of course, girls like the Weatleys would immediately swoon over him, not to mention how wealthy Connor was - though he did not seem to understand just how well off he was. They never talked about money. But all the more proud he felt as Benjamin even admitted that he had already heard of Connor from mutual friends. Well, it seemed, Connor did not particularly need his father's last name. He had had plenty of time to make a name for himself especially since he had started to become a great asset at sea for the Templar Order and their allies.

For quite some time, Haytham listened to the conversation and enjoyed seeing Connor blush as good old Benjamin started talking about cougars once again, a code word which slowly started to make sense even in Connor's innocent little head.

Shay too seemed to find great amusement in this, but the mood suddenly changed as he saw his son grew incredibly tense and his eyes widened in horror. »Son of a-« Shay suddenly hissed and as Haytham followed their eyes he too was surprised, to say the least, to see George Washington meandering through the crowd as if nothing had happened.
»Well, isn't that a surprise.« Ben suddenly exclaimed in a rather hushed tone as he turned his head to see why his comrades had suddenly grown so tense. »I heard that he is undergoing an investigation for his latest mistakes on the battlefield. I wouldn’t have thought that he would come here under these circumstances.«

»He thinks that there is no reason for him not to come. He thinks himself without flaw and is as blind to his mistakes as he ever was, sadly.« Haytham answered, but though he tried to not show his hatred for the man in front of Benjamin or the other guests, his worry lay with Connor. He could see the way he was clenching his jaw, but before they could even do anything about the situation at hand, it was Washington who noticed them standing and staring and with the most friendly grin he could portray he moved towards them. Of course, Haytham was wearing a weapon, hidden underneath his clothes and he was sure that the same was true for Connor and Shay too, but he could only pray that his son would keep a level head and not attack his old enemy right away because no matter how influential Haytham was, he would not be able to get Connor out of trouble like this if he would kill Washington in front of all those people.

»Ah, Haytham!« George exclaimed loud enough that a few people turned their heads to look at the little group. »What a pleasure to see you here. It has been too long, old friend. It has been five years since you last visited me at Mount Vernon, I believe.«

»Last time we've met was during the continental congress a few years ago.« Haytham replied with his voice and face as neutral as possible, while he felt Connor almost vibrating with tension next to him. At least Shay was here too, just in case they would need to hold the boy back - which Haytham was almost positive they would have to do.

»I almost forgot about this.« Washington smiled, before his eyes fell upon Connor and in the moment they did, Haytham could feel that something inside of him was about to snap. »Then that must be your son, right? I've heard much about him already. Why, isn't he a handsome young man, I am sure you are proud of him.« He did not need to see Connor's expression to know how much his son's heart must be racing at these comments.

»I am.« Haytham immediately cut him off with a dark glare before George could even try to taunt Connor any further because that was exactly what he wanted to do and Haytham was not dumb enough not to know this. In front of all these other people around them, they could not say outright what was on their minds and it would not be wise anyway, but Haytham felt the unmistakable urge to rip off Washington's head the moment he offered Connor his hand. To his biggest surprise, Connor took his hand even though by looking at it alone Haytham could feel the crushing grip of his son as he did so.

»Connor Kenway.« His son introduced himself to Washington. For all the rest of the world knew, Washington and Connor had never met before. For all the world knew, Washington had not held Connor captive as one of his slaves for years. For all the world knew, Washington had not tormented, tortured and even raped his son - and Connor was good in trying to keep it that way. His face was the most neutral mask he had ever seen his son wear. As he retreated his hand, a faint chuckle left Washington's mouth - a sound for which alone Haytham wanted to beat the crap out of the man.

»Connor Kenway« He repeated with a faint grin on his face, his eyes still drilling into the dark brown ones of his son. Connor did not falter, however. »Who would have thought.«

»Mr. Washington--« Shay began but was promptly cut off by Washington and a sharp glare directed at the unimpressed seafarer.

»Commander Washington.«
»Well, that is exactly my point. I've heard you were undergoing an investigation because of your latest failures. It must be hard when suddenly people starting to catch on to one’s inabilities.« There was poison dripping from Shay’s words and Haytham had probably never liked the man more than in this very second. Shay and Connor had shared an odd and rather unusual bond right from the start and if the Irishman had any say in the matter, he would gladly rip Washington apart for the things he had done. Not only because he liked Connor and not only because Connor was the only child of his Grand Master, but because he had been an innocent child, dragged into a war he had known nothing about. »I wonder how long you will be able to call yourself Commander, Sir. But I’ve also heard that General Lee will take your place, as soon as you will be defrocked. Maybe then the Patriots will be able to achieve a few more victories against the British Forces so that this stupid war will finally come to its conclusion. it has been going on for far too long already.«

Washington clenched his jaw and as he answered he leaned closer and lowered his voice, but his dead eyes rested upon Haytham now. »They won’t find anything.« He hissed, anger written oh so very satisfyingly all over his face. Washington had never been good in keeping his head leveled.

»Oh, don't worry, old friend.« Haytham then answered with a smile as he laid a reassuring hand on Washington's left shoulder. »They will.«
Charles Lee was dead. His blood still clung to Connor's hands as he was dragging his father through the snow and the Underwood of the surrounding forest. His only mission was to bring his injured father into safety, but he could already see dark spots at the edge of his field of vision. Blood was dripping to the ground and his feet were sinking deeper and deeper into the snow under the combined weight of him and his father's body. He wondered just how in the world everything had gone so terribly wrong. It had been a routine investigation and now Charles was dead and he and his father on the run.

#### December 1780

In December of 1780, a letter of Charles had reached their home in Boston. He suspected that a few spies of the British Forces were planning to assassinate Major General Benedict Arnold, who had been given command over the Fort at West Point by Lee. It was a minor investigation that Connor took up, sending back a letter to Lee in which he ensured that he would look into the situation at hand. To his surprise, it was his father who decided to tag along with his son. Only rarely he and his father had gone on missions together until now. His father usually stayed back when Connor would be called to the battlefield by their allies.

»Whom can we trust now, if *Patriot heroes* are betraying us?« Lee had said at their arrival and Connor, as soon as they had walked into the Fort, had been wary of the looks he and his father got shot from the soldiers they had passed on their way towards Lee.

»A good old friend of ours would say that you reap what you sow.« Connor replied to that. Things had turned eerily quiet around Washington after his trial. As expected, he had been spared the death sentence and life in prison, but disgraced and stripped of his title. Lee was now Commander in Chief, just as it had been their goal in the first place.

It was not hard for him and his father to find the spies that were trailing Benedict Arnold, and after they had dispatched of them, Connor had been the one who had informed Arnold about the death of the spies. He had not seen the man often before this day, and he could not say that he would trust the man, or particularly liked him and his arrogant attitude towards him, as soon as he saw him and looked into his meaty face.

»I don’t trust him.« Connor later stated as he and his father got ready to go to bed. Lee had organized a room for them within the Fort which they could share for the night until they would travel back to Boston again.

»I would be amazed if you, for once, would speak sense.« Haytham sighed as he got into bed. Connor still thought that his father was looking ridiculous in his nightgown, but he had also accepted that this was the normal thing to wear for gentlemen at night. It was just … so frilly. Connor still preferred to wear either nothing at all or only his breeches. He would not be able to stand such a nightgown. But since he was sharing a bed with his father tonight, breeches it was.

»Benedict Arnold, I mean.« He sighed but stayed at the window of their little room. The room had only the bare necessities in place, a bed standing in the middle of the room, a nightstand, a chest of drawers, a dirty looking little shaving mirror and a washing basin close to the window. He had already undressed to climb in the bed, which already looked ridiculously small for two grown men of their physique. Well, this was no inn or pension and they were lucky that Lee managed to find a
free room for them at all. He could, of course, sleep on the floor instead of cramming himself into the bed with his father, but then again he reckoned, that they would survive this for one night. He would probably fall out of bed anyway, as he usually tended to do. For a moment, Connor just looked out of the small window. From this spot, he could overlook the courtyard quite good. The oil lamp standing on the small windowsill was reflecting its light in the glass and for a second, Connor was sure that he had seen Arnold down there in the shadows. It was hard to tell after the man who was now walking towards the gates had his back to Connor, but in the short moment as he had seen his face, he had almost been sure it was Benedict.

»And why is that?« His father further inquired and grabbed a book from the nightstand. His father liked to read in bed and more than once Connor had grown painfully aware of that fact when they had to share a room in some dingy little pub during their travels.

»I don’t know, just a gut feeling I suppose.« Connor sighed and turned off his own oil lantern so that only his father's beside him on the nightstand was burning. It was cold inside the room and he could almost feel in his bones that snow was going to fall tonight again, covering the world in powdered sugar. He was quick to bridge the distance between the window and the bed as he grew aware just how cold it was. »And you will not read the whole night again, father. I can't sleep when you are reading.« He then groaned as he shoved his father aside a bit to squeeze into the bed as well. Of course, soon there would break out a fierce fight over the blanket and this time Connor would surely win this fight. He would not again let his father take the entire blanket and wake up shivering and with a running nose.

»Well, I am not tired yet.« His father immediately shot back as Connor rolled onto his left side to show his back to his father instead and pillow his head with his left arm.

»Then go take a walk, old wolf.«

»And how about you taking a walk instead, son? Or the least you could do is tying up your hair. I will have it in my face the entire night otherwise.«

»If you are not turning off the light immediately I will not tie my hair.«

They decided to stay the next day and helped to distribute the gunpowder to the troops. Connor enjoyed this change in pace a little, away from his usual duties of aiding their allies at sea, infiltrating various Forts or spying on the British. He was more involved in the war as he had originally planned to be, but as long as this meant he would not get dragged to yet another ball this year, Connor was fine with helping Lee in his cause. It had been their goal to get Lee into this position, so what good would it do them now if Lee would collect just as many failures as Washington had?

After his father had finally turned off his lantern, Connor closed his eyes and yet he was not able to find sleep. He felt oddly on edge the whole time as he was lying in complete darkness, listening to his father breathing beside him. Since he had seen Washington on the ball of the Weatleys two years ago, he could hardly shelf the idea of finally killing him. He just wished to wrap his hands around that pale man’s throat, but yet his father ordered him to stay back and keep his calm. He could not just go after the man like this and Connor was aware of that fact, but now since Washington had been disgraced, the chance to kill him seemed almost so painfully seizable. George had gone completely off the radar by now and Connor could only suspect where he might be. Rumor had it that he was hiding out in Fort George, but Connor was sure that the man had gone back to Virginia and his petty little plantation to further torment his slaves.

During the next day, the uneasy feeling he had felt during the night never left Connor. He noticed that Benedict Arnold, the great war hero, he and his father had saved during the last day was
behaving quite oddly, but they had been too busy helping the soldiers in distributing the gunpowder and carrying around large boxes through the Fort. It was much too late, when Connor spotted Benedict and Charles in the courtyard, arguing wildly. Lee was wielding a piece of parchment like a sword and drawn towards the scene, Connor left his post behind to creep closer towards the arguing men.

»Explain this, Benedict!« He heard Lee shout as he came closer to the two men. Only then he noticed that two of the patriot guards held a redcoat between them. Another spy, perhaps? As Connor looked at the presumed spy, however, he recognized him as Major John Anderson, one of Arnold's men.

«I don't know what this is, Charles.« Benedict replied with his ever so arrogant demeanor - the same demeanor with which he had sent Connor to help the soldiers before, looking down on the young native boy as if he was merely a dog. If his father had not been there with him, Connor was sure he would have treated him even worse. His father, well, where was he anyway? Connor had lost track of the old man at some point, but it did not take him long to notice his father not all too far off, watching the scene unfolding.

»A letter, in your hand addressed to General Clinton of the British Army, confirming the surrender of West Point for the sum of twenty thousand pounds.« It was his father who spewed the news at the seemingly calm Patriot hero as he slowly stepped closer and out of the shadows of the building he had hidden in before.

»This must be some sort of plot to expose the Fort! I am a Patriot through and through, Charles! My actions at Saratoga speak to that, I'm sure!« Benedict replied pointing wildly at the letter that he had taken from Lee's hands. Benedict would have been lucky maybe if Lee had not been here today.

A shout tore the scene apart as Connor stepped towards the group. »Regulars! Regulars! We're under attack!« After this, hell broke loose.

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»Argh, god dammit!« Connor found himself cursing quietly as he dragged his father into the cold cave. As he let Haytham's body sink to the ground he shortly clutched the wound on his right side. It was a clean shot, but it was bleeding profusely and Connor knew that he had to do something to stop the bleeding if he did not want to die out here in the middle of the forest. He needed to focus. He needed to stay calm, no matter how bad he wanted to scream at the world around him. He swayed as he ruffled through his dark mane, but then his eyes fell upon his father's unconscious face again and he sprang into action. He needed to make a fire. He needed to keep his father warm, he needed to tend to his wounds.

Haytham had gotten a pretty bad blow to the head as the Regulars had attacked the Fort. Arnold had escaped in the turmoil and Connor had not been able to do anything except trying to help his father and the other soldiers, only to flee as all had been lost. First, Connor kneeled beside his father to look at the wound on his head. It looked pretty nasty, but there was not much he could do about it. He could try to rinse the wound out and then bandage it with a piece of fabric, but that was about the best he would be able to do. His heart had stopped for a second as his father's unconscious face again and he sprang into action. He needed to make a fire. He needed to keep his father warm, he needed to tend to his wounds.

He left his father together with his coat to go and look for firewood. It took him a while to find wood that would be dry enough to burn and stones large enough to make an almost decent ring
around their makeshift campfire. His father was truly lucky that Connor had grown up in the wilderness and learned these things, otherwise this whole situation would look even darker than it already did.

On his way back to the cave, Connor was forced to duck behind some bushes as he saw a group of British soldiers patrolling the area. They were too close to the cave for his liking, but as of right now, Connor could only cower behind the bushes and watch them - hoping that they would not find his father inside the cave.

He made himself as small as he could, but the wound in his side was almost using all his mental capacity not to howl in pain. He could hardly walk. The strain he had put on his wound in carrying around his father on his back had been too much even for him, though he was not willing to admit it. His knees were shaking under his weight as he needed to hold this position for what felt like hours and the cold and the snow did nothing to better his situation at all.

From behind the bushes, he watched as the soldiers walked closer towards the cave and his heart nearly stopped beating for a moment. He would not be able to fight them. Yes, he had his hidden blade with him and he had his sword and gun, but with the gun, he would be able to take out one and then the others would know where he was. They would be at him in no time before he would have been able to reload even and in a close combat he could not win with his injury. He felt helpless. Almost as helpless even as he had felt in Bridewell or at the plantation. He could only cower and watch as they grew closer to his father's hiding spot.

The moment the first soldier walked inside the cave, was the very moment Connor dropped everything he had clutched to his chest, ready to make a run for it. He expected to hear a shot, expected the soldier to take out his helpless father maybe or that he would drag Haytham out of that cave while he just stood and watched. But nothing like this happened. After a moment, the soldier came back out, shrugged his shoulders and walked off together with the others.

He felt relief washing over him, but the moment did not last long. What if his father was already dead? He had left him behind without protection. Of course, it had only been a couple of minutes, but by now he could have been mauled by bears or wolves. As soon as the soldiers were out of sight, Connor gathered the wood again and sprinted as fast as he could towards the cave, even though his body was barely able to produce the strength that was needed for running.

His father was not there, as he dropped the firewood onto the cold hard stone floor of the dark cave. There was no trace of Haytham at the spot where Connor had laid him down and covered him with his own dark coat. Connor's heart was racing inside his chest. It was almost unbearable, this panic that was gripping his heart with icy hands. He could not simply lose his father like this. He needed to know what had happened!

»Father!« He shouted and his own voice echoed from the walls of the cave pathetically like the voice of a small child that had gone lost on the crowded marketplace of New York. In this moment, he did not care if someone could hear him. All he wanted was to hear his father answer him. He walked farther into the cave, hoping that there was a niche he had not seen previously due to the darkness around them and yet again he called for his father. No answer, only the sound of the wind blowing through the cracks in the walls.

He felt empty as there was no answer and no sign of his father. He had not left the cave so far behind that he would have mistaken this cave for another for sure. His orientation skills had never betrayed him and he was sure that this was the right place. There even was still a little blood on the ground where his father had been lying. For once, Connor just wanted to collapse and let himself be engulfed by the pain of his wounds.
He pressed his hand to his side again and as he looked at his fingers they were wet and covered in dark red. »I thought they got you.« A voice behind him suddenly ripped him from his thoughts and as Connor whirled around his father stood close to a wall by the side. He looked gray and exhausted. His graying hair was a mess as it hung around his face loosely and for once Connor felt the urge to immediately jump his father for a hug as Fenris would have done, but he stayed back, only let a breath of relief out his mouth.

»No, no« He murmured and clutched his firewood before he moved towards his father. Only then he noticed the thin gap in the wall behind him. There was a niche he had not seen - just wide enough for one man to fit through. »I was looking for firewood. Where have you been? I thought you were gone!«

Apparently, it was a fact that the Kenway-men were not able to sit still and just do nothing. His father was the best example for this as he held his head with his left hand and gestured towards the niche again. »I found this entryway. It leads into a bigger cave and I believe that there is another exit, probably on the other side of that hill. As I woke up and you were gone I looked around a bit and when I heard the Redcoats, I thought it might be best not to get caught. Come on, we should not stay here, just in case.«

Even though his father stood upright and seemed well enough to make witty little remarks directed at Connor, as they ventured deeper into the cave system, Connor could see that he was unwell and could hardly walk properly. His injury was worse than it looked maybe, but his father would never admit to that, as Connor was aware. He was limping a little too as they entered into the next bigger cave and Connor found himself in awe at the space they stumbled into.

»At least we are safe in here.« He mumbled as they walked up to the next exit before he put down his firewood at the spot where his father had previously put down Connor's coat. Before the old man could even say a thing, he began to set up a little campfire. The wind was blowing through the cave and would pull the smoke out through the next exit that was a whole lot bigger than the one they had come through.

»For now.« His father helpfully added as he sat down on the ground again. They had not much with them, only the clothes they were wearing and their weapons. It would be a cold night for them in here and Connor thought that he better tried to hunt down a few rabbits for them to eat. It did not take him long to get the fire going for them. For a moment, he just stirred in the flames until he deemed the fire big enough to keep them warm for a while. Only then he turned around, grabbed his coat from the ground to put it on again and then braced himself to face his father as he kneeled down beside him. »This does not look good, father.« He informed his old man quietly, but Haytham could only snort at this.

»I had worse.« He scoffed as Connor rolled his eyes and grabbed his father's head to take a closer look at the wound on the side of his head.

»Yes, but you are not a young man anymore. You could have a concussion, father.« He growled. »Just tell me when you start feeling loopy. And what about your leg? You limped just now.«

»I think I sprained my ankle. Just don't fuss about it.« Connor sighed over the headstrong attitude his father liked to portray before he got up again. He did not feel too good as he did. In fact, he felt as if the world around him was spinning out of control the moment he rose to his legs, but he shook off that feeling and instead just walked to the exit again.

»I go and try to find something to eat. Just stay there and try to relax. I don't want this injury of yours to get worse.«
Haytham had always known that his son was a man of many talents and yet Haytham was impressed as Connor later came back with two dead and already skinned rabbits, their skins shoved under his belt because his son would never waste any part of any animal he would hunt down, and a patch of snow on a large leaf. It did not take long for Haytham to understand what his son planned on doing with the snow. While the rabbits grilled over the flames, Connor was quick to melt the snow and then rinse out the wound on Haytham's head. It was fruitless to say that he did not need to do this. Connor was not one to let himself get stopped by his father, not even as he was bandaging his head with a piece of fabric he had ripped from his shirt. The bloody thing was already torn, so it really did not make a difference, at least not in his son's eyes. At least the boy had put on his coat again before he had left the cave to go on a hunt.

Connor seemed to think his father would not notice how he was moving since they were in this cave. He seemed to think Haytham had not already noticed the bloodstain on his shirt and the cut in his coat, but Haytham would not say anything. Connor was a grown man and he was sure that his son would say something if he would be seriously injured. He was not stupid after all.

Even though he was snorting and growling at Connor, when his son tried to tend to his wounds, Haytham had to admit that he really did not feel too good. After the Regulars had attacked, everything had turned into a nightmare. The Patriots had hardly been able to protect their Fort and even with Connor and his help, they failed. The blow to his head had been something he had not expected. He had not seen the man on horseback approaching him before it had been too late, but he was sure that he would be dead now if it had not been for Connor.

And Lee? The last thing before the Regulars had attacked, before everything had gone to chaos, had been Benedict Arnold firing one single shot at Lee. His friend had not collapsed. In fact, he had run after Arnold and then vanished from Haytham's sight. He was sure that Charles was dead, however. Since he was not here with them, Haytham knew that his friend had not made it out of that Fort. Connor would not have left him behind, no matter their little quarrels in the past. He was sure that he would be dead now if it had not been for Connor.

Even though he was snorting and growling at Connor, when his son tried to tend to his wounds, Haytham had to admit that he really did not feel too good. After the Regulars had attacked, everything had turned into a nightmare. The Patriots had hardly been able to protect their Fort and even with Connor and his help, they failed. The blow to his head had been something he had not expected. He had not seen the man on horseback approaching him before it had been too late, but he was sure that he would be dead now if it had not been for Connor.

Benedict had known that the Regulars would attack and he had done everything in his power to make it easy for them. The gunpowder they had helped to distribute had been perfectly placed by Haytham, Connor, and the other soldiers so that the Redcoats had it easy to fire at them and cause havoc. There had been death, and explosions, and once more Haytham had felt like an old man as he later had been fighting back to back with his agile young son.

»What happened with Charles?« He finally asked after a while over the smell of roasting rabbit and the little sizzling of the flames. It was cold and they had nothing to warm their bodies except for their coats and the fire. As soon as dawn would break, they would need to find themselves some horses and leave the area before the redcoats would find them out here in the woods around West Point. They were close to New York, but maybe it was not wise to move there.

»He is dead.« Connor just said and his tone already told the tale of a young man who did not wish to speak about the details of the incident. »I got his ring.« Connor quietly added and as he gave it to his father, Haytham decided not to ask. They sat in silence after this, eating Connor's hunted meal.
and later huddled closer together near the fire. Oddly enough, Haytham did not feel the need of talking about Charles' last moments. Yet he could not help but to think about the years he had known the man. They had met twenty-five years ago - the first friendly face to greet Haytham in the new world and since then one of his most trusted friends and advisors. He had always been sure that Lee would succeed him one day. It was almost comical. They did not even need a young Assassin on the rise to destroy their Order. Had it been so weak all those years? Had he done such a bad job in leading the Order in the Colonies? He should have expanded the Order as it had been still strong. Now the only person he had left from his younger years was Shay. And Connor.

He could see Connor shivering even as he stretched his large hands to the flames to get a little bit more of their warmth. Connor looked oddly pale in the light of the fire. A few cuts and bruises were disfiguring his face and he sometimes made a grimace of pain when he shifted positions and thought his father would not notice. Leaning against the closest wall to the fire, Haytham finally bridged the distance between them and after a moment of hesitation, his son let his head slump against his shoulder in a search for warmth and maybe even comfort, while his father was poking a stick in the flames to keep them going. His head was aching, but unlike Connor, he was sure that it was nothing to worry about. He had blacked out before, as they had been running through the snow, yes, and he would much rather not imagine how Connor might have pulled him along because that stupid boy would not want to risk losing his old man instead of saving his own skin. Funny, how history tended to repeat itself. He thought about his own father and the night of his death. He too had not been able to just save his own skin and run away with his mother and sister, he too had been adamant to save his father.

»Shay told me that you are in contact with Josephine Weatley.« Haytham interrupted the silence and his own odd thoughts after a while and noticed how Connor drowsily opened his eyes at that. He looked odd, but Haytham could not put his finger on what it was that looked so odd about him. Well, his son had always been an oddball, he mused.

»I'm not.« He murmured but he sounded as though he was slurring his words a bit. He was most probably just tired. Haytham had no clue how late it really was, but he expected it to be dark outside already. When the Fort got attacked it had already been late in the afternoon and since then at least a few hours had passed. »She writes me sometimes and I reply. I'm just being polite.«

»There is nothing wrong in being in contact with a lovely young lady.« Haytham replied, even though it was a little odd to talk about these things with his son in general, but even more so now that they sat in this freezing cave with Connor leaning against him and his head resting on his shoulder. Connor was not a person fond of touching. He rather tried to avoid touching as much as he possibly could even with people he liked, so Haytham would never make the big mistake of shoving his son away when he would open up like this. He might not be the best father in the world, he was maybe a little too strict most of the time, too demanding of his son and would not praise him enough for the achievements Connor had brought them, but he was not a complete jerk either.

»So you like her.« Connor realized still very quietly. His eyes had fallen shut again as he apparently was not able to keep them open.

»Her grandfather was one of us, Connor.« Haytham replied. »She has his intelligence without a doubt and she knows how to use her skills to her advantage. She would be a great asset to our Order if we would manage to get her to join the Templar Order. Our ranks have cleared quite a bit by now - and yes, maybe with her as your wife, you would be able to achieve great things in this new world. You know, Connor, your skin color does not always stand in your way. You will learn that your name will open quite a few doors for you if you wish for it. We never talked about your education. You could still visit a good college either here or in England, if you wish and I am sure
Josephine would-« He paused as Connor slumped against him even more so than before and as he looked down on his son’s face, he was sure that Connor had just fallen asleep out of utter exhaustion. But then he saw the blood quietly pooling on the stone floor.

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As Connor stumbled into the Fort he could hardly breathe from the smoke outside. He had lost sight of his father and even though he wanted nothing more than to search for him and make sure that he was okay, he trusted his father’s skill in battle. His father would know what to do and Connor needed to catch his breath. Coughing and wheezing he clutched his side and looked in horror down on his bloody hands and the gushing wound in his right side. He had seen the soldier with the musket too late and had barely escaped a deadly shot to the head before he had managed to take out the soldier with a swift move of his hidden blade.

As another explosion shook the building, Connor knew that he needed to go back outside and fight. Everything had happened so fast that it was hard to keep track of everything. The moment the guard had shouted that the Regulars came, the first shot had been fired and straight through the eye of the screaming soldier. Connor had been too distracted by that to notice how Benedict had swiftly drawn his pistol and as he had, the shot had already been fired. First, he had not been able to understand what was happening and too busy with running to aid the Patriot soldiers in keeping out the advancing troops. Only out of the corner of his eye he had seen how Charles had run after Benedict, firing after him, but he had not seen what had happened then.

With a low grunt, Connor was stumbling forward. He had lost all orientation and could hardly even recognize the room he was in. He was almost sure that he had one or two fractured ribs, suffered from one especially nasty blow from the exploding gunpowder. He could hardly stand upright without crumpling in pain and yet he did. He could see light coming from the back of the room he was in and so he moved towards the light, hoping to find something that could indeed aid him out there.

All he found, however, was Charles Lee, sitting at a small, round, wooden table with an open bottle of whiskey in his hand. He looked pale, as Connor walked closer. In the dim light of a lamp hanging over the table, he could see a thin layer of sweat on Lee’s forehead. He did not even need to ask to know what was going on. As Lee looked up from the bottle in his hand, his eyes were glossed over by death, as he was clutching his stomach with his free hand. Connor noticed the dribble of blood on the wooden floorboards beneath Lee’s chair as he slowly walked closer. Suddenly, his mouth felt incredibly dry. There was no question that Lee was a dead man and that there was nothing Connor could do to change that.

In a moment of silent agreement and understanding, Connor sat down heavily on the chair next to Lee. He noticed how Lee’s eyes darted to the wound in Connor’s side, with an almost unreadable expression on his face. Connor wondered if Lee might even felt concerned or worried for him, but he shoved those thoughts aside as he watched how Lee pulled the Templar ring from his finger and laid it on the table between them. There were no words and Connor did not feel as if they would need words anyway. The gesture was clear enough and so Connor carefully took Lee’s ring and closed his fist around it. There was the ghost of a smile pulling on Lee’s lips before he took another sip from his bottle and then offered it to Connor. He hesitated, but then took it. This was a peace offering. Lee’s last wish was to make peace with Connor, maybe even gain his forgiveness and Connor answered his silent plea as he took a sip from the Whiskey as well and put the bottle down between them. The alcohol was burning up his stomach and as he drew his hidden blade he could not help but cramp his fingers around the knife a little. Lee nodded and without wasting another second, Connor pulled his fellow Templar close, as he put his right hand in Lee’s neck. It was an almost intimate situation they were in, as Connor stared Lee directly in his gray, dull,
dying eyes, leaning his forehead against the other man’s damp skin and then he plunged his knife straight into Lee’s heart to end his friend’s suffering quickly. As he let go of Lee a moment later, his fallen brother fell face first onto the table and all Connor felt was a hollow sensation deep down in his stomach.
Chapter 26

»Unbelievable.« The sound of a voice by his side was shaking Connor awake, slowly but thoroughly like thunder roaring across a nightly sky. He was suddenly a child again, shaken awake by a thunderstorm and caught up in an endless search for his mother. »Unbelievable. How can one single person be so stupid?« There were hands upon him, on his skin. Hot hands on his icy skin. It took a moment for him to fully grasp the situation, and as he did, the words almost escaped him without his permission.

»I'm fine.« He whispered, but his throat felt like it was lined with sandpaper. »I'm fine.« He repeated and yet the words barely made it out of his mouth. His own voice was nothing more than a raspy breath in his ears, almost impossible to hear over the constant ringing in his brain.

»Shut up.« His father almost shouted as he pressed his hands down on his side and Connor did his best to follow the motion with his eyes, but all he could see was blood and naked flesh, before the world turned upside down again and dragged him back into the endless abyss of the dark oceans of his mind.

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He was sure that he had never felt this old before. Hell, he was only in his early fifties and there was no reasonable explanation for him to why he should feel as old as he did now, watching his son in the flickering light of the flames. This awful, petulant child. Connor was not able to follow the most simple of instructions. He was not able to act reasonably and he was most definitely not able to keep himself from harm, as should be expected from any adult.

Their situation could not be any worse. Outside the cave, a blizzard shook the woods around them, as he had seen when he had decided to venture outside to collect snow to melt so he and Connor could drink. Never in his life had he wished more for a pot or a pan to ease the task. Connor had hardly been conscious after he had first blacked out and getting him to drink at all after he had rinsed out his wound, had been quite a tedious little task. The wound was a gushing cut through his right side. It looked like a bullet had gone right through the flesh, but the edges were jagged and would leave an ugly scar for sure - If his son would manage to survive until dawn anyway. It was unbearable cold inside the cave and his son’s boots and breeches were wet from running around the almost knee-high snow with him earlier this day. He had nothing to sew his wound shut and no clean bandages to wrap around the boy. All he could do was to rip another piece of fabric out of Connor's already destroyed shirt.

As he later sat in complete silence and stared at Connor's unconscious face, he felt like laughing. The odds were stacked against them completely. It was highly likely that Connor would die of infection or of the shock his body had gone into after he had blacked out. He was shivering in pain and coldness - it was hard to tell the difference and Haytham too was badly wounded. His leg was worse than he would have thought originally and his head - well, his head had seen better days for sure. He was left with a very demanding and consuming headache, but he forced himself to keep his eyes open anyway.

Maybe they would freeze to death, he thought. Or they would die from their wounds. Both scenarios seemed equally likely to Haytham as he sat on the cold hard ground. At least Connor's breathing had evened out again by now, but he was still pale. He had lost quite a lot of blood and that was only what Haytham had seen him lose. As soon as the sun would rise in the morning, Haytham would venture out and find some horses for them to use. He needed to get Connor and himself as quickly as possible to a doctor, but New York - no, it was too dangerous. They would
need to come too close to the Fort of West Point, to get to New York. They needed to find a settlement nearby. And yet, as Connor stirred in his sleep, Haytham was aware how unlikely it was that Connor would survive a travel on horseback. There was no way the boy would be able to ride by himself.

»You are truly the epiphany of stupidity, Haytham Kenway.« He sighed to himself as he checked on Connor's makeshift bandage again and tucked him into his coat a little more. He would freeze to death. His body was not strong enough to keep him warm.

Since he had started his journey into the colonies twenty-five years ago, he found himself often entranced by the amulet he wore around his neck and had not taken off a single time since it was in his possession. This bloody thing had been the main catalyst behind everything that had happened. It was the cause of his journey and his meeting with Ziio. If this thing had never fallen into his hands, Connor would not exist. Maybe it was about time to split paths, he wondered. He had worn this thing for twenty-five years and since it looked as if everyone he knew since then was dying around him, maybe it was about time to pass on the torch. Maybe, he wondered, the bloody thing for once could make itself useful and act as a lucky charm to his son, since it helped Connor to even find his way into this world.

After a moment of hesitation, he could not even explain to himself, he took off the pendant and carefully pulled it over Connor's head. It seemed to shimmer on his son's bronze colored skin as Haytham stroked his finger over the strange metal one last time. Odd, really. He had never seen it do something like this, but it was as if the metal piece had a mind of its own and recognized Connor. Well, that was his concussion speaking, Haytham thought.

Then again, this thing had always seemed to whisper to him as he had first gotten it and had been alone with the thing on board of a ship on his journey into the colonies. Now it was silent. Maybe it would speak to Connor now instead. Haytham could only wonder, but, finally, he took off his own coat as he curled around his son from behind and threw his coat over them both. It was a pity attempt to keep them both warm and alive and Haytham was aware that the odds were stacked against them as he closed his eyes.

Connor was staving off infection for now, but his condition still did not look very promising as the next day came, which surprisingly enough did not see them both dead, as Haytham noticed as soon as he managed to open his eyes. Connor was awake already when he woke up and even though he looked still sickly pale sitting close by the dying fire, he seemed a little more awake and yet Haytham did not see them travel yet, as he left Connor to find at least one horse.

It was not hard for him to take out two unsuspecting redcoats on horseback which were lurking nearby in the woods and lead their horses back to the cave where he tied them to a tree so they would not just run off like this - and of course, he had taken everything useful he could find on the guards too. One could never be too prepared. Even though he tried not to complain and keep his always superior mask intact in front of his son, Haytham was aware how critical his own condition was too and so it was indeed a miracle, even to him, how he had managed to take out these two men. Well, they had been distracted quite a bit, talking about some ladies in a brothel in New York, apparently.

His son needed more help than he would have assumed to get out of the cave - a task Connor had performed with ease the last day. »How does it always happen to be me who gets seriously injured?« His son inquired with furrowed brows and panting with exhaustion already as Haytham helped him to climb on the horse’s back outside of the cave. It was a beautiful brown mare with deep brown and understanding eyes, as her new rider clung to the reins like a drunken sailor to the railing of a ship in a storm.
Because you are still just a pup. But even though he was humoring his son, Haytham felt the effects of his very own head wound as they left the cave behind slowly. They had decided to put on the redcoats of the two soldiers Haytham had killed for their horses and to their incredible amount of luck, one of them had even been big and generous enough to lend his shirt to Connor. While it was not the first time that Haytham would dress up as a redcoat, it was weird to see his son in uniform, but at least it was warm enough so the boy would not need to freeze more than necessary. Still, as he threw a short look at his son, he could not help but smirk a little. The red suits you. He said, trying to at least pry a small grin from his son, but all he got was a confused look out of brown eyes. Connor's hair hung loose and messy around his face and he had not gone to the lengths to tie it together or hide it under the hat of the redcoat, but still, looking at his son now almost painfully reminded him on the day he had last dressed up as a British soldier - and furthermore how it ended.

Now looking at his son, he could hardly make out what parts of his face looked like him. As he had first seen Connor he had recognized his nose and his mouth immediately as traits he remembered from his own father, but now, looking at his son's freckled face it was odd and almost impossible to pinpoint what traits he and Connor shared. Shay always liked to say that they just somehow looked alike, and Haytham thought that he was blind to these similarities simply because he was too close to see them.

However now, seeing him dressed up as a British soldier, his usually bronze colored face oddly pale with the freckles on the bridge of his nose all the more prominent, Haytham could almost see himself as a young man in his twenties in this young man.

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It's all a matter of perspective. Ben gasped as he clutched the wound in his abdomen that would kill him soon enough. Never in his life had Connor more felt the urge to inflict pain while he wanted to just turn away at the same instant. He was sickly torn and could hardly focus on his task all the while Ben spat his poison at him without regrets as it seemed. There is no single path through life that's right and fair and does no harm. Do you truly think the crown has no call? No right to feel betrayed? You should know better than this, Connor. After everything you have seen, after everything you have experienced. But dedicated as you are to please your father and fight for the Templars, fight against the British Crown and the Loyalists, who themselves think their work is right and just. Think on that the next time you insist your work alone would benefit the greater good. Your enemy would beg to differ and that not without reason. His words and his eyes were full of hate towards him, as Ben took his last horrible rasping breath and died. Connor felt frozen in time as he watched the eyes of the man he had once called a friend falling shut.

Your words may have been sincere, but that does not make them true. He whispered more to himself than to his fallen Templar brother as he crouched down to slip the ring off Benjamin's finger. It left a white stripe on Benjamin Church's ring finger where it sat until now. A reminder of their time as brothers, as allies, as comrades that would now never get to vanish. Someone else would wear this ring one day, and this person would give back honor to it, Connor decided as he almost carefully shoved the ring in his coat pocket. They had quite a few rings by now and no one to wear them.

The moment he rose from the spot where Benjamin lied, he braced himself for what would follow next, but still, the attack from behind took him by surprise.

Can you keep going or do you need a break? His father's voice caught him off guard and forced his mind back into reality. As Connor opened his eyes he slowly grew aware that he had closed them for quite a while, dreaming of the shadows that were haunting his mind. His horse was still
going, but mainly because his father was holding its reins as he noticed now. He felt dizzy and his balance was off, but he knew that they needed to keep going.

The road they were taking was a little longer than the one they would have been able to take if it had not been for Benedict Arnold's betrayal. They could not dare to come too close to Fort West Point, especially now that they were dressed up as British soldiers. By now, the sun was high up on the sky and he was sure that they had come a whole lot closer to New York again. It would be too far to travel on horseback back to Boston without stopping in New York for a doctor and something to eat and Connor was as aware of that as his father was. He was not the only one of them who needed a doctor desperately. His father too was injured badly and he could see how pale he was looking.

»I can keep going.« Connor said therefore even though he wanted nothing but to sleep. He could not sleep, though. He needed to push through this somehow. »Tell me about London.«

As he glanced at his father from the side, he was increasingly becoming more and more aware how odd his father stared at him at this question. Around them, the world was hidden under a blanket of snow and ice and Connor could already sense that it was only a matter of time now until snow would start to fall again and make it harder for them to travel forwards. Their horses needed a break too soon enough, he guessed, but they could not allow them to rest until they were somewhere safe.

After a moment of what seemed to be hesitation, his father cleared his throat a little and looked ahead again, keeping their horses in a steady trot. »Well, I lived in London until I followed my Mentor, Reginald Birch abroad, but you know this story already. So, just keep in mind that everything I can tell you about London is through the eyes of a child.« It was hard to imagine his father as a child anyway, but Connor nodded nonetheless to urge him forward. »Well, London, to me, had always been like the churning sea in the middle of a storm. If you think you have seen a lot of people in one place in Boston or New York, you would be overwhelmed ever going to London. It has always been lively around our house at Queen Anne’s Square and I still remember the theater vividly. My father has taken me to see a play when I was eight years old, but I hardly remember any of it now. Sadly, I must say, that London is one of the most dirty cities I have ever seen in my life.«

»What do you mean by dirty?« Connor asked quietly while he tried to form a picture in his head. He tried to imagine the labyrinth like streets of this big town and the houses that surely towered a lot higher than those of Boston or New York, Connor was familiar with. He tried to imagine fine dressed ladies and perfectly polished gentlemen roaming the streets as if this was all that London was. There was so much of the world that Connor had not yet seen and though he had always been too occupied with his own goals in life to even think about exploring the world, now suddenly he felt the urge to see every little wonder this world had to offer to him as soon as Washington was dead.

Haytham smiled a little at his question as they urged their horses onwards over a snow covered path through the forest, careful so that their horses would not slip on the ground or injure themselves in any way. New York was already in sight, as they finally breached the tree line. »It's covered in dust, you know? The smoke from the chimneys has tainted parts of the town almost black. In the autumn, when the days grow shorter, the poorer districts of town are almost hidden underneath a black veil. It’s a very persistent kind of fog lingering about at all times.«

»Did you travel a lot when you were younger? I mean, other to the places of which you told me.« Even though traveling through the continent of Europe and visiting even faraway places like Damascus sounded incredibly adventurous and Connor could not at all even imagine those foreign
places.

»No, not at all. My whole life was determined to find my father's killers and bring back my sister from her torment.« His father replied. »Every place I visited, it was exclusively for work purposes, but I hope to change this when we achieved our goal here in the colonies.«

»But when will this be, father? Our goals will not be fulfilled just because Washington is dead. I can see that now.« Even though it had taken him a while to see it.

»Maybe never, it is hard to say.« His father agreed quietly. »Now, with Charles gone, we have lost a lot of influence in this war, sadly. Now we can only see and pray that our previous acts had enough influence to tilt this war into the direction we need. Perhaps it's on you to bring our plans to fruition so that the colonies can maybe bloom to a big and wonderful nation someday, but I would like to show you London first.«

As they fell into silence once more, Connor wanted to focus on London. He and his father would travel across the Atlantic together to land in Britain and his father would then show him the wonders of Britannia. Maybe he would even like it there, he wondered. Here in the colonies, he was torn between his cause and his loyalty to his native people. He knew that no one was left of his tribe now. He did not know what happened to the other children that got captured with him, but even if they were still alive and chained into slavery, Connor would never see them again. He was aware that this life was gone forever and that he would never turn back. The land where his people had once lived would be taken by settlers soon enough if it had not already happened. The only way for him now was forward. He wondered, though, if maybe he would find that he belonged there when he would first set foot on British soil. He was, after all, half British. »I want to see your birth house.« Connor mumbled, more to himself than to his father, but he was aware that the old wolf had heard him.

He was freezing as they reached New York finally after hours they had spent on the backs of their horses and Connor already knew that the cold he was feeling was not due to the snow around them. They had disposed of the red coats a good mile in front of the town so that they would not fall under suspicion too much. He was feeling sleepy again and walking simply did not seem to be an option to him any longer. His feet felt heavy as iron and as he looked at his father he could already see how gray his face appeared.

They needed a rest as fast as possible - and more importantly, they needed a doctor. But where to find one? His father dismounted his horse soon enough after they had dove into the noisy crowd that was New York. Really, if London was bigger and louder than New York, Connor could not even grasp how this city must look like. He had seen a few paintings, of course, for his father was quite proud of his origins, but he still could not fathom it.

Haytham again took the reins from his cold hands to gently guide the two horses towards the closest inn he could spot alongside the main street that was dividing New York in the middle as it seemed on first glance. »We take a room for now. Maybe the innkeepers can fetch us a doctor.« Haytham quietly turned towards him as he tied their horses to a drinking trough in front of the inn. Only reluctantly Connor dismounted his horse then and to his surprise, he did not even feel pain anymore. He was sure that this could not be a good sign. Shortly he grabbed his father's left arm for support, but then he straightened his back.

»I feel like every time I help someone to fight, I either get my head bashed in or get shot at. Why is it always me?« Connor huffed, angry at himself for showing such weakness. He was aware though that he had been lucky. His father and he had probably been the only ones escaping West Point alive. Lee was dead now and to him, it was an enigma who would fill in for him. Would the
Congress be as stupid as to give Washington back his position as Commander in chief or would someone else get the job? Whoever it was, for now, Connor had enough of the war.

He needed to focus on all the achievements he had had during the last couple of years. He was twenty-four years old, but his name was already known among seafarers. He had aided their allies in many ways. He had helped the Randolph and her Captain in a quite tedious operation a few years ago when he had only been twenty-one years old. He had won battles, even though no one was supposed to know it had been him. He had helped to tilt the outcome of the war to their favor and thus to the favor of the colonists. He was sure that, thanks to his help maybe, the colonies soon would be free from the British. His father always said he was too humble to see the good he had done and maybe he was right. Unlike Lee, Pitcairn or even William, he did not have medals to show what he already achieved in his young life and his name would never appear in any book talking about this period in history. There was no military career lying behind him and thus no reputation to remind him who he was. He knew that he was not a lousy little wimp who only got beaten up all the time. He was strong and he was a capable fighter. It was him, who had killed Kanen'tó:kon. It was him, who had killed Church - and many more before him. He was skilled, he was careful and he was living a life in the shadows.

But even though he knew all of these things, to Connor it was sometimes hard not to see his life as a repetition of him getting his ass whooped every single day. It was like a poorly written story, in which the main character would suffer through many hardships seemingly without good reason and only to become a strong person at the end of that story, leaving the reader with annoyance at best and disgust at worst.

This was no story however, this was his life and he was aware that participating in a war tended to lead to injury. It was nothing to be ashamed of. And yet he felt weak.

»Don't dwell on it, Connor. We are lucky that we managed to get here alive. It could have been me who got shot just as likely. I too was too reckless, too careless. But I have a little bit more experience than you and now come - we both need something warm to fill our stomachs.«

It was later when Connor finally managed to flop down on one of the narrow beds near the windows leading towards the main street. If he would raise and stood beside the window, Connor was sure that he would be able to see their stolen horses. It had been quite tedious to get the innkeeper to give this room to them, but Connor had already forgotten the reason why already. His father had talked to the man behind the bar, but Connor had noticed the looks this man had thrown at him and his father, looks he could not really categorize.

»Apparently there is a doctor living close by.« His father said as he walked into the room behind him. »But the owner said the people around here call him White Death, so maybe he is not exactly the right choice for us.«

As fast as he had flopped down on the bed, he was up on his feet again. »Where can I find him?« He asked immediately as he already walked towards the door and thus towards his father. Haytham, however, grabbed him by the arm right away.

»You are not going anywhere, Connor. I am going to find this man.«

»I'm fine, father.« He had seen the way his father was moving since they arrived in New York. His father's balance was just as bad as his and every time he thought Connor was too distracted he had been swaying quite badly. They were both badly injured, but Connor still thought that he might have the better chances of managing to fetch the doctor safely. His father would call it the ignorance of youth, perhaps.
»You have lost a lot of blood, Connor. You are not fine.«

»I am well enough to fetch the doctor and you should be lying down now father. I will not argue about this with you and waste precious time.« For Connor, it had become a normality to use a firm voice and be strict since he became the captain of his very own ship. He was used to giving orders and to lead, but it was new that he would use the same kind of dominance on his father. At first, his father seemed not impressed, but then he could feel his hand losing its forceful grip before he let go of Connor altogether.

Finding the doctor whom people only called White Death was not as hard as he had feared at first. Right after he had left the inn, he had already started hearing people talk about the man he was looking for. Dr. White’s name resounded through the land, apparently and Connor had always been quite a good listener. He followed the hushed voices of the people around through the snow and the cold, biting air until he found a young man leaning against the corner of a house with a pipe in his left hand and the right digging deep into his coat pocket. He looked bored, to say the least and the way he eyed Connor up did not escape him. Sometimes, even years after the fact, Connor still wondered how many people in this town might remember him and his failed hanging. Maybe that was why the innkeeper had been reluctant to give them a room, he shortly wondered. He tried not to think too much about it. Thinking about that very day would mean remembering Lee’s help in freeing him too - or Thomas.

»Dr. White?« Connor asked the man as he stepped close enough so he would not need to shout and draw attention, and instead could lower his voice to a quieter tone. Not everyone would need to know the predicament he was in and Connor himself tried to let his body forget about it as well. He needed to go back to his father as fast as he could now. The old wolf would never complain, but Connor knew that he was in pain and that he was maybe injured more seriously than he would ever let on.

»No.« The man replied with a snort. »He is the drunken sot around the corner. If you can get his attention, tell him I quit. All this ire on him. Not worth getting caught up in it. I have a family.« Well, at least he had found Dr. White’s ex-apprentice as it seemed and Connor followed the direction the man was pointing him in a little more quickly now. A drunken sot. Well, that was exactly what he needed now. Of course, he could have decided to run around and look for another doctor, but he was acutely aware that neither he nor his father had that much time now. They needed a doctor and they needed one now. The only hope left for him was now, that even drunk this man could perform a reasonable job on them.

He found the doctor around the next corner and witnessed just how a group of men walked away from him, after they had apparently tried to scare the doctor in throwing apples and rocks at him, but the man only swayed and shouted after them as if they could scare him just as much as a bunch of kittens would.

For a moment, after Connor had walked around the corner and saw the men throwing things at the person he could only assume to be the doctor, he had feared that he would need to interfere and help the man - something that he was in no condition to do now. He was glad as those men simply walked off with insults on their lips. He watched how the man they had insulted and attacked staggered back to the wall of a nearby house and slowly slumped to the ground as if he would not even mind the snow wetting his clothes. He was wearing eyeglasses, just as Connor had always imagined every white doctor to wear when he had been still little. His clothes told the story of a man who surely had seen better days already and while he held a pipe in his left hand, he had a bottle of what Connor could only assume to be rum in his right.

»Dr. White?« He asked as he walked closer and the look he was granted with was at the very least
angry as the man shot back an annoyed »Yes?« at him, as though he was expecting another person to taunt or attack him.

»My name is Connor.« He said immediately as if this would mean anything to this man at all.

»And what can I help you with?« The man growled while his sharp eyes never left Connor's face like a hawk preying on a little mouse. »Another quote for the broadsheets for you to twist against me? Same thing all over this wretched country. No matter where I go. Boston, New York - it's always the same thing.«

»I need your help.« But he could hardly even explain himself to the man, as Dr. White got up to his feet again, swaying as badly as a drunken sailor about to fall into the turbid waters of the harbor.

»Don't you know who I am, boy? I'm the doctor the British have been slandering all over every town within the colonies. Just ask, boy. In Boston and here in New York I am only known by one name: White Death. Does this ring a bell? No? Then you are either deaf or even stupider than you look.«

»I don't care much for the things the British say.« Connor groaned as his hand found its way back to his side again where he carefully pressed against the makeshift bandages his father had applied on him last night. He could feel the moist sensation of blood seeping through the fabric once again. He needed to get back now as quickly as he possibly could. »Please, Dr. White, I need your help. My father is badly wounded and requires a doctor's hand immediately. The owner of the inn we are staying at told us your name. Please come and help.«

It seemed, whatever Connor had said exactly, was enough to convince the doctor. Connor liked to think that it was the same reason this man had decided to become a doctor in the first place, the wish to help people in need of help, that led him to follow Connor. Maybe it was only the promise of good money he could use for another bottle of rum. He really did not care.

»You must truly be desperate when you come to me for help, boy.« The doctor huffed but then, with a derogatory gesture towards the street, he continued. »Lead the way. I will see what I can do for your father.«

Haytham was not impressed with the doctor Connor brought before him, but, he thought, he needed to suffice. He could smell the alcohol on Dr. White's breath, as the man leaned over him to look at the wound his son had clumsily bandaged up last night with a piece of fabric.

»Is it bad?« Connor worried behind the doctor while he was still hovering near the door instead of sitting down himself. He looked like he wanted to be ready to go off running if the doctor would ask him to fetch something and clearly Haytham did not expect anything else from his son. Needless to say that he would not get very far. »He hurt his leg too.«

»Would you stop worrying and sit down already?« Haytham groaned. »You should rather have a look at my idiot son, Doctor, he is injured far worse than me.« Dr. White threw a glance over his shoulder at Connor, but his son only stared at his father in a silent battle for dominance - which he would clearly lose, as Haytham decided. Then again, he could understand his son's worried behavior, no matter how ridiculous and completely out of character it seemed. Of course, he could. His son had already lost his mother and now he was afraid to lose his father too. He knew how Connor felt. He had been in his shoes too when he had been younger and because of this, he let the doctor do his duty.
»I'm afraid you suffer from a concussion.« The physician later concluded as he was finished with his examination of Haytham's head and Haytham himself had a hard time not to snort or comment on this conclusion. Of course, he had a concussion and he had been aware of this himself for the last hours at the very least. »This wound will need stitching and after that, I can only ask of you to rest for a few days. There is not much I can do about this anyway.«

»I'm afraid we do not have time to rest. My son and I are in dire need of going back to Boston as soon as possible, urgent business is calling for our immediate attention.« Haytham replied. He would be fine as soon as the wound was stitched shut. He would take something against the pain and ease the headache and after a night of sleep, he would book passage on a ship back to Boston first thing in the morning.

»Well, I can only give you my professional advice, Sir, everything else is up to you.« Dr. White stated with a frown that clearly told of his annoyance with Haytham before he turned to his bag and started to pull out all kinds of medical supplies. Drunk or not, he made a decent job and he was prepared at least. His hands were steady as he had examined Haytham and his eyes focused, still, Haytham felt a little uneasy by the thought of letting this man poke a needle through his skin.

»Connor, would you fetch me a bowl of water and a few clean towels? I could need your help when I start to sew your father’s wound.«

There was no response. No enthusiastically little yes from his son, who was oh so very eager to please and be helpful all the time. »Connor?« Dr. White asked again and as he and Haytham turned to look towards the door he had almost expected his son to lie on the floor already. He did not. He still stood with his back pressed against the door as if in search for support. Even from his position on the bed, Haytham could see the thin layer of sweat on his son’s forehead. His pupils seemed huge even from afar and he was pressing his right trembling hand against the wound on his side. Still, he could not hide the red seeping through the shirt yet again.

»I need to lie down.« Connor murmured, but did not make a move towards his bed on his own and Haytham knew that this was because he was not able to. As long as he would not move a limb now, he could stay upright, but as soon as he would try to move, he would collapse. »I think I have been bleeding.« He helpfully added. The doctor rose quickly from Haytham's side, but they both could only watch as Connor took his blood stained hand from the wound, staring at the red skin in awe for a moment, before he sunk to the floor heavy like a bear before Dr. White could even reach him.
Chapter 27

January 1781

»You know in my village, we have a special tea that only the strongest warriors are allowed to drink in times of need.« Connor began his little tale as he was occupying himself with staring at the wooden ceiling. The wooden beam above him that was stabilizing the roof as it appeared, did not look very trustworthy to him, but as of right now it was serving as a drying rag for their clothes. Connor hated nothing more than to rest and that he was not allowed to run free and busy his always nervous hands with something useful to do. He had never been good in doing absolutely nothing. He hated idle with passion, but as of right now he could only lie on his back and stare at the ceiling of this unfamiliar room.

»Is that so?« His father hummed somewhere from his left side and as Connor turned his head to look at him he found his father leaning with his back against the headboard of his clumsily crafted wooden bed with a book in his hands. He could not read its title from afar, but he was sure that it was just another poetical and surely very important book – maybe even some scientific study. His father was quite interested in science. Unlike him, his father was allowed to move by now according to Dr. Lyle White, and he had chosen this opportunity to raid his favorite bookstore around the corner here in New York, as he always did when he would travel to New York and had a little bit spare time left on his hands. His father too could not stand boredom, at least that Connor clearly got from him, but his father seemed not willing to share his books with his son either.

»It's brewed from the leaves of the red willow in the frontier, the tea I mean. The clan mother said that the tea is granting special abilities to those who drink it if they are strong enough.« Connor then continued, even though he thought his father was not really all that interested in his little tale. His book seemed more thrilling. And yet, Haytham threw one sideways glance at him, before he asked: »And what if they are not strong enough?«

Connor could not help but grin a little at this. »They go crazy and die.«

»Charming.« His father snorted before he turned his attention back to the book. Connor was quiet for a moment as he himself decided to stare at the ceiling again. He missed Fenris. If his wolf would be here now, he would already feel a whole lot more comfortable, even though the wolf would want to sleep beside him in the bed, resting his big, heavy head on Connor's chest. It was one bad habit of Fenris' that Connor simply seemed not able to white out of him.

The situation was almost comical, he decided after a few more moments in silence. Here they lay, father and son, in this dingy room in a strange inn they had never stayed at before, both wrapped up in bandages. Doctor White had done a good job taking care of his wound, as Connor had noticed after he had regained consciousness. His father had later told him that he had been sleeping for almost two days straight and that the doctor had even been afraid he would die of infection instead of waking up at all. Apparently, he was not going to die of infection all too soon now – but maybe of embarrassment instead. After all, he had wanted to show how strong he was this time around in helping his father instead. The swelling of the wound had gone down drastically within the last day and Connor did not even feel sick any longer. The stitches the doctor had made to sew shut his wound were even and tiny, but they would leave a scar nonetheless and Connor did not really mind anyway. He was still amazed what such a tiny bullet could do to a human body – not that he would have seen it for the first time, though usually, he was not at the receiving end of a shot. His father had scolded him that he could deem himself lucky that the bullet had not hit vital organs. As if Connor would not know this. His father's head too was still covered in a thick bandage to keep his
injury from dirt, but as he knew his father, the bandage would soon need to leave his skull anyway. His father was much too vain to run around like this.

»As a child« Connor again broke the silence between them after a moment as his father had already gone back to his book again and turned the next page seemingly uninterested. »I always thought that I would drink the tea one day in the future and help my people to rise against those who wanted to take away our land. The tea is meant to send the warrior who drinks it on a spirit journey and Kanen'tó:kon said the tea would then bring the warrior into contact with an animal which would lend him their powers. I always thought that I would meet the wolf for sure when I would make the journey as a grown man. Kanen'tó:kon said I would probably meet the duck.«

Walking the streets of Boston once more felt nice for a change after having needed to lie down for quite a while now. Connor had been out of commission once again for days after they came back from New York, until he was allowed to leave the house again - mostly because his father had been quite adamant to keep him in his sight as if Connor would just get himself injured once again as soon as his father would not look. They had not talked that much about Charles’ death after Connor had given Charles’ ring to his father. They had not talked about the amulet either, which his father had given him in his sleep, apparently. Connor had not taken it off since and his father had not asked for it again or even demanded it back. Since he knew about the amulet and the story behind it, knowing that this necklace had brought his parents together in the first place, he had always wondered how it felt to wear it when he would see it dangling around his father's white neck. It was a Piece of Eden after all, and though in the beginning, he had not wasted a second thought about the necklace, now that he knew how it had felt to wear the ring and what power it had had, he had grown aware of the fact that the necklace probably possessed some powers too. His father seemed still unaware of those powers still, though.

His father had told him that it was a key but that he did not know what it opened. He had thought it would open the big Temple, the one thing every Temple Knight was searching for seemingly since the beginning of time. It seemed to be close, but the cave his mother had brought Haytham to had not been the right place, apparently. Maybe Connor would find out about it at some point in his life. Maybe he would be able to open the big Temple and lead the world in the right direction (whichever that might be). Sometimes, he had to confess, he felt a little uneasy with the amulet around his neck, especially in cold dark nights when he would just stare at the odd metal and turning it between his fingers. It seemed oddly alive as if it was about to whisper secrets into his ear he was not yet ready to hear about.

He was drinking up the town as he was wandering through the streets. It was only two weeks since Lee’s death and Connor was out to hear what was being talked about now among the soldiers in Boston. He needed to gather as much information as he possibly could about the state the Continental Army was in after Charles’ untimely demise. But first and foremost, even though he would not say it out loud, he needed to hunt.

And his hunt was leading him closer towards the fish market near the harbor, where some of the soldiers were lurking. In the past years since he was living in Boston, he had learned that this was the place to be if one wanted information. »It seems the Congress has not yet decided on a new Commander in Chief.«

Of course, Connor was not surprised to see or hear Shay. The assassin hunter had been his best teacher when it came to the art of moving undetected and without any noise at all and though he had not noticed Shay before as he stopped close to the corner of a tailor's shop, he did not flinch. He did not always need to hear or see Shay to know that he was there. It was a certain feeling he
would get if Shay or even his father, who was silent as a black cat, were around. It was a test. Every time they would sneak up on him, they were testing if he would let himself get surprised or if he had learned to focus all his senses on his environment at all times.

Connor would never forget the days he had spent with Shay, moving through the house for hours and hours on end, trying to be more silent than a mouse. Shay had always been sitting somewhere in the house and not only had Connor had the order to find him, but also to reach him silently and by surprise. Sometimes they had used Haytham or even Gist to help with this test. While his target, Shay, had been waiting somewhere seemingly unaware of his impending doom, their helpers had roamed the house and Connor had needed to get around them without them noticing. Sometimes it had even been part of the test to take them out without the other noticing – the one that had gotten taken out would then have sat down in the sitting room and wait for the test to end. It had been hard, but he had mastered these techniques at some point. Learning from a former Assassin really had its pros. The Templars operated differently though and his father was never tired of reminding his son on this distinction between their groups. They were no dull murderers taking out their enemies one by one. Their game was the political one. Their game was the game of the puppet master. Not in the shadows like the Assassins had chosen but in brought daylight. They should not need to know these techniques, but his father said, it was never wrong to know how the enemy operated. And knowing these details and techniques could be crucial when it came to surviving. Kanen'tó:kon had not known that Connor was aware and trained in these arts and it had cost him his life in the end.

Right now, however, it seemed they were losing the game with Lee gone now and the disaster that had been the battle of West Point. This was not entirely their war, of course, but it was their goal to build the foundation of a great society - possibly under Templar rule or impact at least. For that, they needed to get rid of the Brits first, though.

»I'm afraid they will turn back to Washington again.« Connor murmured as he leaned against the brick wall of the tailor's shop. Shay stood on the other side of the corner right next to him on his right-hand side. He held his arms crossed leisurely in front of his chest, leaning with his left side against the brick wall and watching calmly the market.

»I'm afraid that they will elect him again. Lee was a good Commander and he has won the battles he has fought in earnest, but sadly Washington was Commander for a little while longer than him and he too helped to tilt the war in the direction of freedom. There is only one battle left to fight for him if it comes to this. If he manages to end the siege of Yorktown, well, the people would love him, maybe even give him more power than he previously possessed.« Shay quietly considered and he seemed to do his best to give the impression of an unworried civilian.

»We can't let this happen.« Connor decided immediately, even though this seemed not to be a question anyway.

»Well,« Shay grinned. »he is the first person on your list anyway, isn't he?«

Oh, as if it would be that easy! If it was for him, he would hunt Washington down immediately and let him bleed for everything he had done. »Father warns me to be patient.«

»And rightfully so!« Shay agreed cheerfully but with a small sigh anyway. »But I feel like you don't need to be patient for much longer now.«

»What do you mean?«

»Can't you smell it in the air, Connor? Can't you feel the air sizzling with conflict?« He chuckled. »Not long now and the final battle will be fought. The British siege against West Point was just
one pity little attempt to get a bit leverage back, but they are aware that they have already lost the battle. It is not long now until the war is won and I think you will soon get the chance of revenge. If you are lucky, Washington will fall right into your hands. You just need to wait.«

Connor grew silent again as he just turned his attention back to the market and watched a few patriot soldiers chatting away their day near a booth where a beautiful young woman was apparently selling the freshest fish one would be able to find on this market. That was at least what she was shouting. She was petite and tiny with long golden blonde hair, but her voice was something entirely different. Connor had always been quite amazed by the fishwives as they were called here. Most of them were robust and looked as though nothing in the world could ever scare them and most men had a whole lot of respect for them.

»But what then?« He sighed. »I mean, even if I manage to kill Washington. The real problem is the situation we are in right now. The Templar Order is crumbling and dying off slowly right underneath our fingertips – at least here in the Colonies. Only four of us are left now and I am afraid that maybe the other Templar Grand Masters will see father unfit to keep his position.«

»Well, the answer to that is quite easy, little wolf, isn’t it?« Shay replied with a silent, but clearly amused huff of air leaving his lips and making a small white cloud. It had not been snowing for a few days now, but there were still patches of slowly melting snow all around town and the air still had its cutting edge. »Maybe you should go and recruit new members then. It is necessary for our Order to stay strong here in the Colonies, now that the Assassins are pretty much gone. Now, only Achilles is left again and he is an old man. I doubt that he will once again train another young Assassin like your friend before he dies. And you are right. If we get any weaker here in this new world, the other Templar Grand Masters will eventually send someone else to take your father’s position. Not now and certainly not next week either, but they will not see us getting defeated like this.«

It was hard to pinpoint the emotion Shay was going through as he said these things. Was he afraid that something like this would happen? Then again, Connor doubted that his father would get killed off just like this. And even if he would, Shay was not a Templar because he was following his father or anyone else. He was a Templar because he had seen that this was the right way for him, that this was the right cause to follow. His father had nothing to do with that revelation. For Connor, this was a different thing. He believed in their cause, but he was aware how very much possible it could have been for him to become an Assassin instead of Kanen’tó:kon. What if he had gotten Kanen’tó:kon's prophecy from the spirit? What if the spirit had shown him the Assassin Insignia and send him to find Achilles instead? Would he have still ended up as a slave for Washington and meet his father like this? Or would he have maybe followed the spirits advice, found Achilles and become and Assassin? How would he have then acted around his father? Would he have stayed by the Assassin cause and blindly followed the indoctrination of this old man or would he have instead given everything up to instead be with his father? These were questions he honestly had not answer to. He was still a very young man and he was aware of this. But, he wanted to believe that he was not as easily changeable and fickle like this. He wanted to believe that if he had become an Assassin that nothing could have changed his beliefs then. And he wanted to believe that the same was true now for the Templar Order. He wanted to believe that he would stay by the Order even if his father would get killed off because it was the right thing because it was the right cause and not just because he wanted to make his father proud now. One thing he knew for certain, though: If he had become an Assassin, this whole thing with his father would have ended in tragedy. »But how am I going to do this? It's not as if I could advertise for us in the newspapers or just ask random strangers on the street.«

»Maybe you should start with someone of whom you know has ties to our order anyway.« Shay chuckled as though he was imagining Connor running around talking to scared strangers about the
»You mean Josephine Weatley, don't you?« Connor sighed. His own father had talked to him about her already too on numerous occasions, but still, Connor did not know how to think about this and her possible involvement in all of this mess. She was a beautiful young lady and she had her whole life ahead of her still - and being a Templar was not the safest thing one could be, especially not for a young woman who needed to take great caution when it came to her reputation.

»Maybe. She seems to be the kind of person we need for the Order. And you will meet others of which you will think the same. I'm quite optimistic that the Templar Order here in the Colonies won't die so easily, but we need to act to prevent this too.«

Yes, Connor thought. Shay had it easy. He was getting old and he would probably not be around to see how Connor Kenway would someday ruin everything.

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»Isn't it oddly fascinating?« The voice of the former Commander in Chief sounded disturbingly quiet and satisfied as he remained in his position in front of a painting that was hanging in the hallway of Boston State House. Haytham was not exactly surprised to meet Washington in this very building, but he had not expected it either to be perfectly honest. His very own research had driven him to walk straight into the building and his research would make him continue his task too as fast as he could, even though he had stopped out of reflex perhaps, as he came up the stairs and saw Washington standing in the hallway. »Fascinating, really. Who would have thought that those creatures could learn to be civilized, really?«

Haytham tried not to spare the painting so much of a glance. He knew the painting well and he hated it all the more, even though many others praised it for his display of bravery and love. It showed the story of a young native woman with bare breasts, shielding a fine Englishman from the wrath of her very own tribe as one of the broad-chested warriors swung his tomahawk over his head to kill the Englishman lying across a stone, with the clan leader watching, a grim expression playing on his face and almost nude women by his side. It was the story of the girl Pocahontas and the British Captain John Smith. According to reports from this time, the girl had not only saved the man from her tribe but also contributed to a peaceful coexistence of Native Americans and British invaders in Virginia. The picture, however, only showed the wild and animalistic side of the native tribes with painted faces, nudity, and restless anger.

Needless to say that her friendliness had caused the young girl great harm in the later stages of her life, but those were reports secret to many. Most people that knew about Pocahontas liked to think of her as a great heroine who had acted out of love for the English captain and then followed him to England. This story was completely false and fabricated of course. The people, especially the invaders of this country, rather liked to hear the friendly version of this story where Pocahontas converted to Christianity by free will and traveled to Europe, forced to give up her own name and adopt another to mock her fate, instead of the cruel reality.

Haytham stopped nonetheless as Washington was still struck with the silent admiration of the painting, his eyes transfixed on Pocahontas. Haytham was wearing his best coat, not because he wanted to dress for the occasion, but to show off his influence and wealth, even though this was something Haytham rarely did. Today, however, it seemed like a good idea to him. They were at a critical point in their little operation now. Charles, his good old friend in whom he could have always confined in, was dead and such their influence on the Patriots weakened. They wanted to help the Continental Army to win this war against the British so that they could help build up a nation founded on their principles. Order, purpose, direction, peace. No more than that. Time was,
he had thought that Lee was the promise of a better future. The sheep needed a shepherd and for such a long time he had been sure, that his good friend would be the one to lead this blossoming nation. Maybe he had been wrong. Maybe he had not seen what had been right in front of him the entire time. Maybe Connor was their future, but he could not replace Lee in this debacle.

The war was almost won, Haytham could already feel it in his bones. The loss they had suffered in West Point was nothing more than just a temporary setback and his friend would become a footnote in the history books of the future. The Patriots would soon manage to gain West Point it back. With their help at least. »I’m afraid you are not the most experienced person when it comes to the way of the native tribes.« Haytham replied as calmly as he could as he crossed his arms behind his back.

That Washington was here was clearly not a good sign. Oh, he knew the day would come when this man would try to sneak his way back into his old position. Lee was not even cold and he was here, trying to bury his claws into the position he was not suited to fill.

Washington smiled at him as he turned away from the picture and looked at him with his dead fish eyes. For everyone who would pass them now, they were nothing more than old comrades having a friendly chat. »True, true.« He sighed then. »I believe you have more experience in that field than I could ever dream of having. After all, it was you who managed to make a civilized young man out of a vile raging savage. Sadly, I must confess, I was not able to teach your boy manners as he resided at my house all those years ago. Oh, I invested much time and energy into his education, but to no avail, as it seemed. Maybe it needs a savage to teach a savage. Or maybe, it is only the façade of a fine young gentleman you were able to build up on his true self. I am almost entirely certain that underneath his polished outer shell is still a beast hidden. It would not surprise me. The boy seems to be a chip of the old block.«

Haytham clenched his jaw and narrowed his eyes into danger promising slits, but still, he forced his mouth into the horrible grimace of a friendly smile as another young man was passing them by with hurried steps carrying various parchments in his arms. »I was never a big supporter of the theory that allows beating children into submission only to teach them manners or what is collectively understood as good behavior. I think monsters are not born but made and I always thought that children who are beaten and tormented are bound to lash out on their tormentors sooner or later.« He replied as though they were talking about the weather and nothing more, their voices pleasant and calm while around them the state house was busy like a beehive. »My father actually never raised his hand against me. He was an advocate for talking with his children instead of applying violence on them. Whenever I misbehaved, he would show me my mistakes and make me understand them not by violence but words and I must say that I do believe he was right when he thought that this treatment would leave a much more permanent impression on a young boy’s mind than any beating ever could. Maybe you could have tried that instead of using a blazing piece of iron to scar a child for the rest of its life. Truly, I wonder, who would be considered to be the real savage beast in a situation as this: The child that misbehaved or the man who used violence in such a gruesome way.«

Washington showed himself undisturbed by his words as he nodded in a way that would lead others to believe he was considering Haytham's words as truth. »I grew up on a plantation in Wakefield, so I know much about hard work and even one or two things about the keeping of livestock. Even though I lost my father at a quite young age - so much do we have in common, Mr. Kenway - he taught me quite a bit about the importance to always protect your own property, including livestock. To brand your cattle is a necessity to protect it from thieves.«

»I can assure you, your cattle was not stolen by me. It only returned to where it belonged. Isn't this another important thing when it comes to keeping livestock? I do not have much experience in this
field, to be perfectly honest, but I was once told that one would get the best results when, for example, a mother cow is being held with her calf. «He hated this metaphor and he could hardly shake off the disgust he was feeling creeping down his spine by comparing his son to a calf. »I would assume the same would be true with people too. Wouldn't a child slave learn better and faster in the company of their parents?«

»I learned the exact opposite. Keeping them separate makes it easier to get them to succumb.« Washington explained with a little smirk on his lips. »And it is much easier to keep rebellious thoughts out of their heads when they are on their own. But I must confess my weakness in one point, old friend. I think I underestimated the wildness of such a creature. I thought it broken and all its rebellious thoughts gone. I was blinded by its pure beauty and would not have thought it would lash out as fast and violent as it did. Almost I paid with my life for this moment of weakness. But who could fault me? Such a wild beauty - I know, if anyone could ever understand this, then you, Haytham.«

The tension that had been building up in his body was almost unbearable for Haytham now. It was hard to restrain himself from punching Washington square in the jaw. All he felt was restless anger burning hot inside his veins. He wanted nothing more than to punish this man who had humiliated his only child and was still gloating about it, thriving on the memories while Haytham tried not to imagine the horrors this man had inflicted upon Connor with no regret whatsoever and only because Connor was his child.

»It's always a pleasure talking to you, old friend.« He then forced himself to reply a little louder than before as he noticed a door being opened at the end of the hallway. »But I have to go now. There is someone else I need to speak with.« He did not offer his hand to Washington, instead, with a sharp glare at the man, he walked past him and moved towards the open door. Washington's voice compelled him to stop one more time, though, as he raised it again in an attempt to taunt him further.

»I am glad to see you here and I can't wait until we will meet again, for I am sure the next time I will be reinstated as Commander in Chief again. My condolences for the parting of your friend Charles.«

He could only force his feet to march forward and he got help as the face of Mr. Weatley appeared in the open door. At the door, he stopped again for a moment and threw a last look back at Washington. The former Commander in Chief still stood near the painting and looked after him, his expression that of a predator preying on his desired victim. Haytham however, was not dull enough to think that he would be the desired victim. He was only a mean to get to it.

He could feel the tension vibrating between them and suddenly he saw clearly what was happening around him. Washington had helped Arnold, he was sure of that now. He had given him the plans and the knowledge he needed to help the British to attack the Fort. He had wanted Lee dead from the start and now he was. If he was proven right, Washington would be reinstated as Commander in Chief now and then the real fight would begin. He could see it in Washington's tiny eyes, the desire to destroy - not a country, but a person. The only real question to Haytham now was only which person he wanted to destroy. The hatred they felt for each other was older than his son. Washington had never forgiven him for the murder of Braddock and the setback in his career he had suffered because of it. If the world would decide to turn upside down again, Washington would want to kill Connor, he was sure of that. He would want to destroy what was left of Haytham's family to have him alone and without hope, just as Haytham had left Washington behind. Oh, what greater misery could a father suffer than to lose his son? He wanted to see Haytham broken while he would triumph above this would-be nation.
»Haytham! A pleasure to meet you, my friend!« Mr. Weatley exclaimed as he eagerly grabbed for Haytham's hand and shoulder to shake his hand and squeeze the tense muscles of his shoulder in the friendliest of gestures Haytham had ever experienced. »My friend, what can I do for you? Oh, how long haven't we seen each other? Two years isn't that true?«

»I'm afraid that is true.« Haytham shrugged as he followed him inside his office.

»Oh, you and your awful son, Haytham! It's true what people say! The apple never falls far from the tree! My wife is in despair because of you two, I must say. She keeps on and on about it. Mr. Weatley, she says, you must go and deliver the invitation to our next gathering yourself, otherwise, those Kenway's will never attend another one of our festivities. They are such busy men, these two, they hardly remember to eat and drink. So, please, Haytham, you would save my life if you would agree on visiting us again soon - together with your son, of course. I must say, he is a very fine young man - lovely company, lovely, truly, my friend.«

»Thank you. I will see what I can-«

»You know, two years ago, when you visited our ball, my wife and I were almost sure that we were about to see your son becoming a part of our family soon enough. Our girls were very much taken with Connor. I was sure, it was only a matter of a few months, perhaps, until your son would come to my house to ask for my blessing. But, oh, it would be hard to decide which of my daughters to give to him.«

Haytham stopped him in his rambling as he placed one hand on Kenneth's shoulder and closed the door behind his back. »I am honored to hear that you were considering a union between our families. As far as I know, Connor is in active contact with your lovely daughter Josephine. Apparently, they are corresponding with each other quite regularly. If anyone, I would say she would be the most fitting companion for my headstrong, idiot son. But I'm afraid we cannot do much about this.«

»We can't?« Mr. Weatley replied with furrowed brows as Haytham lowered his voice like they were plotting something secretive behind their children backs. This whole situation felt incredibly odd to Haytham, but, a part of him thought, that now he knew how his father might have felt about dealing with Jenny's suitors.

»No, I'm afraid this is something between the two lovebirds. They will find a way, I am sure. But that is not why I am here today, old friend.«

»You are not?«

»I'm afraid not, although this would be the much more pleasant topic to discuss with you, Kenneth. I am here because I do worry about the state the Patriots are in as of right now. I wonder, since, as you know, Charles was my good friend, who would be fit to succeed him now at such an important point in this war.«

»Well,« Mr. Weatley began as he walked towards his desk, which was loaded with paperwork. »The most logical candidate would be Washington, I'm afraid, Haytham. I told the other members of congress already that I doubt he would be the right choice, after all, these things the investigation against him revealed. I mean - I believe I can be honest with you - George Washington can call himself lucky that he is still alive. He would have been sent straight to the gallows under different circumstances and I doubt that a man such as this one would be fit to hold an office such as Commander in Chief. There are rumors that Washington himself helped the traitor Benedict Arnold in his betrayal of the Patriots - which ultimately lead to the killing of our good friend Charles.«
»Then who would be your favorite in this scenario?«

Mr. Weatley was silent for a moment and turned his attention to the window leading outside onto the plaza in front of the state house, but Haytham was sure that he had him where he wanted him. Mr. Weatley was as loud as his wife, but he was far from being an idiot. He could be sharp minded, whenever he needed to be, but he was also very naïve and saw a close and very trustworthy friend in Haytham – which was not entirely false. »Well, my personal favorite would be John Adams in this situation« He confessed as he shortly glanced at him with a gleeful smirk on his lips. »But I do not believe that my colleagues would ever agree on that with me. Only time will tell. I will make the proposal as soon as the Congress will come together again.«

»I only heard good things about Addams and his cousin Sam Addams too.« Haytham quietly agreed before he bridged the distance between them once again to place his hand on Kenneth's shoulder yet another time. »But I am here to talk about something different too, Kenneth.«

There was no reaction at first, but then Weatley huffed quietly. »I can imagine what it is, Haytham.« He smiled. »I always wondered when you would come to me. I always knew that my father would have wanted me to follow in his footsteps but as a young man, I didn't know what I had to offer the Order. I still don't. Maybe it is not my help you should seek out. You said it yourself before. Josephine would be the most fitting comrade for your son. She has her grandfather's spirit and I believe she will be eager to help.«
Chapter 28

Fire. Next to human beings, fire was one of the most terrifying things that were haunting his dreams ever since he had been a child of four years. He would never be as Fortunate as to forget the sight of his burning village and how the flames had devoured every last one of the longhouses, giving way to the most horrible smell of burned human flesh and hair, of furs being set ablaze and leather slowly crumbling under the heat like dry leaves. And exactly as it had been as he had been but a small child, barely able to understand what was happening around him, he could only watch and do nothing as the house was burning without mercy in front of him now.

The glass of the windows in the first floor had already shattered by now and the danger of the fire moving to the neighboring buildings was real enough to spook the people of the entire street, no matter how eager the same people were to help extinguishing the fire with buckets and buckets full of water from the wells around. Connor knew that there was no chance for them to get the fire extinguished like that. His home was lost yet again and a part of him already wondered if he might have been able to prohibit this from happening in the first place had he come back home earlier and not wasted his time lingering around the harbor a little while longer than he had needed after he had gathered the information he had wanted.

He had seen the orange shimmer in the sky as soon as he had come close to the Union Street, but still, even though he knew how it had looked, had had decided not to let the thought seep into his brain and accept that their house was burning. After he had then rounded the corner and entered the street, he had come face to face with reality. He still stood at the corner to North Street from where he had come. He did not wish to go any closer towards their house. It was lost already and there was nothing he could do and since he did not know what had happened, he thought it might be wiser to stay hidden as much as possible. Instinctively he pulled his hat a little deeper into his face and hugged the wall closer with his body.

His thoughts, however, were racing already. What was with Mrs. Taylor and Fenris? What was with his father? He could only hope that they were well, but since it was his life he was thinking about, he was already sure that they were not. Then again, wouldn’t he have felt it, if something had happened to his father? Their connection was strong and Connor was sure - no, he wanted to be sure - that he would have felt it, if his father had been killed. But still, the picture of his father lying in a pool of blood in his study engulfed by flames, never vanished from the forefront of his ever-imaginative brain.

»Mr. Kenway!« Mrs. Taylor's voice was shriller and louder than usually and her steps on her tiny heels were echoing loudly from the brick walls around them, so that Connor felt himself slink back into the shadows of the corner even more. The other people did not seem to have noticed her or her call - at least no one looked towards them as the tiny housekeeper was running towards him. She is safe, thank the heavens. »Mr. Kenway! Oh, thank god, you are safe!«

First, Connor did not even want to turn his body to face her, but as he did, he saw her pale and horrified face right in front of him and, thankfully, Fenris was right by her side. She was already out of breath from the small distance she had been running at him, her cheeks were flushed and she was clutching her chest, either in a gesture of pure relief or because her lungs were aching. Connor could not help but crouch down to greet his wolf, who seemed just as terrified as everyone around, but his heart was racing and his mind was just a blank slate. The dark night sky was tinted in orange and red from the fire, people were screaming and shouting in panic, running around to save those they loved and first and foremost their most valuable belongings before their houses would be set ablaze next.
A part of him wanted to help the firefighters, but he could not move. He was oddly terrified. He was paralyzed by fear. He was frozen in horror and not able to cast out the shadows looming over his thoughts. The house looked like the grotesque grimace of a demon as flames were flaring out of the windows in the first floor. His room was gone and everything he had held dear that was in it. As he watched his thin laced curtains dance ablaze, it was as though he was watching ghosts finally escaping their tomb.

»Where is my father?« Connor found himself asking, but his own voice sounded far away as if he was not really here, but only an onlooker from a few streets off. He did not even know why he asked and he had not commanded his mouth to ask that question either. He had just done it, his mouth had just acted without his brain's permission.

»I don't, know! I have not seen him in hours!« Mrs. Taylor exclaimed as he rose to his feet slowly. She clung to his left arm in horror as they watched the house burn together from the distance with Fenris snuggling up to his left leg in a gesture of comfort as if he could feel what was on Connor's mind. He probably could.

»How did this happen?« He breathed. How could it be that their house just started to burn? He knew that something like this not just happened. He knew that someone surely had helped setting this house ablaze. He knew. But he could not form a coherent thought. He did not want to. He was afraid. He was worried. He did not know where his father was and if he was alright. He had left before his father to investigate and his father had only told him that he was going to see Mr. Weatley at the State House. What if his father was in there? What if he was burning alive right now while he stood here and could only watch - again?

He felt utterly helpless and he just tried to force out the memories and screams in his head. He could not allow his memories to take over again. He could not allow his four-year-old self to scream for his mother as she was burning alive in their crushed longhouse, not able to escape the flames with her leg broken and trapped under the large wooden beams that should support the structure. He could not allow his thirteen-year-old self to watch how his tribe was slaughtered in cold blood by Washington's men as if it meant nothing, as if they were not human too, as if they had no feeling of their own, as if they were just feral animals not capable to feel love and fear, not worthy their compassion. He could not allow Kanen'tó:kon voice back in his head as he plunged the knife into his chest while the Welcome was burning around them and would swallow the body of his best friend forever.

»I … I really don't know, Mr. Kenway!« She exclaimed again, hot tears streaming down her round face. »I was gone to fetch a few groceries from the shop at the corner of Haymarket where I always get a little bit of a discount. I forgot to buy milk yesterday and I took Fenris with me for protection because of the late hour, and when we came back the house was already ablaze. Thank god Susie has her free day today!« Yes, Connor thought, Susie. She would have burnt to a crisp by now if she would have been there - or Mrs. Taylor, if she would have sent Susie to the shop.

It felt like hours which they spend just standing there at the corner of the street, watching their house burn. He had not grown up in this house and he was sure it would have been more painful if this was his birth house that got destroyed like this, but it still hurt and he could only imagine how his own father had felt as he had been forced to watch his birth house burn as a child. This was the place where he had been reborn as Connor Kenway, not a slave, but a real human being, a real gentleman. He had a family now, but the foundation of this new identity seemed to burn down together with this house or at least to crumble down quietly like a house of cards. And in the end, who was he, if not the son of Haytham Kenway? Who would he be when his father would not be around anymore to tell the world that he was his son? Would people like Mr. and Mrs. Weatley still welcome him in their home then? Would their daughters still swoon because of him then? Or
would he go back to be just another Native American slave again?

»Oh, thank the heavens!« Mrs. Taylor suddenly gasped and as he turned to see if she had noticed some kind of miracle preventing their house from getting destroyed completely, he saw his father approaching. He looked disheveled at best and straight out of a nightmare at worst as he was walking slowly out of an alley between two houses. It was impossible from where he now came, but his overcoat was ripped at his left arm as if he had been in a fight with someone. There was a bloody cut on his right cheek also and a few strands of his graying hair hung loosely in his face.

»Ah, Connor. I see you are still in one piece, excellent.« His father greeted them and Connor was not even surprised to hear his cheerful tone. For once he did not care for a witty or snarky remark. For once he did not care that their house was burning down with everything important and valuable inside. His father was still alive and he would not need to face the world alone for a little while longer.

February 1781

Connor could not help but to stare at Shay’s face in the dim light of a few candles standing in the middle of the table between them with their way slowly dripping down onto the wood. Nobody really seemed to care for the mess the candles made and everything else would have really surprised Connor anyway. He could hear the noise coming from downstairs, mostly the voices of men laughing and chatting, the sounds of glasses clinking and cutlery jingling. It was warm inside the tavern, the air stuffy from all the people that were lingering downstairs. Since Connor first came into the Green Dragon tavern, the mood of the place and its guests had changed.

When he first set foot into the tavern at his father's side, the people had been hostile towards him and generally careful or agitated. Now, however, they seemed a lot more cheerful. Perhaps they could also feel that the win against the British was right around the corner. Or at least they thought it was. Connor was not that optimistic, but maybe they just wanted to believe that they were as good as free from the Brits regime of terror and injustice. Connor wondered however how long it would take this infant nation to destroy itself. He believed in the values those people, those Americans too, but he knew that men were born to fight, to argue - and they soon would find another thing to fight over, if not with the British, then with each other. This would not be the last war that was fought on American soil. And still, a part of him was not ready to lose hope just yet.

»I see you are staring at me again.« Shay broke the silence between them after a while of him ignoring Connor's staring as he was talking to Gist who sat beside him and opposite of Connor at the old wooden table which they usually frequented in this place. The corner upstairs near the window seemed oddly lonely by now. His father was not with them now and a part of him started to grow worried. Outside it was dark already and Fenris was lying by his feet under the table. Of course, his father could watch out for himself and he did not need Connor to worry for him or his safety.

Weeks had passed since their house burnt down and never in his life had Connor been more grateful for his father's brilliance when it came to foresight. In the moment as he had stood in front of that burning house, he had not thought about it, but later, when they had been alone in their room here in the tavern where they had found shelter at last, it had hit him like a lightning bolt right in the chest. He had almost all but forgotten about the Pieces of Eden, that Ring, he brought from his journeys a few years ago and the precursor boy Shay had spent years and years of his life searching for. He already almost deemed both items lost, but his father had then assured him that he had stored the ring, the Templar rings, the box and all their important documents - including his
very own journal - at the bank in a safe.

As he had asked his father as to why he had taken those precautions without telling him, his father had just told him that he had expected an attack on the house at one point in the future and that he had also taken precautions that Connor would be informed of that very safe in case of his death. Of course, this had not been the answer Connor had longed to hear, but it was all he would get and he would have time, later on, to talk about that with his father. They had so many enemies and so many of them wanted to see them dead or at the very least destroyed. No wonder their house would burn someday. They could just be glad that the fire had not caused any deaths.

Connor blinked at Shay's words, but he did not even try to avert his eyes and appear as if Shay had caught him doing something awful. »I just wondered…« He slowly began.

»What?«

»Your name. I mean your middle name. Where does it come from?« He had never really thought about it, now that he was looking back on the last years. It had always been just Shay Patrick Cormac and he had never thought about where the name Patrick came from in the first place, even though Shay always put so much emphasize on the name when he would introduce himself to anyone.

Shay looked at him puzzled for a moment as if he was watching a goat trying to climb a fence for no apparent reason without success only to get up and try again before he sat down his glass of beer on the dusty table. Gist, on the other hand, rather gulped down on his beer as if he was not willing to take part in this conversation. »Patrick was my father's name.« Shay then shrugged his shoulders. »Why do you want to know?«

Instead of answering him, Connor turned his eyes to Gist again. »What about you?« He asked and the man almost choked on his beer as he was dragged into the conversation against his will. For a second Gist coughed up beer, but then he seemed to regain his composure again as he looked at Connor, amusement written all over his face already.

»I don't have a middle name if that's what you want to know.« He then started laughing, wiping away the beer that was dripping down his chin. »What is it with you tonight, Connor? You are acting weird for a while now, as I observed. You remind me on my uncle Jedidiah when he-«

»You are wondering why some people are wearing their parent's name as middle name, aren't you? Your father's middle name was your grandfather's name, as you probably know.« Connor just nodded. He felt as though he should know the reason for it and he felt as though he should feel embarrassed for asking, but he did not. His life had been a chaotic one and he simply had never had the time to think about these things. There had always been so many other things to do. »It's just ... well, sort of a tradition I think. Not every family continues this tradition, as you can see with our friend over there.« He laughed and pointed his glass at Gist who only rolled his eyes at the comment. »But it's common, especially in wealthier families. The oldest son usually gets his father's name as his middle name, the second born son the name of his grandfather or perhaps even of his uncle. It's to, well, tie the family together, I believe. To create some sort of legacy.«

Connor was silent for a long moment and decided to drop the topic for a while which he used to guide his eyes to the window and the blackened sky outside. He could see the full moon looming over Boston. It was huge tonight. Right as he noticed how Gist and Shay returned to their previous conversation again, Connor raised his voice at them yet again quietly. »So, I would be Connor Haytham Kenway then, right?«

»No« Shay said and he could almost hear the grin dripping from his voice even before he felt
Shay's tight grip around his shoulder from across the table as he slowly looked at his old friend once again. Shay truly was one of the very few people he could stand being touched by. »You would be Ratonhnhaké:ton Haytham Kenway.«

He almost smiled at this, as he heard how smoothly his name rolled from Shay's tongue. He had not heard his name in a long time now, since Kanen'tó:kon's death actually, but she shelved this thought and the sound of the name in the back of his mind for the rest of the evening. Of course, he would wish to hear his name more often, especially from his father, but then again, he felt as though this boy, this Ratonhnhaké:ton was dead for a long time now and as if he had nothing in common with that kid anyway. Maybe it was best to forget him and bury him forever, to just be Connor Kenway for the rest of his life. A legacy, maybe that was what he wanted, to be part of this legacy. But, he thought, they had more pressing matters to worry about than his name, and clearly, he would not ask his father about this too. It would be odd to do so.

As they came together again a few days later on board of the Aquila, the mood was a whole lot grimmer than in the night Connor had been alone with Shay and Gist in the Green Dragon tavern to talk about these silly things that really did not matter to any one of them as it seemed. He had hardly seen his father in the last few days since each of them was out the whole day and either he or his father always came back to the tavern so late the other was already sleeping. The weeks since their house had been burnt to a crisp had been chaotic, to say the least. They had spent each day gathering information, finding the people responsible and getting them to talk. His father had caught the man responsible for the fire on that very evening as it had happened and pursue him through town, ending in a brutal fight, which he had, of course, won before he had gone back to the burning house to meet Connor and Mrs. Taylor there. It came as no surprise to either one of them that Washington was behind the attack and Connor hardly felt any different knowing this. He had not even been surprised at all. He had known right away. Of course, he had, after all, it was Washington and this man knew no boundaries. All this knowledge had done was to further Connor's hatred towards the man. He had tried to erase his traces good, never talking or giving orders directly and so it had taken them a little while to find every last man involved in this little attack on their house and their lives.

»Washington knows that we know about the attack and he probably knows that I already informed Weatley about the situation as well. He can forget about being reinstated as Commander in Chief now, for our friend will surely motivate the other members of congress to stand against George.«

His father began. His face was half obscured in the shadows of the cabin Connor called home, as he strode through the captain's cabin as if it was his ship. Connor did not say anything about his father's behavior which resembled that of a prancing cat once again. His eyes remained focused on the map lying on his table in the middle of the room. In the back, right underneath the bull's eye was his cot located. He would have taken quarter in here, but there was not enough room for two grown men in his small bed and his father would not have been happy to take quarter downstairs, plus the Aquila was a target as well. Connor was not naïve enough to think that Washington and his men would not know about his ship. He was sure, if he and his father would have decided to stay here, the Aquila would have set ablaze in the middle of the night sooner or later. Connor had dozens and dozens of maps in his cabin, his exchange clothes resting on a mannequin in the right corner of the room near the door. He mostly possessed maps of the ocean of course, which he used to plan his voyages. This, however, was a map of New York.

»He hides within Fort George,« Connor took over as he stepped closer towards the table and pointed at the spot where the Fort was drawn onto the map. It had taken him quite a long time to piece this map together, but he was proud of the result. »Which itself is surrounded by a militarized district. I cannot hope to infiltrate it directly--« But he was cut off before he could continue by his father stepping closer and throwing a sharp glance at him.
»We cannot hope to infiltrate it directly, son.« He said, but his voice was sharp and sounded as if Connor had just undermined his authority. They both knew he had not done anything like this. He respected his father greatly and he respected his decisions greatly. Never would he act against his father's orders as long as he was part of this Order. He was headstrong, that he knew of course. He was always tempted to break a wall with his skull if necessary. He wanted things to be done his way and more than once he had thought he would know better than his old father, only to be crushed by the reality when he would not succeed the way he planned to. Bridewell always came to mind when he thought about it. Connor knew that this sharpness to his father's voice was not aimed at him, that he was not angry because Connor had wanted to go alone and not because he thought Connor might think him an old man. It was something else that was driving his father to act as he did. Something deeper that only the both of them could really understand.

»We cannot hope to infiltrate it directly, yes.« Connor said before he turned the map around on the table in one swift move. »So we will go under it instead.«

»Incredible.« Gist breathed beside Connor as he leaned down closer to the map. It was the most detailed map Connor had ever seen of the tunnel system underneath New York which he had once used to hide from the guards looking for him and which often had aided him in a great many ways. It had taken him years to create this map, hours of him looming over his desk as the house, with his quill scratching over the parchment. He was lucky that he had already stored the map here weeks before the fire.

»But the tunnels leading into the Fort had been filled in.« Connor finally continued with a small sigh as he straightened his back and looked at his companions. In this dim light, Shay looked incredibly old. »I am going to require help to clear them and we will need some sort of distraction when we go in.«

»Well, we could use the Morrigan and the Aquila to bombard the walls of Fort George.« Shay proposed and though he should sound reluctant, he did not. It was a dangerous plan they were plotting and every detail needed to fit, but Shay had proven to him in the past that he was mad as a hare in March when it came to risky maneuvers at sea. Of course he was, after all Connor had learned from him and he was no different in this regard. More than once he had been called a madman at the wheel. However, Connor did not like the thought of having his father by his side when he would go for the kill. He wanted to be alone in this.

»There are a few French naval ships in Chesapeake bay we would be required to help for this plan to work.« Gist chimed in as he straightened his back again. »We could disguise the ships as British ships to bombard the Fort, this way we would not draw too much attention to our ships as well and we could create an even greater distraction perhaps.«

»In the chaos we will slip inside, find George Washington and silence him forever.« It was an odd feeling as the words finally left his mouth. For a few moments, they just stood around the table, four men, four silent witnesses to this great complot against one cruel man who had helped to destroy their order and was disrupting their cause for years now. It was hard for Connor not to focus on his revenge. He needed to think clearly, he needed to focus on the task not as the boy who wanted to punish the man for everything he did to him, but as the man who needed to put the orders work and safety first at all times.

It was much later and the sun had already sunken hours ago when he and his father were alone again in their room in the Green Dragon. When they had left Shay and Gist behind near the harbor they had left them with their plan laid out perfectly in front of them. Two days from now as soon as the Admiral of the French ships would be informed about their plan and that help was coming, they would strike. Connor had never liked the Marquis de Lafayette as he first met him at
Monmouth, but it was his father who had convinced him to help them in their plan and talk to the Admiral of those ships. It was easy after the failure that had been Monmouth for it had turned out that the Marquis was quite the vengeful man. He still thought Washington responsible for that fiasco and since Lee's death and since the rumors of Washington's involvement in the attack on West Point and Arnold's betrayal, he was one of George's biggest opponents in this war and Washington's thrive for his old position.

»I am not sure that we should go together, father.« Connor sighed as he took off his boots to place them by the end of his bed. He missed his own bed in their house. This one was hard and itchy and it creaked with every move. Sleeping in the same room as his father for weeks was quite uncomfortable for Connor had the tendency to wake at every little sound, a relic from his time at the plantation when he had been awoken by cries and silent sobs in the night. It was weird, though, that he had never a real problem of sleeping through the night on his ship, even in the middle of a storm perhaps. He felt safe at sea, perhaps even at home.

His father still sat at the desk they needed to share, his back slightly hunched as he leaned over a piece of parchment. Connor was used to the sound of his father's quill scraping over the paper, so much in fact that it became somewhat like a soothing little lullaby by now. He liked the sound and he could hardly imagine a world without his father leaning over a letter he was writing or idly scribbling in his diary. Connor did not know what he was writing now, but he was sure that it was important, after everything his father usually wrote was somewhat important.

»Are you afraid I would ruin your little adventure or steal all the glory from you?« He hummed without even looking at Connor who slowly sat down on his bed to scratch Fenris behind his fluffy ears. The wolf never left his side in the last weeks since the fire which was not always easy - especially not when he needed to stay undetected. A man accompanied by a wolf usually drew eyes towards him.

»Of course not, I just meant-«

»You wonder if I will take your chance of revenge from you and kill the man myself.«

»No, I-«

»Revenge is a dangerous wish, Connor. I know this and believe me when I tell you that the thrive for revenge never brings anything good with it. Now you might think that your life will be different as soon as you will get what you have desired for far too long, but it won't and you won't be happy just because Washington is gone. It won't be as if the past had not happened just because you got your revenge and killed him.«

»I know this, father. Don't treat me like a child. Of course, I know this, I know that Washington's death will not change the past, but I will sleep more peaceful when I know that he is not roaming this earth any longer.« Or at least that was what he wanted to tell himself desperately so that he might sleep tighter this night and the coming nights. But of course, he had heard this a million times before from his father and from Shay. *He who yearns for revenge better digs two graves.*

»When this is over,« His father then decided to change the topic all of the sudden and Connor watched how he began folding the parchment in front of him, after he took his eyes from Fenris' loyal little face back to his father. It was a letter apparently, judging by the way his father was folding it. »you will go to the bank with this letter,« He waved it at Connor as he turned in his chair just enough to face him. »and you will take everything out of our safe.«

»Our safe?« Connor asked in surprise as he was raising his left brow slightly.
»Of course. It's our family’s safe, so it's yours too.« Haytham sighed as though talking to an incredible dull donkey, before he placed the letter on the desk again and started to prepare his wax sigil. »We need to prepare to go back to London when this is over and Washington dead. We won't be gone for long, only for a few months, maybe a year - long enough so that this war is over and done with. When we will come back the war will be won and we can finally start to shape this country after our ideals, I already took preparations for that.«

Connor still was not satisfied with this answer of his father. He always felt as if his father was not telling him everything he needed to know and this he could not have. Not this time at least. »And why shall I take everything out of our safe? Can't we just store it there until we come back?«

»It won't be safe enough. No, we will take those things with us and in London, your aunt will see to it.« He nodded, but in reality, he could not yet fathom what his father was telling him. He had always known that the day might come when he would meet his aunt and see his father's birth house, but now, with their plan set and the day they would spring into action right around the corner, the reality only started to seep in slowly. He did not quite know what to expect or what to think. His aunt seemed a little distant in her letters, but they had never met and she knew nothing about her nephew so he could probably not expect any kind of warmth from her towards him.

As he did not respond to his father in words, the old wolf turned his body towards him fully as best he could while still remaining seated. »You worry, don't you?«

He almost laughed. Of course, he worried, but he did not really know about what. Then again, this was not true, it was just a lazy little cop out so say that he would not know exactly what he was worrying about. Washington was strong and he was a soldier, but this was not what made him worry. Connor too was strong and with his father at his side in this fight, he could not possibly fail. He was not a little boy any longer. Neither was he still the same as he had been with thirteen, nor with sixteen. He was stronger than this man now and he would not give him a chance to taunt him. No, he was worrying about the confrontation. Every time he saw this man it was the same. He felt oddly small and helpless and he would not have this any longer. He would make sure that this man would lose. But he hated it to involve Shay, Gist and even his very own father in this. It was his fight, but of course, his father thought differently.

»I just hope that everything will go according to plan. We only have one trial and we better be successful.« He finally answered before he lay down on his back to stare at the wooden beams looming over his head. It was like a sick little déjà-vu or a reminder to when he and his father last shared a room in some inn. Fenris would soon enough climb into his bed and lie down at the end of the bed.

»Are you worried I might die?« His father inquired and even without looking at him he could imagine the way his father was furrowing his brows at this question as if it was the most insulting thing he had ever heard as if he was not human enough to die. »I might not be a young man any longer, but I have much greater experience when it comes to the art of fighting, son - and ideally we will not need to fight.«

»Washington will know that we will come and he will not be surprised by our arrival. I’m sure we will have to fight and I ask only of you that you will stay back, old wolf. This is my fight and I do not wish you or anyone else to get harmed in this.« Too many had been harmed in his fight. Kanen'tó:kon also had just been one of the victims of his little cause for revenge - even Lee and Hickey and all the others had been. He would not be able to stand any more funerals. He would not be able to live through seeing yet another of his friends being laid to rest in front of him.

»Don't think that I would not understand, Connor.« His father finally sighed as he got up from his
chair in front of their desk and slowly wandered towards their window. Outside the town was eerily quiet but downstairs people were still drinking and laughing and having fun with no knowledge of their worries up here and not a care in the world as it sometimes seemed to Connor. »I know quite well how you feel in this situation and I will not stand between you and your revenge. But do not believe that you are the only person who desires this revenge. I too have been robbed by this man. He might have held you as his slave and treated you with violence and disrespect, but I was robbed of my son by him and thus I have a pretty good reason to be out for revenge as well.«
The sound of cannon fire was wafting across the sea to be heard by yet undiscovered islands and countries in the distance like the great catastrophe that it was for the men and women involved in the battle of Chesapeake bay. In this night many frightful wives would sit by their windows to stare out at the ocean, hoping their husbands would return home safely.

Shay Patrick Cormac did not have a wife to whom he could return, no one who would look out on the sea in deep worry, but he knew that feeling of sitting by a window or standing at the harbor and waiting, hoping, all too well. His father had been a seafarer, employed by the merchant marine. As a child, Shay had often found himself close to the harbor, watching the ships in awe, imagining himself at the deck of such a ship, maybe even beside his father, but on the same instant worrying for his father's safety and return. His father had been ripped away from him by a storm when he had been a young man with Shay being left behind at last.

However, it was moments like this one right here, with cannonballs flying and blasting into the ships around them when he found himself not thinking about his father or remembering the words of wisdom his father had once shared with him on the deck of his ship before it got destroyed completely, but about Liam. Liam O’Brien, his childhood friend, the man who had helped him gather up the pieces of his soul again and again, no matter the hardships he had suffered in his youth. He did not even know why, but as he was shouting his orders now, trusting Gist to keep the *Aquila* safe enough, he thought about Liam and about the things he might say if he would be able to see him here at this very moment.

What now, Shay? Have you already spend all your luck for getting out of trouble? Is there nothing left anymore now? Truly, this was something he would have said and Shay, being the ever arrogant idiot that he had been as a young man in his early twenties, would have replied with something along the lines of *Trouble just follows me around.*

And it was true, wasn’t it? Even as a child, he had constantly gotten himself into trouble, always relying on Liam’s protection, even though he would have never admitted it. If it had not been for Liam by his side even as children in the streets of New York, only God knew what would have become of him. Well, his aunt would truly have had a sore hand from all the spanking she would have needed to do.

The British ships were relentless in this battle, but so was Shay. It seemed his entire life had been centered around battles like this and he was glad that it was him and Gist out here and not Master Kenway and the little wolf. Then again he was sure that Connor would have done a great job in this battle if it would have been him guiding the *Aquila* and leading the French against those British ships. But the boy was still young and reckless. He was a skilled captain, a natural when it came to these things without a single hint of a doubt, but rather Shay took the risk of dying out here than the risk of having Connor or his father dying out here. Maybe he was just growing sentimental with age. They had already lost one ship of the French they wanted to use for the attack on New York and the *Aquila* herself had been hit quite a few times too. But as the canon fire stopped finally and as they all watched the last remaining British ships sinking, the smoke of the fire tinting the nightly sky even darker than before, it was like sailing through a graveyard. The masts rose from the darkened waters like the arms of skeletons and the same eerie silence lay over the world of which Shay was already too used to hear.

As the fog and the smoke lifted and the *Aquila* came back closer to the *Morrigan* at the front, he could already hear Gist shout: »Where are our blasted reinforcements?« Shay almost laughed at
this. Gist was rarely one to curse, he always had a smile on his face, always a cheerful comment on his lips, but now, as Shay looked over to the Aquila beside him, he could see how tense his old friend had grown during the battle.

»Are you afraid the little wolf will tear you a new one when he sees what you have done to his lady?« Shay laughed, though he did not quite feel like laughing. He himself felt incredibly tense and although he was never one to deny a good little fight or battle at sea, this time it was different. The Aquila had taken quite a few hits. She was not as sturdy as the Morrigan was, though still a battle hardened ship, just as her crew and her captain, but there were holes gaping in her hulk and she could not take much more as it was now. »Don't worry, old chap! They will come. We must hold the bay until they do.«

»This is madness, Shay!« Gist replied frantically from the other ship. »The Saint Esprit sunk, the escort is lost! We are alone we are without reinforcements!«

But before Shay could respond another loud shout demanded his attention as one of the sailors who hung in the shrouds cried out so loud that his voice was echoing from the waves. »MAN-OF-WAR!« The ship emerged from the smoke and like a demon straight from hell in front of them and there was no doubt about the fact that the ship would take shots at them now that they were outnumbered and already at the losing end. The reinforcements that Lafayette had promised were still too far off to help, as the Man-of-war took its first shot at them. The noise was almost overwhelming, deafening even as the cannonballs hit their intended target, destroying the canons of each the Morrigan and the Aquila at once. They should have stayed at a greater distance! Shay cursed himself in silence as he frantically altered the course, pulling at the wheel to get away from the Aquila as quickly as possible so another hit would not find them both once more. He had no time to look for Gist or the Aquila. All he could do was to trust that his old friend would manage to stay alive as he always had.

In this moment, as the Morrigan managed to build up a little more speed again thanks to the heavy winds tearing at his coat, he only saw one option in this battle and so he threw one last look over his shoulder towards the Aquila, before he forced his own ship, now without canons, against the Man-of-war, thinking that sometimes Connor's approach would be the best to follow and that sometimes a man needed to beat his head against a brick wall to succeed.

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The tunnel system was dingy and dusty as ever with no light source except for the lanterns that Connor and his father were holding in their clammy hands. It was cold underground and the cones of light from their lanterns were dancing across the brick stone walls. Every time Connor visited the underground tunnel system underneath New York, he felt as if the wooden beams above his head could crash down and bury him at every second, though that was, of course, absolute nonsense. The freemasons had done a good job in building these tunnels. Yet, after years of knowing about these tunnels and having used them many times before to travel undetected, it was not at all easy to find the right path through this system, not even with his map. Even in the light of the difficulties at hand, he and his father walked in silence, trusting that Shay would not disappoint them and that everything would go according to plan. No matter how risky that plan was. It was not the first time his father was willing to follow a plan that Connor came up with, but it was the first time he would follow such a risky one.

Connor remembered telling Thomas how much he despised that his father always like to play it safe when it came to the true nature of their operation within the colonies, and he remembered how Thomas had then laughed and told him the tale of how he had first met his father. Apparently, his father had been quite prepared to take risk in the past. John had once even said that he would have
called his father a daredevil in his youth. And Connor knew that his father still had something left of his old self. He had seen it before, but it had taken a few years until he had been allowed to see and prepared to understand. Being here with his father now, knowing that they were so much alike, felt weird, but somehow it gave Connor the reassurance he needed. His father would not be here with him if he thought his plan to be a suicide squad.

The entryway to the military district in which Fort George was located was blocked by rubble and Connor could not say if the rubble had purposefully been set up by the soldiers of this district to block any way into the district or if it was just pure coincidence. He did not know if the soldiers even knew about those tunnels and until know he had always been quite certain that this was a well-kept secret. He wondered if Kanen'tó:kon had maybe known about these tunnels as well. He did not know much about the ways in which Kanen'tó:kon had operated or whom he had known and called his allies, but Connor was sure that his Mentor had made sure to aid him as best he could in his fight against the Templars. Perhaps it had been because of the tunnels that he had managed to escape so easily back when he had wanted to attack Hickey in brought daylight.

Sometimes he found himself lying in his bed, staring at the ceiling and wondering if Kanen'tó:kon had maybe known who he was right from the start if he had maybe even recognized him right away when they had met on this fateful day in the streets of New York. Maybe his old friend had played him all along, trying to get him to lower his guard so he would be able to strike. It was impossible to say now for certain and he did not have time to think about it anyway. Kanen'tó:kon was dead and gone and there was nothing that would change this fact and nothing to burden his mind with.

»When we get through this rubble, we only need to sneak towards the tower and wait until we light the signal for Shay and the Admiral.« Connor quietly muttered as he began to move one of the broken down wooden beams that were blocking the passageway. One of the many rats that were living in these tunnels scurried between his legs and through the barricade. Last time he had checked, which had only been a week ago, he had already moved a little bit of the rubble to see if the path behind it was clear enough to go through. He had not dared to remove the rubble entirely, though, simply out of the fact that he did not know if the soldiers had blocked the path themselves to keep intruders from getting inside. If they did, chances were that they came down here regularly and if they would have then noticed that the rubble had been moved, they would have been alarmed and their plan foredoomed.

»Of course, you are aware that your plan has quite a few flaws to it.« His father replied with a silent hum, but Connor only threw a glance and a lopsided grin at him as he watched the old wolf starting to help him in removing the rubble. This was something he liked about the old man. For any outsiders his father was nothing more than a prancing cat, a fine polished posh gentleman, always looking flawless, always commanding attention and obedience when he spoke. People wanted to follow him because the tone he used told them that he was a man of wisdom and experience. Some saw a brutal and violent man in him who never shied away from punishing someone who needed punishment in his eyes. But beyond all of that he was a practical man, a man who was not afraid to get his hands dirty. He was a loyal man, a man Connor could not only respect or look up to, but first and foremost trust. His father would never keep a secret from him, he would never betray him. He was always upfront, especially with his criticism.

»Not every plan needs to be flawless, father.« Connor shrugged as he placed the next of the wooden beams down to the side and got back to work. It looked as if a bit of the gateway into the next corridor had broken down, but since the rat had squeezed through, Connor was sure that behind the rubble the corridor was free.

»A plan like this better should be perfect, Connor. We've only got one shot before Washington's
men come crashing down on us and Washington is not to be underestimated either – though I believe I do not need to tell you that."

»You don’t.« Connor replied, this time sharper and as if his father could read his mind, he continued, stopping in his actions for a second.

»And this time, Connor, you better not show mercy, you better not hesitate. If you get the chance to kill him, then do it no matter what, do you understand?« No matter what, Connor thought. He knew exactly what his father meant and that he was demanding Connor to go after Washington even if his father would get injured and would require help, but although he nodded and continued his work, he wondered if he could go through with this. Would his revenge be more important than anything else? Well, it was a purely hypothetical scenario of course, but still, the question remained and he was afraid to find out the answer.

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The moment he jumped and landed on the deck of the man-of-war, Shay Cormac for the first time felt that he was indeed an old man now. He had lost some of his youthful agility to the years traveling the seven seas in search for this cursed item which he had been able to retrieve from France after sixteen years of search and to endless fights against those who stood against the Templar Order. His bones were aching a lot more than he was willing to admit and the noise on board of the ship he had just crashed the Morrigan in, was disorientating to him for at least a few seconds. Vital seconds, as it turned out when the first shot rang in his ears and managed to hit him straight in his left leg. By some cosmic coincidence, the bullet only scraped his outer thigh, but the pain all the more made him spring into action immediately.

He could mourn the loss of his youth another day, he guessed, right now he needed to channel his old strength as he threw himself right into the fight that erupted on deck of the enemy's ship. He was all alone, his men left behind on board of the Morrigan as he ran for the captain of the ship - the same man who had dared to shoot him. Even as an old man now he was still more agile and fast than any of the British soldiers on board of that ship. The Assassin that he had once been was telling him still exactly where to put his feet next, how to move to avoid getting hit and as he attacked the captain, he did so with all the force he possessed, if only to punish him for his cowardice before. There was not much time left and he needed to act quickly.

The man-of-war was already badly beaten thanks to the naval ram of the Morrigan (that should teach Gist to trust him with the importance of his spending!), but it was not yet enough. He knew that Connor and Haytham were relying on him and that they were waiting for him so that they could give the signal and start the attack. Every minute he needed out here for this battle was one minute of danger for them to get caught by the Patriot soldiers within the military district. Operations like this one were always risky, even for experienced men like him or Haytham. The shot at his leg had been one pity attempt to end him, now the captain was running for cover like a little girl, but Shay easily dodged the upcoming attackers as he jumped over the remains of the foremast that gladly had broken down from the impact of the Morrigan crashing into the ship.

Most of the men on board were busy trying to save the ship from further harm, some of them were shooting at Shay's crew, but a few still tried to aid their captain against the Irish lunatic that had just rammed his ship into theirs. Already flames were erupting from the under deck and it was only a matter of time now until they would reach the powder storage.

He found the captain behind the rubble of the forecastle on the main deck where he stood, awaiting Shay's arrival with his saber already drawn and ready to fight, three other soldiers at his side and a triumphant grin on his ridiculously pale face. Shay had always felt a certain sense of aversion against men who hid behind their beautiful, shiny medals that meant nothing except for the fact
that they were good in licking the boots of their higher ups. Most of the men, like this captain, had never lay in the muddy trenches of any battlefield or fought for their lives. They only sent their men to the slaughter. Shay did not waste a second as he drew his pistol without thinking twice. The shot was clear and straight to the head – no unnecessary fighting involved this time – and yet again he found himself reminded of his old friend Liam.

Liam had been one stern teacher as it came to shooting. He had learned from the best apparently and he was still grateful for his teachers - only Liam would tell him now that he was using those abilities he had taught Shay for the wrong gain.

With his pistol still drawn and the surprise written all over the faces of the remaining British soldiers which had been ready to help their captain fight off the attacker, Shay aimed for the gap in the main decks flooring. From his position, he could easily make out the powder storage underneath the hole in the ground. He wasted another second to look over his shoulder to see where the Morrigan was only to find her close enough to risk it.

The second the bullet left the barrel of his pistol he was already running. The explosion nearly pushed him off his feet and sent quite a few of the British soldiers overboard screaming, but Shay kept running and jumping over the rubble, his goal straight ahead. The bowsprit was still intact and the Morrigan waiting for him to escape before the man-of-war would explode completely. No one tried to stop him because the soldiers were busier to save their own skins. As he leaped from the man-of-war and onto the Morrigan, there was another shot somewhere behind him. He could hear it clearly even through all the noise, but he knew that he would not be able to dodge the bullet this time. He knew he had been hit before he felt the pain shooting through his body right in the moment he collided with the hard floorboards of his beloved ship.

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The scuttle at the end of the tunnel led them straight into the heart of the military district. Connor was careful as he opened the door to the street and was quick to duck back into the darkness of the tunnel as he noticed a group of soldiers walking by the alley the tunnel had led them into. Only when he deemed it safe, Connor opened the door quickly and climbed out of the tunnel to go hide in the shadows behind the next corner. His father followed shortly after him and as they ducked behind the shadowy corner, Connor was almost sure that he was able to hear cannon fire in the distance. The battle still seemed to be on and the military district was swarmed by soldiers of the Continental Army still loyal to Washington – or at least loyal for now. Washington had decided to go into hiding in Fort George, as Mr. Weatley had explained to them a little while ago in his house, with the explanation that, after Lee's death and the discussion whether or not he should be reinstated, he felt unsafe and would fear an attack on his life.

»They seem a lot more agitated than usual.« Connor quietly stated but only got a small snort from his father as a response to that discovery of his. Connor could not help but to flash him a dark glare. »What if they got a tip perhaps?« Was he being too careful? Was he being too anxious? Usually, he ran into situations and battles head first as though something like consequences would not exist for him. Usually, he was acting a lot quicker than he did now, but he had already regretted it often enough when he had stormed ahead too eagerly. This time he would not get a second chance. This was important. He only had this one shot and he better not spoiled it.

»Of course Washington is aware that we are coming and he probably asked for the soldiers to stay on alert at all times as long as it will take for him to feel a bit safer again.« His father finally replied with his voice lowered ever so quietly.

»He is probably aware by now that he is not going to be reinstated as Commander in Chief now
that he has the entire congress against him, thanks to your special friends, and that he cannot hide in here for much longer.« Connor snorted and this time it was his father who flashed him a dark glare.

»You should not talk about them in that fashion, son. If it wasn’t for Weatley and the others, things would look much grimmer than they do now.«

They had not done much after their house had been attacked and burned down, Connor thought, but that was the child inside of him speaking. Of course, they had not been able to help and maybe it was not important anyway. »It seems the battle is still raging, but I will go to the tower and get ready for the signal anyway.« Connor then decided. »I’m sure it won’t be long now until Shay and the French will be ready.«

»And what do you propose I do, son?« His father asked, his voice suddenly a bit more stiff than usually and as he looked at Haytham’s face, he noticed how his posture had changed for the first time this evening. His father was standing straight as a broomstick, his arms crossed behind his back, his chin slightly lifted, his left eyebrow raised higher than the right one, his mouth a thin line that clearly told of his annoyance, and his eyes narrowed and cold as steel as he looked at Connor now. This was the posture and face of a man who clearly felt his authority breached by some nosy little youngster. Of course, Connor was not afraid of his father’s anger, but his father also was his Grand Master and Connor tended to forget this detail from time to time. His father was the one giving the orders, not him. His father was the one making the plans, not him. And yet this was his revenge.

»Do you really wish to argue now?« Connor sighed, casting another careful glance at the street between the houses to see if they were still safe here in the shadows. He would much rather not fight the Patriot soldiers, after all, they were fighting on the same side – for now. He was, of course, acutely aware that their loyalties usually changed depending on the circumstances and which side would be more useful to support for them to reach their goals.

»I always wish to argue with you, son. But please do enlighten me and tell me what do you think I shall do while you run off to light the signal fire? Shall I just go hide somewhere or…?«

»Well, I would not recommend you to walk around the streets and sing a cheerful tune.« He snorted. »Maybe hiding would indeed be the best thing.« But of course, he was aware that his father would not listen to him and for once, after he and his father climbed on top of the roof of one of the houses, Connor felt uneasy to go with his father.

The old wolf was still fast and agile as they ran across the roof, jumping over the edge to another house. Moving across roofs had proven to be much quicker and safer in the past already, the only thing they truly needed to take care of was not to get caught by the shooters that were guarding the roofs around them. It was not easy to move quietly. The shingles beneath their feet produced a little bit of noise with every step and Connor was sure that he would have been better off alone in this. And yet they managed to reach the tower within the military district close to the fort just fine. They stopped at the abandoned lookout of a soldier right in front of the tower. Right underneath the lookout down in the street stood a cart loaded with hay for the horses in the nearby stables. The tower itself stood out in the open and close to the stone wall that was surrounding the district and separating the military district from the fort itself. Beyond the wall around the tower, there was only the wide open sea. It would not be hard to sneak into the fort after Shay and the others would have caused the necessary distraction to the guards.

Right now he could only make out one guard patrolling the area surrounding the tower. He was walking over the catwalks surrounding the bay wall. From their position, Connor could already
quite clearly see the bay that should be besieged by the Brits. The British ships that were besieging Yorktown, as some called New York, were gone for now, but if everything went according to plan they soon would come back and open fire.

»If I jump into that cart I might be able to sneak around that guard and climb the tower before anyone notices me.« Connor proposed as they carefully ducked behind the railing surrounding the lookout. He was quite fast when it came to climbing and although he had seen his father climb before, the old man at least would never dare to argue with Connor about his skill in that regard.

»Or I could just kill him so that you have a clear path and don't need to worry about him.« His father replied, but before Connor could possibly roll his eyes at his father proposal or do anything about it, his father had already jumped over the railing of the lookout and landed gracefully in the cart of hay a few meters down.

»And he calls me foolhardy.« Connor cursed under his breath, but he stayed where he was until he watched his father hopping out of the cart, as the guard had his back turned towards it. He had not often had the chance of watching his father go for a kill like this. They had gone hunting before in the past in the frontier and though he had seen his father being skilled and light footed, he had never quite seen it like this.

It was the first time his father did not remind him just of a prancing black cat but of a mountain lion as he had seen them in the past roaming free through the frontier. He was quick after he had left the safety of the cart and it only took him mere seconds to reach the guard who still did not know what was coming before it was too late.

»Show off« Connor snorted as the guard fell dead to the ground. However, his father was none to leave evidence lying around. In just a few seconds the poor man was being thrown over the wall and into the sea - one more man lost to this war of theirs, one more wife who would never learn about her husband's fate. Connor did not waste another moment as he himself jumped into the cart of hay as his father had done before. The landing was not at all as smooth as he had hoped it would be and he was already not looking forward to jumping down in this cart again - but this time from a much higher distance. Hopefully, he would not bruise his ribs or hurt himself in any way. Usually, he would not worry about something idiotic as this. He had done this already hundreds and hundreds of times in his life. A jump like this, a leap of faith, as the Assassins called it, was so familiar to him that he never even wasted a second thought about it. He just did it - and that was the whole entire secret of a jump like this.

Right after his body had made contact with the hay in the cart he hopped out of it and ran straight towards the tower. There was a scaffold surrounding the tower itself and wooden steps leading up to it. Apparently, the wooden construction was serving as some sort of porch to the door that led inside the tower. He was up there in no time and after he had first climbed the scaffold, climbing the tower was everything he needed to concentrate on. By now the cannon fire had stopped echoing across the sea and he was sure that now it was only a matter of minutes until the ships would come back into the harbor. All he could do was to hope that Shay had been successful.

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The jubilance of the sailors and soldiers was almost louder than the cannon fire from before and echoed over the churning sea like thunder. »You are one mad bastard, Shay!« He could hear Gist growl a little too close to comfort as Shay noticed as he managed to get back to his feet slowly.

»Not mad, just growing old, my friend.« He snorted quietly as he was clutching the wound in his left shoulder. It was a clean shot and he knew how much luck he must have had to have only been hit in the shoulder and not having pierced his lungs by that shot. It was the second time he was shot
from behind and survived.

»You are lucky to be alive!«

»I make my own luck, Christopher.« Shay replied and with a laugh he noticed for how long those words had not escaped his lips anymore. Gist only made a small grimace at this as if he had not missed these words coming from his captain and friend and fellow Templar in the past few years. »Well, everything went according to plan I would say.«

Around them the other ships of the French were slowing their pace, the soldiers and the sailors of the Aquila and the Morrigan were starting to readjust and look for damage that might have gone unnoticed until now. Shay, however, used this moment of rest to lean against the main mast of the Morrigan and to close his eyes for a second while Gist was already again up and about to shout orders at the men of both the ships. The Aquila was in bad shape, but not as bad as the Morrigan, luckily. For now, they had done their part of the agreement, the only thing that was left now was to give Connor the signal, hoping he would see it after the French would have stolen the British flags.

And yet he rather paused for a moment longer and pressed his right hand to his shoulder. He could already feel the blood gushing out of that wound and how it was seeping through his coat, drenching him slowly but surely. »I'm too old for this.« He finally admitted, relieved that no one seemed to have heard the words. When all of this was over, he would settle down finally, he decided. It was about time for him to find a decent wife and have some children of his own.

Haytham watched how his son was climbing the stone wall of the tower with a degree of agility and ease as if it meant absolutely nothing to him. It was not the first time he saw his boy in action like this, he knew how skilled Connor really was and though he felt the sting of envy in his heart from time to time, the pride warming his soul was entirely more important than his own self-pity for growing older with each day. He should be thankful that he had the chance to grow old, after all, as a young man he had never thought that he would make it to fifty let alone to have a son he could watch growing up and even though he had missed most of Connor's life, he was all the more proud that he had had the chance to see him grow into the man he was now. He remembered still the awkward sixteen-year-old boy, a shy creature, riddled with uncertainty, shame, and fear.

Whenever he would look at Connor now, however, he saw a capable leader, a skilled warrior, a sharp-minded diplomat - but he also saw his hot temper and his tendency to spring into action too quickly. However, Haytham was sure that in time, Connor would leave behind his temper and his haste. He had seen how past events had changed him slowly but steadily. The biggest change Haytham had seen him make, was after the death of the Assassin, whom Connor had killed with his own hands. It was guilt and sadness that were still gnawing at his soul and though Haytham knew these feelings all too well himself, he also knew that there was nothing he could say to make it easier for Connor and that he would never escape those feelings as well.

The cannon fire that he had heard earlier when they had left the tunnels had now died down and he could already see the first ships slowly coming back to the fort. From up here it was impossible to say if it was the French flying under British weft or the British themselves, but he had trust in Shay and he doubted that Shay and Gist had lost their battle. He had never seen a more skilled captain than Shay when it came to the more tedious situation at sea. For a short moment, Haytham caught himself thinking back to the days of his youth when he and Shay had followed Adéwalé across the seas and Adéwalé’s words sometimes still haunted him. He would never say that Adéwalé had known his father better than he had, but Adéwalé had known a different Edward James Kenway from the man that Haytham had known as his father - and yet he wondered, if he might have been
right with the things he had once said to him. *Your father would be ashamed to see what you have become. If you had become half the man he was, it would be a blessing.*

Maybe that blessing had skipped one generation. His son had much of his grandfather - or at least of the man Haytham had known as his father and yet he could see even more similarities between himself and Connor. At the beginning, he had not seen those similarities as much as he did now. They used the same gestures, their faces tended to do the same expressions, they were both incredibly sarcastic and snarky at times and they both sometimes had troubles to bow down to another figure of authority, not to mention that they both had troubles in showing their affection to the people they loved. He wondered if his father would be proud of Connor, even if he might not have been proud to see what had become of Haytham.

As his son was now climbing up that wall, Haytham finally left his position and went to hide underneath the catwalk on which he had just killed that soldier. In his youth, when he had first come to America, he had cared a great deal to not kill unnecessarily, but now he did not even bat a lash. Killing had become so ingrained in his personality, that he would not even think about it any more than necessary.

From his hiding spot, he watched how Connor reached the top of the tower where he would light the signal fire as soon as the ships were ready. He could only hope that Connor would not get hurt by the jump into the cart and that this whole plan was planned out well enough to ensure his safety. Washington was like a viper and he would not let himself get surprised by their arrival. Surely, the man already knew that they were coming and no matter what would happen tonight, Haytham would make him regret everything he had done to his son and to their family. He did not like being stuck in the past or to occupy his mind with asking what might have been if things had turned out differently than they had, but he was never able to shake off the question of how his life might have turned out if Ziio might not have died or if he might have gone to her village to take Connor earlier. They would not be here right now, that much was certain to him.

He was ready when the moment finally came after what seemed to have been an eternity of waiting as soldiers were passing by his spot under the wooden scaffold without noticing him. It was his luck that it was already pitch black around them and that he tended to wear dark colored clothes. From here he could not see the ships any longer, but as the signal fire lit up in the tower Haytham was ready and sprinted away from the wall as fast as he could as there were no soldiers to see him. His son had caught a good moment to light the fire. No one had noticed - no one but the ships. As he ran he could not see what was happening behind him. He could only hear the cannons being shot, hear the sharp whistling sound as the cannon balls flew through the air and then the loud crash of them finding their intended targets. Haytham reached a safe spot, a narrow niche close to the thick stone wall of the fort itself as the cannon balls bombarded the walls and houses of the military district. He could see Connor jump from the tower - right in the moment as a cannonball hit the tower itself.

He did not need to hear the howl of pain as he watched how Connor crashed down into the cart of hay as planned. The impact of the cannon ball hitting the tower and sending stones after his boy had ruined his leap into the safety of the hay and while guards stormed out of the fort and into the streets of the military district to see what was happening, Haytham knew that he had only one chance left.

He watched as Connor crawled out of the cart. He was limping and injured, clutching his ribcage as though the blow had broken a few of his ribs. His balance seemed to be off as he was slowly making his way towards the fort and towards his father's hiding spot, after most of the guards had already vanished into the streets and away from the fort. There was no way his son would be able to fight in his condition now, but of course, Connor would state otherwise. And suddenly Haytham
could see the outcome of this night very clearly in front of his eyes. Before the sun would rise again over New York, before the bells would stop chiming and alerting the soldiers, he would hold his son in his arms, dead with his dark eyes staring emptily into the dark sky above. This was not the fear of any parent who knew that their kid was in a dangerous situation, this was the truth. This was no irrational little fear - this was what was about to happen if his son would enter this fort, even with Haytham by his side. Maybe together they would have a better chance to surprise George and kill him swiftly - but his guts told him differently. If Connor would enter Fort George, he was dead and there would be nothing Haytham could do to change that.

As Connor slowly moved towards him, he knew what he had to do.

»We have to find Washington.« Connor hissed as he spat a little bit of blood to the ground but tried to straighten his back in the process and not to show how badly he was hurting in reality. Of course, he did not want his father to think of him as weak in any sense of the word. It was useless to say that he had never thought of him as weak, not even when he had been sixteen and lying unconscious in the bed in their house at Marshall Street when he had not known if his son would survive or not. It was Connor's pride standing in his way as it had always been.

»There is a gap in the wall of the house over there. We could squeeze through and avoid the guards this way.« Haytham proposed quietly as he pointed towards the spot he meant. One of the cannonballs had managed to punch a crack into the wall of one of the fort's buildings, wide enough for them to scramble through one after the other. Still, guards were running around with thunderous footsteps and heavy boots and they only had a moment to act now while gunfire was growing louder within the streets of the military district itself. Connor nodded and was quick to move ahead. He was the first of them to squeeze through the gap in the wall.

»I'm afraid I am in no condition to fight.« He heard him mutter halfway through the gap as he followed him to the other side. »We need to surprise Washington.«

»Of course.« Haytham replied and as they reached the other side it was eerily quiet for a moment, except for the sound of gunfire and cannonballs being shot at the fort and the military district now. They had stepped on a mountain of gunpowder now and it was only a matter of minutes until everything would blow up around them. Surely Washington had left his rooms by now to see what was going on. They could stumble into him at any second.

»His rooms are in the north tower, I will go and see if he's there and you-« It was almost comical, Haytham thought. Hadn't he once chided his son and asked him how many times he would need to get hit in the head to learn his lesson? As he dropped the stick he had found lying around in the dirt, he was quick to catch his son before he could fall to the ground.

»You are not going anywhere.« He muttered quietly as he saw how his son desperately fought against the darkness trying to swallow him. His eyelids still fluttered and he still tried to form words, but they came out garbled and slurred as Haytham slowly dragged him behind a few crates and boxes close to the stone wall of the building they had just used as a gateway. »I am going to find that son of a bitch and I will kill him for you.«

He did not feel good leaving his son behind like this as Connor finally passed out from the blow to his head. He felt guilty for leaving him there. He felt guilty for knocking him out like this and yet it was the only chance he had. Haytham caught himself wasting another precious moment looking down at his unconscious son, before he straightened his back, drew his pistol, and started to move.
Chapter 30

The smell of beer and sweat hung in the air like a thick cloud of smoke that was bombarding his nostrils without mercy. It was uncomfortable warm and stuffy inside the tavern. Downstairs in the pub the people were laughing and chatting, some of them even dancing to the violin music that was played by a young musician. He could almost hear his mother in his ear as he took a look at the young man and his violin: »A musician? Well, he better be poor and deliciously desperate, only then he will get the favors of the ladies.« At least he looked poor and desperate judging by the way he was moving around the tables, inciting the young folks to dance and make this night their own as if tomorrow the world would end already.

Outside the air was humid and offered little refreshment for those who dared seeking it and risked being robbed. During this time of year the thieves, just like stray cats, were more active and eager to roam the streets at night in search for some none suspecting victim. There was not even the hint of a breeze coming from the sea to ease the sweltering heat of a summer’s night. But Haytham would not complain. He found himself looking through the windows that were wide open as if to coax a bit of fresh air inside. They were closed most of the year and their shutters blocking every bit of light from outside to give the tavern that much desired dark and gloomy feel. When summer hit, however, every door and window stood wide open. From his position at the table, he could easily see the clear black firmament and all the stars that were hanging from the sky. The thought almost made him chuckle. It had been his father who had told him that all these little stars were dangling from the skies attached to invisible threads of silken yarn and that god would turn them on each night so that they had a little bit of light and something nice to look at. Of course even as a child he had known this to be nonsense, but he had wanted to believe it nonetheless, simply because he had liked the imagery.

»You are drunk, Thom.« He heard the familiar voice of Charles mutter and turned his attention back towards the table where all his friends and comrades gathered around for drinks and food as they had in the old times, when Haytham first came to this new world with all its opportunities, his mind filled with expectations and an almost ridiculous ideology. Even though he had lost some of the expectations he had once had, even though his conviction had shifted quite a bit, the sole fact that even now so many years later they all still came together as they had when they were younger, gave him a bit of his old optimism back.

»I'm always drunk, Charlie!« Thomas erupted in laughter as if he had just heard the most funny thing in his life. »But that does not change what I’m saying!«

»It's nonsense, that's what you're saying.« Charles sighed and waved his fork in Thomas’ direction. Even after all these years Thomas was still the very same unruly man with his feet on the table, leaning back in his chair so much that Haytham was sure the backrest would break at any given moment.

»I don't think it’s nonsense.« Haytham almost smiled as his son managed to chime in and he was not the only one who was surprised by Connor's admission that seemed to have come out of nowhere. Charles looked puzzled at the boy to his right and Connor, though a little blushing, straightened his posture in his chair immediately. »Well, I mean - we can't proof that it is in fact true, can we? So why should it be nonsense to say that it's not like we’ve all been thinking?«

»Hear ye!« Thomas laughed and raised his pint in Connor's direction. »That's a win for me, Charlie! Listen to what the boy’s sayin’! ‘E’s a clever one!«

Charles sighed but did not comment on it. He only made a small grimace of annoyance that he had
lost the little game that they were playing, but Haytham still noticed the little smirk pulling on Charles’ lips.

»And since he is such a clever young man, I think it would be wise to install him as fast as we can in the military. He could make a great career if I would be allowed to take him under my wings.« John proposed at Haytham's left hand side and Haytham caught himself almost rolling his eyes at his words. It was true that John had already approached him with this proposal numerous times and yet his answer always remained the same. It was not like he would not trust his old friend, who had used the years of his absence to rise in the ranks of the British Military and had proven himself to still be a valuable asset to their Order. At this table sat men with the most different lives and beliefs and yet they came together as friends. It did not matter that Charles had left the British Military to join the Continental Army, it did not matter that Thomas was nothing more than a thug, it did not even matter that he, Haytham himself, had no ties to the Military at all or that his son was a half-breed. All these things were of none importance to their little band of brothers in this unruly land.

»If that is his wish, John, we could see to that in time.« He replied, but though his eyes shortly darted to John's face, he was quick to turn them back to his son who seemed overwhelmed by all the attention as he was shifting uncomfortably in his chair. He was not used to that much attention or interest in his person and he seemed not to be comfortable with it as well. »But don't you think he is a little young to make such a decision?«

»I was younger when I joined the forces.« John laughed. «We were all younger than him when we started doing what we are doing now.« William suddenly chimed in and patted John's shoulder from behind in the fatherly gesture that was so very much him. He was the only one who did not sit, but rather occupied his legs and holding onto his jug of beer. William often was the calming breeze in the middle of a storm when they were all together and Haytham noticed the little wink William directed at Connor. »But those were different times, John and now we are all old men and need to accept that the world isn't the same place as it had been when we were Connor's age. He has his whole life ahead of him still - and so I would recommend him to learn about politics and more importantly the trade market before he joins the military.«

For once Haytham decided to let them discuss, his eyes remaining on his son, while he wondered if his back was still hurting. To Connor, it must be odd that all these white men who he still barely even knew were discussing his future, but Haytham was filled with pride as he listened. »Why not showing him how the black market works then?« Thomas laughed and this time it was Charles who rolled his eyes.

»Ruin your own life and reputation, you imbecile.« He snorted. »Leave the young Mr. Kenway out of this.«

Thomas wheezed, before he took another sip of his beer. »I'm just saying! He should know these things, shouldn't he?«

This time it was Benjamin chiming in the discussion and his face clearly spoke of the annoyance he felt for this topic. »He should know medicine too, but do you see me handing him a scalpel?«

»Well, I believe he could use some training in the maritime department too.« Shay chuckled and Gist, who sat beside him as he usually did, raised his jug with a thunderous and joyous »Aye!«.

»But I am more interested to hear what the little wolf wants.«

All eyes rested upon Connor and though Haytham would have thought his son to blush and stutter his way out of this situation until his father would come to his rescue, he did not. Instead, he only
looked at the others and then rested his eyes upon Thomas who sat across from him. »Well, for a start I would like Thomas to put his feet down, I would like to eat without his dirty boots near my plate.«

Thomas was the first to start laughing again and as he took a swipe of his beer he almost spilled it all over his shirt. »Like father like son!« He bellowed.

»I think he won't need our help.« John finally admitted with a small smile on his face. »I think he is already prepared for the way that's lying in front of him.«

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His head was spinning out of control as he managed to pry open his eyes again with as much effort as he would use to open a barricaded gate perhaps. His whole body felt like a sack of potatoes and he had a hard time to piece together what had happened before everything went black around him as it had the tendency all his life. If the situation would not look as grim, it would almost be comical to Connor that his very own father had knocked him out. However, the situation was grim. The world was being ripped to shreds by noise and cannonballs flying through the air. Every minute that they wasted inside the fort was dangerous to them just as it was dangerous for the soldiers outside the fort. He needed to find his father - or Washington, whomever he would stumble over first! His father was out to find the man for sure and he did not want Connor to join him on his hunt.

But Connor had no time to figure out what had led his father to decide on going alone. As he scrambled back to his feet, he grew more and more aware of the predicament he was in. Without his father, at his side, he was as good as dead if Washington would catch him now in the state he was in. »And he’s calling me a fool!« Connor gasped as he made his way forward slowly but steadily with his knees screaming and groaning in pain under his weight. Washington's rooms were in the north tower, but since he did not know how long he had been knocked out, he doubted that Washington would barricade himself in his rooms. He was a soldier too and surely he would not cower in fear of them - no matter how much he hated the man and no matter what a coward he was, he would not miss the chance to take his revenge on Connor or his father. Besides, staying inside his quarters could proof to be even more dangerous anyway with cannon balls flying around.

Connor stumbled forward. He did not know what led him into the inner courtyard, but something was. For a second, he even wondered if it was the amulet around his neck demanding him to go there for whatever mystical reason there might be. »WHERE ARE YOU GEORGE?« He shouted as he clutched the edge of a corner of one of the buildings enclosing the courtyard for balance, his eyes set upon his task and scanning the yard, darting over wooden tables and stools. Only shortly the thought that it might not be wise to shout the name of his biggest enemy out loud crossed his mind, but even though he had before urged his father to be cautious, every bit of caution was now lost to him. Instead, fear and restless anger ruled every fiber of his being.

»Connor« The voice came from behind him after he had managed to move farther into the courtyard itself, his hand now resting on the top of one of the tables in front of him for support. »it is you at last.« The attack was swift and took him by surprise before he could even turn around properly more so than he was ready to admit as Washington landed a blow against his back that almost pushed Connor off his feet and made him wheeze in pain. As Connor whirled around, he was not able to brace himself as Washington rammed his knee in his stomach and when he slammed down his fist on his back, Connor finally went down to the ground in pain. This time his movement was quicker and before he even tried to shoot up, he aimed right for George’s groin with his fist, sending the man stumbling backward and away from the attack groaning in agony so that he almost even lost his sword. Washington’s next hit he was able to block as he jumped back
to his feet and drew his hidden blade in an instant, taking Washington by surprise yet the same as the other way around first.

Washington laughed as his sword hit the steel of the blade that was now secured in Connor's left fist. He jumped back from his opponent and for a moment it hit him just how inferior he was to Washington right in that moment. All these years of training had succumbed to nothing. Every hour he had spent building up his strength was of no importance any longer and only because he had gotten hurt just moments before he would finally face him. He had been too reckless!

»You see me surprised, boy. I would have thought you would bring your daddy along to help.« Washington teased as they carefully watched each other, circling like dancers in the middle of the courtyard. Connor had his chin narrowed, his shoulders raised and his jaw moved forward a bit - a bull ready to lunge at is enemy while around them hell was still breaking loose. He was a child once more, facing the man who had decided it was his right to enslave him - but this time he would not falter.

»I don't need help to give you what you deserve!« Connor hissed. »And when you're dead I will show the world what a man you really were. I will drag your name through the mud as you did with mine and I will make sure that everyone knows what a vile creature you were.«

»Those are big words for a man about to die - though I must admit that I enjoyed having you by my side. Who knows? If I kill your father, we could go back to where we left off, don't you think?« The smile on his face was the last straw and Connor shot forward without thinking twice, not seeing that he was playing right into Washington's cards as he did.

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The military district had sunken in uproar and pure chaos. Explosions were coming too close for comfort to Haytham, as he ran through the fort and its narrow hallways in search of the man he longed to kill. It was, of course, impossible to say where he would find him. It was completely possible that Washington was still hiding out in his rooms, like the coward he was, but on the same instant, a small voice inside his mind begged him not to underestimate the man only because of the hatred he felt for him. Yes, Washington was a bloody coward, but that did not say that he would not like to face Connor in battle now that everything was starting to go out of control anyway. He had seen Washington as they both had been young men. He knew how vile this man was. He had not been so close to Braddock without reason! Haytham would never make the mistake of forgetting how it had been George who had shot his horse and nearly sealed his fate as the horse had collapsed and nearly crushed his legs when they both fell. He would nearly make the mistake of forgetting how it had only been thanks to Ziio who had thrown herself at the soldier like a lioness to protect him from his gun, that he was still alive.

Connor had done a great job in putting together the map of the fort - even drawing in Washington's rooms. He had not asked Connor how he managed to do it because he had been sure it would lead to them arguing once more. Connor was taking too many risks for his liking, that much was certain. But even though Connor had managed to come this close to the fort and George that he had been able to draw in his rooms onto the map, he still had not acted alone, even though he might have a few years ago. He found Washington's chambers without a problem and without running into any soldier or Washington himself, but as he ripped open the door to his room, he was immediately greeted with utter silence. A bag stood on his bed, half packed as though the man had prepared to leave the fort in the morning or even during this same night, whether because he had known that Haytham and Connor were on their way or because he had already known that soon the Congress would decide against him, was not clear. A few of his clothes still laid around, as well as his diary, but Haytham had no time to look at it - and he did not much care either. He did not want
to know what Washington might have written in his diary, which sick fantasies he might have described or if he had written a single word about Connor.

Knowing Washington he was sure that he had. He was a man who liked to gloat on the perversions he had taken part in and Haytham did not want to take the risk to read these things to have them ingrained in his mind. It was enough knowing what he had done, reading about it in detail - he would not be able to stand it.

Haytham did not waste another second as he whirled around and fled Washington's room again to rush down the hallway he had come from. If Washington was not in his rooms, then surely he was waiting outside. Waiting, that Connor would stumble right into his path. This cunning creature had known they would come and Haytham doubted that the man had thought only Connor would come to kill him. Surely, he had known right from the start that Haytham would not let his son go alone to face his greatest enemy. What if he had already planned to set a trap for them? No, Haytham refused to think Washington clever enough to set up such a scheme for them. He could not have been sure that one of them would venture to his rooms after all. And yet he had left Connor unprotected out there. Hell, what irony that really was. He had left him in harm’s way only to protect him from a fight with Washington. It would be more likely for George to underestimate them. He knew nothing about Templars or Assassins and thus he was blissfully oblivious to their true abilities.

That was at least what Haytham wished to think as he rushed down the corridor and was nearly thrown off his feet as another blast shook the fort awake. He managed to jump back right as one of the cannonballs hit the wall to his left and ripped a giant hole into the Fort itself. Knowing how close he had come to be killed by a cannonball, Haytham wanted to proceed quicker and with more caution, but as he passed the hole in the wall, climbing over the rubble of the corridor, his eyes swiftly moved outside and towards the inner courtyard.

First, it was hard to see what was happening outside, but as the smoke from the most recent explosion slowly started to settle, Haytham could see the two figures outside in the courtyard clearly. Even though the night hung dark above New York and the smoke of gunfire, cannons being shot and explosions were darkening the sky in addition, he immediately knew who the two figures were. Apparently, he should have hit his son a little harder to make sure that he would stay down for a couple more minutes until Haytham would have been able to locate George and, preferably, killed him.

While his mind told him to wait and watch, his feet were already running and would not take no for an answer. He did not need to see what was happening. To know that his son was alone with this monster was all he needed to know. It was not as though he would underestimate Connor, this bear of a young man, but he was injured and Washington was probably not. Even if Connor would not be injured, it would be a tough battle between the two.

»Come on, Connor, you cannot hope to match me!« He heard Washington groan as he had left the quarters behind and came closer to the yard itself - and right as Haytham shot around the corner of the arsenal to dive into the courtyard, he saw how the man managed to free himself from Connor's ironclad grip with a well-placed hard nudge with his left elbow straight to Connor's injured ribs. His son reacted quickly though as he immediately rammed down his hidden blade into Washington's left forearm. Blood was already streaming down Connor's face from a wound on his forehead. He had lost his sword in the battle, as Haytham noticed when he saw it not far off of him lying on the ground.

The moment Haytham shot forward to grab it was the moment his son and George noticed his presence at first and this time it was good old George who truly looked as though he feared the
confrontation.

»Well, look at this« Washington suddenly laughed as Connor's eyes fell venomously on his father. Of course, he was angry, after all, he had knocked him out only a few minutes ago. One day Connor would understand, he was sure of that. »father and son, reunited at last. Of course, you could have had this much earlier, but sweet Connor over here had been a little hesitant back in the day.« Even now, facing death by the two Kenway men, this man had the audacity to mock them.

»Stay out of this« Connor suddenly hissed at him with his teeth clad in blood. Haytham could see the effort it took him to stand upright with his back straight and his face determined. He could see the fury in those deep brown eyes his son possessed and that were so reminiscent of his mother’s. »This is my fight.«

»As much as I love a little squabble with you, son, this is not just your fight and you don't get to decide whether I join you in this or not.« Haytham growled and just when he noticed how George’s right hand slipped towards his belt to grab for his pistol, Haytham was upon him with Connor's sword still in his hand. George showed his skill in battle as he instantaneously parred Haytham's hit with the sword with his own and danced backward and away from him. He could see now that his son had already managed to inflict wounds upon him and that George already was panting in exhaustion. He wondered if George had been surprised to see and feel what had become of his Indian slave.

Suddenly, the former Commander in Chief had to fight against both Kenways and for once, Haytham saw honest fear in his eyes as he and his son moved against him quickly. Their hits were hard as they tried to overpower Washington. Connor was wielding his hidden blade as if it was a sword itself and as Haytham finally threw Connor's sword at him, the boy caught it with his right hand without even looking as though the blade was drawn to his hand while Haytham already drew his own.

It was like a dancing a waltz as they moved against George. They moved a step forward, Washington moved back. They swung their swords at him, he parried. Haytham and Connor were a better team than he would have expected and his son proofed his strengths without question as he moved relentlessly against George, the fire and fervor of his youth shining through because to falter would mean his death.

George cried out in pain as Connor's blade slit open his side, but they had no time to rejoice as right in that moment another cannon ball blew through the fort’s north wall aimed for the arsenal. There was no time to react, no time to jump away as the arsenal exploded in one enormous blow that threw him right off his feet. The next thing he felt was as he was slammed into a wall, sure that his bones had cracked at the impact.

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As he came back to his senses his whole body was ablaze in agony and the world had turned upside down. He could see the sky from his position and though his ears were ringing, he could still hear the pained groans of Washington and his father somewhere in the distance. For a moment, he did not even know what was really happening around him any longer. The world was a blur, but suddenly it wasn't as thoughts, feelings, colors, noises and pain came crashing back down on him. He gasped for breath as he looked around and saw the demolished courtyard around him. The rubble of the destroyed wall was lying all over the place and a heavy cloud of dark smoke lingered in the air so thick that he could almost touch it. It was hard to breathe and as he looked down over his body he understood why that was. A heavy piece of wood was lying across his chest and abdomen and the moment he moved to shove it down from him he felt the sharp sting of pain once
more.

Horrified, he saw the piece of wood that was sticking out of his side. He had been thrown right into a wooden shack at the impact and though he had not felt it as the injury had been inflicted upon him, now he felt it in all its glory. But his eyes darted over the courtyard, anxious to see his father injured or even dead, but when he spotted Haytham, his father was just getting back to his feet. Blood was streaming down his face and the way he was hunched as he stood made it very clear to Connor that he was indeed badly injured himself and so, to his delight, was George.

Washington was badly limping as he raised his sword again. He was not about to give up now that he had an advantage over the two Kenways for sure and his father only threw a small glance at Connor, as he slowly pulled the piece of wood out of his body. He wanted to speak and tell his father he should just let George go for now, that they would find him and kill him and that they should rather go and tend to their own injuries, but his throat was dry and he was not able to speak. He could feel his body going into shock, even though he tried to fight it as best he could. He could hardly move after he had pulled the stick out of him and thrown it to the side, but as he caught his father's blue eyes, he knew that the old wolf would not give up until that man was dead.

Connor could only watch how his father grabbed for the sword he had dropped on impact and then threw himself straight back at Washington. As Connor scrambled to get back to his feet like a fawn that tried to stand on its own legs for the first time, he watched how his father relentlessly moved against their enemy, the sound of metal hitting on metal, of their swords clinking together like beer glasses in the Green Dragon during happier times, loud over the still raging battle outside the fort. Suddenly nothing of this mattered to Connor any longer. He had no weapon on himself except for the blade attached to his left wrist, but if this would or could be enough, he was not able to say. Washington fought like a lion against his father, relentless, the fear of death clear in his blue eyes, so clear in fact that it almost amused Connor.

As the shot was fired, Connor was sure the world had stopped turning all of the sudden. He was sure he would crumble down to the ground at any moment, that it was him who would find his end here in this situation. He expected pain, he expected the darkness to come and claim him for real this time. He expected death. He didn't expect to see his father slumping to the ground like an old doll.

For a single moment which felt like a whole lifetime, he could not move and most certainly he could not speak or even think. He was not able to process what was really happening around him. Connor just stood and stared, heard the sharp metal clattering as his father's sword glided out of his fingers and fell to the ground, watched as his father clutched his chest in pain. For once, Washington made no move, but then as his eyes fell upon Connor and his face distorted into a horrible grinning grimace, he raised his sword at his father again and aimed for his neck.

»No!« Connor bellowed, but his hands were much faster than his mind as he ripped his pistol from its holster and fired a single shot. Washington screamed in pain and clutched the wound Connor had inflicted to his abdomen before he turned and ran as fast as his injuries allowed.

Everything in Connor's mind screamed at him to run after him, to not let him escape, to take his revenge, to end this, but his feet slowly, staggeringly, started to move towards his father instead. Connor could almost not even keep on his feet as he was stumbling over the rubble and though he was aware that indeed he could not follow Washington like this without getting killed most certainly, his mind still reeled and demanded to do it anyway. He felt horribly torn, but as he saw his father lying on his side on the ground between all the rubble, the stones, and the wood while a pool of blood was slowly forming underneath him, he just slumped down next to him onto his aching knees his father's back to him.
His hands were shaking as he was reaching for Haytham's left shoulder carefully. His father only gave out a grunt in response as Connor managed to turn him around. His eyes were still open and his face bloody, but Connor had hardly eyes for his face, only for the gushing wound in his father's chest. He did not know if he was mortally injured - or at least that was what his heart was screaming at him. He only pressed down his trembling hands on the wound in a pity attempt to stop the bleeding. »He escapes.« His father groaned, the pain never clearer than in this moment on his face as he was coughing up blood the next moment already. »Go, you could catch him still.«

»No« Connor breathed as he pressed down his hands harder on the wound and started to look around frantically as if, magically, something or someone would appear to help him. There had to be something he could use to stop the bleeding and get his father to a doctor! There had to be! »No … No, he is not important!« He almost yelled at his father just as though Haytham had mortally insulted him with his words. »Come on, father, we need to get you out of here and find a doctor!« His lungs were pierced. He would not be able to help his father and deep down he was aware of that. He could hardly carry his own weight and he himself was gravely injured. He would not be able to carry his father or even support him. He knew that, but that did not mean it had to be true to him. With one hand he grabbed for his father's left arm to drag it around his shoulders and get his father to stand, but his father only hissed in pain as he did and so Connor laid him down again.

»I'm not going anywhere, Connor.« He stated as calmly as he could, but Connor only stared at him wide eyed like a doe at the sight of a hunter aiming straight at its head.

»Yes, you are! Now come on, old wolf!« He hissed and bared his bloody teeth at Haytham in the process like Fenris would have done. He could still taste the iron in his mouth and still his ears were filled with a shrill beep from the explosion. Where was Shay? Usually, Shay was always there when he needed him! Why had he told him he should aid the French? This whole plan had been doomed from the start and he had known it!

»I'm proud of you, you know?«

»Shut up!« But only a lazy little chuckle escaped his father's lips at his son's insolent behavior towards him. »Shut up, you are not going to die here. We will go home, you will heal and then we will kill George together - and then we will go to London. You promised me we would go.«

Even dying his father could still snort at him in that very way Connor had always hated so much and was now afraid to never hear again. »You showed great conviction, strength, courage. All noble qualities - no matter what others might say or think about you, no matter your past. You are more than what Washington thinks you are. I can see you leading the Templar Order into a better future.«

»I don't care about the Order!« Connor hissed once again and tried desperately to ignore the burning sensation in his eyes. But the blood was still flowing through his fingers, no matter how hard he clutched them around his father's wound, desperate to make everything better again.

»Come on now, Raké:ni! We have to find Shay! Shay could help!«

»Bring home the box and the ring, would you? I am sure your aunt will take great care of them, they shan't fall into the wrong hands and it is your duty to make sure of that. And do not falter. Never falter. You stayed strong your entire life, my death will not change your path or anything about your strength. You are equipped with everything you need to become the leader you are destined to become one day, Ratonnhnahaké:ton.«

If the situation would be different, he was sure that he would feel flustered as his father did not call him Connor for once, knowing that the old man had made an effort to learn how to say his real name properly, but now he could hardly think about such things. »No! No, I am not! I have still so
much to learn from you! You are not going anywhere now! You still have not told me everything I need to know!«

»Well, you are still a pup, but I believe you have finally started to grow into your paws.« With that, his father’s blue eyes suddenly fell shut and there was nothing Connor could do about it. He could only sit within the rubble around him and try to realize what just happened. He could not. He wanted to keep arguing with his father, to scream all his frustrations at him if necessary - everything if it meant his father would stay with him just a few moments longer. Still, his brain was refusing to take in what had happened and he did not care if he would get caught inside the fort. He did not care if Washington was still around, preying on him perhaps. As he pulled his father closer, he only leaned his forehead against the old wolf’s as if he tried to catch the last bit of warmth that was slowly leaving his body. And as Haytham finally stopped breathing there was no heartbeat left for him to find as he placed his left hand over the spot where his heart should be. His father was gone and while Connor’s whole body was shaken with violent sobs, he started to understand that he was once again all alone.

They had warned him from the beginning. Everyone had. They had told him that revenge tended to only bring more pain and suffering to one person. They had told him that there was never something good coming from revenge. He had always refused to understand it - not willingly. It was just that he had never thought that he of all people could fail in his mission for revenge and that surely to him nothing worse than what he had already lived through could happen. It was that sort of arrogance and ignorance that let men stumble into a pit of despair. He could see that now. He could see now what a fool he had been. He could see now how arrogant he had been. He could see now how ignorant he had been. And he could see now that he had stumbled straight into that pit of despair himself without seeing it right in front of him. They all had warned him but he, Connor Kenway, had been too arrogant to believe that something like this could happen to him.

The dusk still lingered over the farmland as Connor paused and let his eyes graze the scenery. It was almost absurd how idyllic and peaceful this piece of land looked now that he was here. There was a thin veil of fog lingering over the fields and dusting the ground. It was not cold, but he felt shivers running down his spine nonetheless. There were a few white shirts gingerly swaying in the soft morning breeze from a washcloth near the big house and the raising of the sun tinted the sky in a beautiful magenta and pink.

It was strange being back here after eight years. The old shack in which he and the other slaves had slept in was gone now, therefore the barrack he had helped building stood tall in a little distance from the fields. He felt odd traversing the piece of land and not having to fear the overseers or Washington for the first time.

Maybe he should have known that it would end here from the start.

A few days had passed since the death of his father - or had it been weeks already? Connor could not tell the difference any longer and it did not seem important now anyway. His father was dead and that was really everything that mattered. Now he was here again.

His own wounds were far from healing and he still had troubles walking. Shay had not wanted him to make the journey after he had stitched him up inside the bowels of the Morrigan, but he had done it nonetheless. Since his father's death, there was a great sense of confusion among the remaining Templars inside the Colonies. Who was going to lead them now? He? Shay? He needed guidance more than anything now. And yet it was on him to guide first.

He found his way to the new barrack with ease as he slowly walked through the fields, not caring
if he might trample the crops. As he reached the doors of the barrack he did not hesitate before he pried the barricaded door open. Only a wooden bar with a lock attached stood in his way and was yet no match for Connor and his determination as he swiftly picked the lock and lifted the bar.

Inside the barrack, it was dark and yet Connor was immediately thrown back into his own memories of hunger, fear and the coldness of being an outcast even among the other slaves. A part of him really wanted to say that he had cared for the other slaves even as he had managed to escape, that he maybe even thought about freeing them as soon as possible, but the truth was that he hadn't. Maybe he was not as good as everyone seemed to believe he was. Fenris rubbed his nose against his right thigh. Almost he had forgotten about his companion. Fenris probably felt what was on his mind as he always did and though Connor tried to avoid the company of his friends lately, he was glad that Fenris still was by his side now after he had retrieved him from Mrs. Taylor in Boston.

There was the rustling of fabric as he entered the barrack and let the early morning light inside through the door. There were not many windows, for this was no place to feel comfortable or spend time in. In fact, this new barrack was hardly better than the old shack, but from the outside, it looked better to guests. Inside it was just as meager as the old shack. No beds, but at least a few hay filled mattresses lying on the ground. Maybe Washington had had enough of his slaves freezing to death during winter because of the conditions they had been kept in. He could not tell and he did not care either.

Even in the dim light, he could see no chains - probably because those men and women were already too afraid to even think of fleeing. He did not notice a single familiar face, but honestly, he did not look for one anyway. »You are free.« He said into the silence of the sleeping quarters, very well aware of the fact that those inside were already awake. He knew that they were conditioned to awake at the slightest noise from outside. He had been too. H still was. For a long moment, there was nothing, no sound, no reply, but then finally again the rustling of fabric as the first of them slowly got up from their scrawny beds. There was no question about what gave him of all people the authority to declare their freedom. No »thank you« either. Nothing. And he had expected exactly that: nothing.

This was not the glorious ending of a story or some fairy tale. There was no music underlining the severity of this moment. There was no cheering voices, no tears, no sobs of relief. Just men and women slowly walking past him. The whole situation was odd and felt out of place and although he could have just let them rot inside, he could not have done it. His father would not have done something like this. The blood of the overseers still clung to his hands and his blade. They had been easy to kill gathered half drunk, half asleep around their old table in their quarters, a meal still in front of them while the slaves had to suffer from hunger.

It was odd. While he had slit their throats one after another as if it would be just some mediocre little task he just had to execute like folding the laundry or peeling potatoes, he had felt nothing. Suddenly the monsters from his nightmares had not looked all too frighteningly anymore. Some of them, those sober enough to realize what was happening to them had tried to fight back, but even with all their remaining strength, it had been like killing a mouse or a rabbit. It had been too easy.

Then again: what had he expected it to feel like?

He could not even tell if his tormentors had been amongst them. He had not seen their faces back then. He did not care anyway. It was not important. No one could give him back what he had lost and to murder those who did it, would not change that. It would not make him clean and pure again, it would not give him back the innocence of a sixteen-year-old boy who knew nothing about the world and the perversions of some men. It would not even give him back the skin on his back.
He was done with trying to get revenge for the hardships he had suffered.

He waited until all of the servants had left the barrack before he followed outside. A few of them started to roam around aimlessly, confused about their new freedom as if they would see the outside world for the first time in their life, not able to process what had just happened and what they should do now. If he would be younger, he would probably not be able to understand their hesitation and urge them to move and just flee, escape, run off, but now he could feel the stupor they were in. All these men and women had not been free for a very long time - if they had been free at any time in their life at all. They did not know what to do and Connor would not show them.

Instead, he was slowly making his way towards the main house with Fenris at his heels. He had not expected anyone to recognize him after all those years, especially not in these fancy clothes he wore nowadays, but still, it had some sobering effect on his mind. After all, who was he that these people should recognize him? To them, he was no one, as was true for most of the world. He had been a Kenway, but now with his father gone ... who was he now anyway? It felt wrong thinking like this after his father's death, so, to mute these thoughts he moved faster across the land and finally climbed the stairs to the porch in the back of the large house. It was still exactly as he remembered it. The smell was differently, but perhaps he only felt this way because it was so early in the day. The staff had not yet started to prepare breakfast and it still was completely silent inside the house. Most of the staff Washington had working for him were slaves, but the cook was an Englishman. Connor had seen him a few times as he had still lived here.

The sound of the porch door falling shut behind him and Fenris with a squeak sounded strange to his ears but he did not waste much time on it. Sure, his eyes slowly ghosted over the furniture inside the sitting room into which the porch door had led him, but he could hardly process the things he was seeing anyway. He had seen these rooms a million times and they were still so very much familiar to him, that he would sometimes walk through them in his dreams like ghost bound to this wicked place. A few paintings in oil hung around the walls, one even of George himself at the very prominent spot over the large fireplace at Connor's left hand side, the other of his older brother Lawrence who had once fallen victim to Shay’s blade, before Shay had joined the Templars and started to regret the deed. His own footsteps sounded loud in his own ears as he was slowly making his way out of the room and into the hallway, shortly clutching the wound in his stomach that Shay had stitched up horrified by the gushing wound that was going through Connor’s body. A few of the floorboards were squeaking under his feet, but he did not pay those sounds much attention. He was not trying to be silent. Somehow he was drawn towards the dining room and as he passed the staircase to move towards the door of the dining room itself, he found himself casting a glance up towards the landing. He wondered if George’s wife was up there, fast asleep in her bed or if she still resided someplace else. He had not seen her often and she had not been better than her husband anyway.

As he opened the door to the dining room quietly he could already see the figure sitting slumped in the chair at the head of the table, Washington's favored spot in this room. From this spot, he had the ideal overlook over the room and his guests and could act out the role of the noble host to his heart's delight. Twelve people would fit the table but now it was only Washington and Connor as the young Indian man sat down to George's left-hand side. Fenris kept his guard by the door to the room and never let any one of them out of sight.

For a moment, Connor did not say anything and neither did George. The man looked horrible and really killing him now would only be like showing him pity and freeing him from his misery. He was as good as dead already. His face looked gray, but not from age. His clothes were disheveled and Connor was sure that he had arrived not much before Connor at his home. The way from New York to this piece of land was not exactly within a stone’s throw. His clothes were bloody and although some time had passed, he did not look as if he had had much medical attention for his
wounds.

»Connor, we meet at last again in his house. Just you and me, who would have thought?« George finally began as he looked at him quickly only to stare outside the window to his right again as if he wanted to watch the rising of the sun. His voice sounded nothing like it had as they had last met, instead it sounded thin and weak. A dying man that was what he was.

»My name is Ratonhnhaké:ton.«

»You were not as picky with your name during the last years, were you?« He replied and a little laugh escaped him. »You were glad to be a Kenway, weren't you? You latched onto the opportunity - not caring if you really were what Haytham told you.«

»I should hang you from one of the trees outside and gut you as you always threatened me with.« Connor spat interrupting the man and his comments towards him for he did not want to hear any of it or even give George a stage to perform on one last time. »I should parade your body around and tell everyone who you really are. I should find your diaries and publish them so that everyone is able to see what kind of sick person you really are.«

»Maybe you should.« He replied with a smirk on his face. »But, boy, never forget that all those people who you try to gain favors from and who you will need in the future more than before to strengthen your social standing will then know the truth about you too. Everyone would see who you really are.«

»And who am I?« Connor asked and did not even really know why he asked or what he longed to hear. »Tell me.«

Washington chuckled quietly as he leaned back before his eyes fell upon Connor's face again. They still looked like those of a dead fish, empty and pale - nothing in comparison to the deep blue rivers of his father. »You, Connor, are nothing more than a vile beast, a savage. Beautiful enough to fuck, good enough to use as a worker, good enough maybe as a bloodhound - but a Kenway ... No. I'm afraid not. Even though, truly, what does this name really hold? A band of murderers, nothing more. Most certainly nothing to be proud of.«

Connor found himself snorting but even though he had feared the confrontation a few days ago and those words out of Washington’s foul smelling mouth, now he felt nothing. Not even anger, not even the thirst for revenge. Just nothing. He was empty. Everything inside of him that had fueled him and urged him to move forward had burned up now. Only cold ashes remained inside of him now. »And yet I am proud to be a Kenway.« He replied silently before he got up from his chair again only to draw a surprised and questioning look from George.

»Go on then, Kenway, kill me. That's what brought you here, isn't it? Do it, you would do me a favor.« George said but his voice had the same snarky tone he had always used to address his father with. It was almost comical.

»Oh, I won't kill you.« Connor replied swiftly before he drew his hidden blade with the flick of his left wrist. »Even though I could. You know what, George? Unlike you, I learned a lot in the last eight years. Revenge was what fueled me and let me march forward. For almost nine years I only wanted to kill you - there was hardly anything but this on my mind. I was ready to die to get my revenge. And see where it led me. I'm back at square one again.« He paused for a moment and let his eyes roam the room for one last time. »No, I'm done.« And finally he let the blade retreat back again, but in the next moment, as he noticed how George started to relax in his seat, Connor suddenly grabbed him by the injured arm, the same arm he had plunged his knife into and as George yelped in pain he felt the sting of enjoyment in his heart, but buried it immediately again.
»But there are others who are still yearning, waiting for you - outside.«
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

This is for everyone who wished Connor to meet Achilles xD I hope I did well...

There was no place like London. A bottomless great black pit of decay and disease that was inhabited by the vermin of the world with morals that were not even worth what a pig could spit - and all of this was going by the name of London. The city always had this very unique feeling about it and this had not changed even in this modern times they were now living in. At the top of the pit sat the privileged few, as was true for every big city he had visited during his life, and they would make mock of the vermin in the lower zoo, turning beauty into fifth and greed with no care for those they would hurt or destroy with their actions.

Sometimes he envied the young men who left their ships after their first few voyages to come and see London for the first time and he tried to imagine what magical place this dark and gloomy city must be for them, not knowing what would await them in this grotesque circus that was known as London. He had seen a lot in his life, but there was, truly, no place like London. The harbor was still one big infestation of sin, hardship, and dirt all over and the fog that seemed to lie over the town at all given moments so thick one was almost able to cut it with a knife, made it hard to estimate whether it was safe to roam the streets or not.

The lonely figure that was slowly wandering through the town did not care about the dangers lying ahead though. As the figure waded through the thick fog and noticed the men across the street that were looking at him with hungry, haunted eyes, the man decided that he had seen and experienced far worse things than this town could ever come up with. And yet, through all this filth and dirt, his feet carried him to Queen Anne’s Square with no hesitation.

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April 1781

To Connor, it was like walking through a dream, as he left the forest behind and made his way down the foothills - though if it was a good dream or a nightmare, he was not able to say. It was true that, at first, he did not know why he wanted to visit this place of all places now that his departure from the Colonies was so imminent - only that this was what his heart told him to do, he could say without the shadow of a doubt.

He could still smell the memories of his childhood lingering in the air so thick that he was almost able to touch them, dancing around him like ghosts woven out of the thin early morning fog, as fragile as cobwebs. He could still hear the voices of his people, the laughter of the children running around engulfed in a play of hide-and-seek, the voices of the women and men shouting after their kids that they should not leave the valley and be always wary of the white men that were slowly but surely closing in on them and their peaceful existence out here in the open.

But as he reached the spot near the water, there was no palisade fence any longer, there was no gate any longer. There was really nothing that even indicated that once there had been a settlement here. For everyone who would not know any better, this piece of land was just like any other. The English settlers did not have a clue about the bones strewn all over this piece of land or the ashes of
those who burned to death like his mother when they walked this land - and even if they did, Connor truly wondered if they would care. The white men did not feel the sanctity of this very piece of land and they would probably never understand any of this in the future. His tribe was long gone and forgotten and he was the only one who still remembered them. In times such as this, twelve years was a long time - more than enough time - to forget.

Connor did not even blame the normal settlers that came over to the Colonies. They were not bad people for the most part. Some of them even were aware of the hardships the native tribes had to suffer, but the majority of those people in towns like New York or Boston were simply ignorant to their pain - and not out of bad intention. The simple townsfolk had their own burdens to carry.

Even though the fence was not there anymore, he felt like stepping through the gate of his childhood, as he slowly walked down to the shore and tried not to think about how it used to look too much. If he would now start to bother his mind with the images of his childhood, he was sure that he would never find rest and that he could not have. He was sure that his father would have never wanted him to live the rest of his life miserable and wandering the earth haunted by his past without purpose. It was okay thinking about the men and women that were lost. It was okay mourning those he had loved and lost - but to give up himself and not finding purpose in life because of their deaths, that would be unforgivable, at least in his father's eyes surely.

The man responsible for the suffering he had lived through was dead and although he had not killed him himself, his death had been a messy one. The shouts and screeches still burnt in his ears, the faces of the freed slaves still haunted his mind distorted into the horrible grimaces of demons as they had taken their revenge with claws biting into George's skin and flesh as they had strung him up. And while he and Fenris had watched from the porch of the house as they had murdered their tormentor and listened to the most horrible sound he had ever heard in his entire life, he had been glad for once that he himself had decided not to engage in that. He felt now, that he was walking the holy ground on which his people had once lived, that he would have lost something of himself if he had. He could live and find peace in the thought that it had not been him who had killed the man, but he would never forget Charles, whom he had killed with his own hands to ends his suffering and he would never forget Thomas and his hand dangling from the bed in Bridewell.

He stopped in the middle of his old village right at the spot where the bonfire used to be and he could not help but to think about the times they had celebrated weddings or other important events in their tribe and how the adults of the tribe had danced around the bonfire, singing and cheering. As a child, he had loved those days and nights of celebration and he had fantasized about the day he would be old enough to really engage in them - maybe even get his own celebration after finding a wife who would have been fit to be a leader. Now that he was old enough he was acutely aware that he would never get the chance to engage in the celebrations of his people anymore. The white men would swallow the rest of the Indian tribes one by one and at some point in the future, they would all be gone, barely a footnote in the history of this great nation. He could already see it very clearly in his mind. First, they would weaken them with war and disease as they had since the first settlers had sat a foot on this land, then they would imprison them in reservations and promise them that they could live there in peace - and surely at one point they would take their kids and try to form them into something they were not all under the guise of doing it for the greater good and to make it easier for them to adapt to this new world.

Looking back on the last nine years with his father he did not feel as though that was what his father had wanted to do with him. True, his father had tried to educate him and make a proper gentleman out of his wild son, but he had never tried to change him in any sense of the word - only to broaden his mind and prepare him for the things that were surely coming. Yes, he had mocked Connor from time to time about his long hair and asked him to cut it. Yes, he had sometimes criticized him for his mannerisms and customs, but he would have never forced change upon him.
Maybe he would not be alive to see those developments in the future, but he would try to fight them as long as he lived. Not for himself, but for the children he might have one day.

A smile ghosted over his lips at this thought as he quietly patted the left pocket of his coat and felt the edges of the letter sticking through the thinner fabric. He would answer personally, he decided, as soon as he would come back from his travels. As he produced a sharp little whistle, Fenris came back running towards him, after he had run straight to the shore to search for fishes perhaps. Connor would never admit it, but he was glad that the wolf was still by his side and that he had not chosen to leave Connor behind at one point to find a new pack as would other wolves.

The only reason they were here now was the artifact that his grandmother had once given to him to see what path was lying ahead of him. In Shay's house in New York they had talked about this very artifact and the holy site that his people had been guarding since the dawn of time, and although Shay had voiced his doubts that the artifact was still there - even if it had survived the fire, Connor was sure that it had. He could almost feel the same tickling sensation in the air that he had felt when he had first held the odd globe in his hands as a child in awe of its wonders. It was reminiscent of the feeling of electricity in the air shortly before lightning would strike and that exact feeling slowly drew Connor to the spot where the longhouse of the clan mother had once sat in the center of the lost village surrounded by all the other longhouses. He could almost still see it towering in front of him as he reached the spot where the entry once was and waited for a second as though he waited for Oiá:ner to welcome him inside. As a child, the longhouses had been gigantic to him, so much in fact that he had never even been able to fathom anything that could make them crumble. To him and the other children their houses had been sturdy fortresses - that was until he had experienced a real fortress and now looking back on his childhood memories the longhouses looked more like a twig in the wind, dependent on the mercy of storms. And just like this his entire childhood now appeared to have been. A meshwork so thin it might as well have been woven out of the silky threads of a spider's web.

A soft breeze that was coming from the water pulled at his long hair and brushed over his left ear before he scooped up the courage to enter the invisible house quietly. And although there was nothing there, it felt different as he stepped forward. It was almost like he only needed to pull back a thin silken curtain to reveal what was lying behind it in secret so he would be united with his family and his tribe again, as though he was stepping through the portal to another dimension - into a dream, perhaps. He almost expected to hear his mother's voice lecturing him in a sharp tone for having left the valley although she had told him not to, but nothing of that sort happened - of course not. There was no longhouse he entered either. It was only him and Fenris out in the open with no indication that there had ever been anything around the very spot where he stood now.

There was nothing to his feet, only dirt and yet Connor moved forward and crouched down. He had always known that his grandmother would take care of the artifact as best she could. Now, that he knelt on the same spot where once the little campfire had been set up to make the night inside the longhouses more bearable, he wondered if his grandmother had known about her impending death and about the impending attack on them. On the other hand, what would it change if she had known? It would not bring her back or any of the others.

Connor did not need long after he started to dig with his fingers until his fingertips hit something hard in the ground and he knew right away that it was the box his grandmother had once shown to him. He would recognize the wooden box the mysterious glass ball had been kept in for centuries by their tribe under a thousand for it was the same wood, the same decorations on its lid that he knew from the box Shay had searched for all his life. This box, this globe were the very essence that made this very ground holy, even though now that Connor knew more about this spirit and the artifact itself, everything did not appear as magical and holy any longer. Maybe this was wrong of him to think, but he still could not shake off that feeling anyway.
A few seconds later, after he got up to his feet again and opened the box to retrieve the glass orb - the Apple, was how his father had called it after Connor had once drawn him a sketch of this cursed item, the world around him began to glow like it had all those years ago. Still, he felt oddly betrayed by the spirit as he saw her again approaching him out of the shadows like an old friend, as if she had not condemned him to a life of suffering in the meantime.

Just as his fingers had touched the apple, there was this soft, warm tingling again that was moving from the tips of his fingers through his entire body in a heartbeat, before the light protruding from the artifact almost blinded him and wove a net out of golden strings like a dome above his head and around him. Even though he had experienced this before, he felt odd and as though he had been shoved straight into another world. He was aware, of course, that he was still standing on the very same spot in the abandoned village, but he was alone except for the ghostly figure of the spirit, this goddess, that slowly walked towards him. She had not changed a bit since he had last seen her. She was still the slender, pale figure that was so alien to him. She had little of a human and yet enough to be mistaken for one if she wanted to be.

»Ah, long have we waited for you to return.« The voice seemed to come from all around him before he moved enough to see her lips move as she came closer. Her eyes still were the ones of a predator, of a tigress, circling her prey dark and unnatural. As a child of thirteen years, he had not seen these details. Now they were frightening to him. »You have done as we asked. You have succeeded.«

»No!« Connor growled as he turned his entire body to face her. He did not care who she was or why so many before him had tried to find out more about her civilization, his father included, why so many had died in search of artifacts of her culture. For this moment in time, none of these things mattered to him, only the feeling of betrayal, and yet, there was hardly anything he could blame her for. She had never told him what was lying ahead of him, that much was true. She had never told him how much he would need to suffer, but could this be considered betrayal in all honesty of the word? Would he have started his journey knowing the pain he would need to endure along the way? »I have failed!« He added and to him the edge of desperation his voice suddenly carried sounded odd. »My family is gone and I could not do a thing to protect them!«

»It is a trade, a sacrifice - and not in vain, for you have found it.« In a blink of an eye she was right in front of him, her fingers mere inches apart as she pointed to his neck, her face suddenly not the calm mask of superiority but glee shining through her dark bug-like eyes, like a rook seeing something shiny in the distance. The amulet was hidden underneath his collar, but he knew that she meant it, he could feel it clearly now. He had felt it tingling on his skin for a while now and it only grew stronger the closer he got to his abandoned village.

»This?« He asked as he pulled the amulet free from his clothes. It felt warm in his hand, almost unbearable warm.

»Now you must hide it where none shall think to look. And then in time ... in time... What once was shall be again.« A smile ghosted over her lips and Connor felt like he had missed the punch line to a very funny joke in the same instant. He wondered what she could see that was hidden from him and he wondered if the people in the stories of the bible had felt this way too.

»I do not understand.«

»Nor need you. Only do as we ask. Then you may do as you wish.« Her words had more pressure to them now and yet Connor was not ready to just do as she told like an obedient little dog.

»But what of my people? Of my family?« He growled although he was aware that he would not get anything from her now. There was no grand reward for his suffering.
»You have saved this place, as was your people purpose. And that matters most.« If she would have been a human, she would have sounded annoyed by now, but her expression remained like that of a statue instead.

»It is not enough!« His own voice echoed from the void around him like the roar of thunder in the distance, echoing from the mountain tops that were guarding the valley.

»It will never be enough. You strive for that which does not exist. Still, you have made a difference. And you will do so again. Remember: You must hide the amulet where none might find it.«

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The settlement was not as big as it had the potential to be. Only a few seemingly new build houses stood alongside the narrow path that wound itself through the lush vegetation of the frontier. On his way through the small collection of houses, he saw a water mill at the nearby river that was dividing the settlement, this little village into two parts, and heard the booming voices of two men arguing close to the shore. Already he had walked past a small tavern, though he doubted that there were many visitors to fill the innkeeper’s pockets around here. Connor had hardly encountered any other trespasser traveling in this direction except himself. Who knew? With a few sailors around the nearby shore, maybe the inn would get the traffic it needed to survive. There even was a patch of farmland not too far off the path and a few men sat on the railing of the small wooden bridge that united the land that was torn by the river. He did not grant them too much attention as he and Fenris walked by, though of course, they paid him and the wolf attention enough and started whispering after he had passed them behind his back.

He did not mind, after all, he was used to this kind of behavior by now. He was, of course, aware that he stood out from the crowd. This was nothing new. Usually, he was the center of unwanted attention because of his skin color, this time it was because of his fine clothes - and because of Fenris for sure. He had drawn odd looks since he had left town to visit his village quite a bit, but most thugs knew better than to attack a man with a wolf at his heels.

His destination was easy to find, even though the tight tree line gave it’s best to hide the great manor on the hill from sight at first. It was obvious that the house had seen better days in the past and Connor wondered how many people lived there at all. He had heard stories from Shay about this place, of course, but those stories took place a long time ago. It must have been a prestigious place back in the day, a paradise blooming in midst all of this turmoil, and this whole settlement booming with life and energy. All this seemed gone now. The tone of the arguing men by the river had been aggressive, the aura of this place was grim and hopeless. He had seen a young black woman working the fields of the nearby farmland all by herself, but he was not here to help these people in any way shape or form - and he was, most certainly, not here to get involved in their lives or business. He was here to … Well, to do what exactly?

His plan originally had not involved to come here at all. He should be on his way back to Boston right now. And yet he was here, climbing that hill and walking towards the front door of the large colonial manor. As he paused in front of the main door, he took a moment to look up the red brick stone facade and wondered how his old friend might have felt as he had first visited this place all those years before. Kanen'tó:kon had never been too brave. He had always been a little anxious and nervous, and yet he became an assassin and a skilled one even. No matter what he might have liked to say in the past about their enemies, if Kanen'tó:kon had not been good in his profession, he would not have been able to kill so many of them. He had to have had a great mentor - and even Shay still spoke with a sense or respect of his former mentor, whenever Connor forced him to do so, which was rare, since he knew what losses his friend had suffered in the process of becoming a
Templar. It seemed almost as though walking the right path in life always demanded sacrifice and suffering from those brave enough to try their luck.

The house seemed huge to him now … It was almost too much to imagine a thirteen-year-old boy who had never seen anything but his village standing in front of this building.

Only for a second, the thought crossed his mind, that he might be stepping straight into the lion's den, but he decided that he would be able to handle it, if there was someone waiting to attack him inside. Sure, he was still injured, his wounds had not much time to heal and he had too many things to do then would allow him to care about his injuries at all. However, if he would get attacked, he would be able to defend himself. Plus, he had Fenris. Shay had demanded him to take Fenris along for this journey to his village and Connor would not have gone without him anyway.

Shay had been hit hard with the news of his father’s death. But well, that had to be expected, he guessed and he tried desperately not to think about the days afterward or the night in Shay's house in Greenwich. They had not done or said anything after Shay had tried his best as he had tended to his wounds even though he had been injured himself. Even cheerful old Gist had not had a joke on his lips for once. They had just sat there in front of the crackling fire in Shay’s sitting room, watched the flames and tried to understand what had happened with good old Fenris curled up in front of the fire. Of course, he had felt that something was wrong, that someone was missing. No matter what some people might say, Connor knew that animals could feel when something was wrong and that they too could feel sadness and loss in some way similar to them. The wolf had not left his side since that night.

It still did not feel real to Connor. He still felt as if it was just a matter of moments until his father would appear to scold him. Oh, and what would he give to hear him lecture him one more time. Surely, he would have had much to say to his silly son now that he was visiting their greatest enemy just like that with no care in the world. Then again, Connor had never truly seen the Assassins as enemies. Only as Kanen'tó:kon had started to kill his new found family, this had changed. They had much in common, though, and maybe together they would have been able to achieve greatness.

Before he finally knocked at the door, he braced himself and tried not to think what this infamous mentor of his old friend looked like or how the man might react to Connor's visit. Surely he must know who Connor was. For a long moment nothing at all happened and just as he contemplated knocking again or trying another door, the front door was opened by a young woman. She was wearing simple clothes and a bonnet that had once been white but had grown yellow with time. She would be pretty, were it not for the stressed look on her face, the unkempt strands of brown hair in her face, and the crumbs of dirt on her dress. Maybe she was the wife of one of the arguing men, he shortly wondered though he had no indication for this little thought of his other than the fact that there did not seem to be too many people living on this patch of land. Clearly, she had seen more cheerful and better days in the past, that he could see by the look on her face.

As their eyes met and as she began to take in his appearance and then the wolf behind him, her facial expression shifted from confused, to bewildered to straight out horrified. She almost jumped back a little as Fenris yawned behind him and showed all his sharp and dangerous looking teeth, not realizing that he almost caused a heart attack.

»I am in search of Achilles Davenport.« Connor began before the woman could even begin to stammer a question in his direction. He still was impatient at times. »I was told I could find him here.« Though that was not exactly true, it was no lie either and most certainly nothing this woman should worry herself with.
»Y-Yes« She the stuttered nervously as her eyes darted from his to the wolf, back and forth, back and forth as if he could order Fenris to attack her at any second. Well, he could - but of course he would not. In that regard, they, the Templars, or at least his father, Shay and him, were the same. They did not kill innocents and they most certainly did not kill without reason. »Yes, he is here. I will ask him if he will see you.« She brushed her hands on her formerly white apron. They were dirty and suddenly the stains on her dress started to make sense to Connor too. It appeared as if she had been scrubbing the floors before he had knocked. She already turned around to go back to her master, as she turned again and gestured him to step inside, suddenly remembering that she did not even know who the stranger with the wolf was. »And what shall I tell him who wants to visit him?«

Connor was surprised to hear a few seconds later that the old man was willing to see him and even more so as he stepped into the bedroom of the old man that was located on the ground floor to the back of the house. The entire room smelled uncomfortably of sickness and death.

»Connor Kenway.« The voice of the man sounded weak and hoarse, but his eyes still had a sharp edge to them as he directed his eyes to look at Connor who kept standing close to the door for a moment longer out of politeness.

For a brief moment, he made the mistake to follow his youthful instinct that led him to only see a weak, dying, old man lying in this bed and not the fierce warrior who he had been a long time ago. The man lying in this large bed was of dark complexion though his sickness had paled his skin and let it appear almost gray, his eyes sunken into his skull, his lips thin and dry like the rough side of a carpenter's rasp. His eyes were dark as pits, but the white around his brown irises was already tinted yellow and red. He did not know what the man was suffering from, but he could not shake off the feeling that he deserved the rest that he would soon find.

His tongue felt heavy as he carefully stepped further into the simple little bedroom. There was not much of great interest to him, only a few items scattered across the room. The only thing really worth noting was the large stuffed eagle that stood on his desk. Connor never liked this tradition of making trophies out of animals. How long until a human head would end up like this on someone's wall? Shortly his eyes were caught by the small table in the middle of the room. There was a game of checkers on it and two stools stood at the table. From the looks of it the game had been interrupted, red was winning, but Connor found himself wondering if Kanen'tó:kon had sat there with his mentor to play. Maybe this had been the last game they had played before Kanen'tó:kon had ventured out to kill Benjamin. To the man lying in this bed, he either looked like a wolf that was slowly closing in on its prey or like a clumsy puppy that tried too hard to be sneaky as he came closer. It was impossible to tell what the Assassin was thinking about him - let alone how much he knew about him.

»I am sorry to bother you.« Connor finally answered even though his mouth felt dry. He did not even know why he had followed his desire to come here and talk to the man who had taught his former friend and ordered that same friend to kill Connor's father - and perhaps even to kill him. »If I had known...«

»If you had known you would not have taken the journey, but rather waited until my end had come.« The old man scoffed. »Why are you here, boy? If you desire to take revenge, so do it - it would befit your wretched ways.« So much spite was spraying out of the old man’s mouth that Connor was taken aback for a second. Had he been too naive again perhaps? Had it been so naive to think he would be able to talk to this man and bury the hatchet between Templars and Assassins at least for a while?

»I am not here to fight - or to kill.« Connor replied quieter than before as he clumsily folded his
hands in front of his waist as he always did when he did not know what to do with them. Fenris sat at the door, watching the two men carefully, but calmly.

»Then why are you here, boy? I am sure your father finds great pleasure in my suffering after you killed my student and thus the hope of the Brotherhood in this land!« If he had the strength, he would have shouted without doubt, but even as he now only raised his voice at Connor, he started coughing and wheezing quite badly.

»My father is dead.« Connor said and quickly too, as if saying it quickly would make it any better - or more real. »And I am not here to taunt you. I am here to … Kanen'tó:kon was my friend. I thought I owe you an explanation.«

»No explanation needed, boy.« The old man growled. »He died as we do: fighting. And I bet if he had made the same mistake as you and would have gone to your father to talk about you, Haytham would have gladly slit his throat, so you should feel lucky that I do not possess the strength needed for that.«

»He would have.« Connor smirked but regretted the twitch of his lips immediately. This was too sore a topic as for him to smile or grin. But it was true. His father would have killed Kanen'tó:kon right away and maybe it was his luck that the old man was so weak indeed.

»So what now, boy? Did you come all the way to apologize? If so, you have a lot to learn still. In this war, people on each side die and yet it is unheard of that the enemy comes to the comrades of the killed to apologize. Are you sure you are ready to take part in all of this?« Despite his weakness there was mock in his voice and Connor started to get a glimpse of what Kanen'tó:kon’s period of training might have looked like. The old man surely had been a stern teacher.

»I think there is nothing wrong in seeing one’s mistake and apologize for them. An apology does not mean the sins are forgiven. It only means that the person who decides to apologize sees their mistakes and can own up to them. It means personal growth and I do not expect anything from you. I don't apologize for killing my friend, for I would be dead if I hadn't. He would not have shown me any mercy and I am aware of that, no matter how much my heart aches to think of him that way. I did what I had to do - that is how this war works and I am aware of that. But I can see the pain I caused in killing him and for that, I can apologize.«

There was a moment of silence, but Achilles was quick to bridge it. »You are nothing like your father, boy.« The man spat and though it should probably be a compliment, it sounded like an insult to Connor, but, he thought this had to be expected. This man did not know as much about his beloved father than Connor did and even to Connor the old wolf still remained a riddle wrapped up in an enigma. »In fact, you remind me of a very rebellious student of mine, back when the brotherhood had been strong, before your father helped to wipe it out.« For once warmth crept in the old man’s eyes, but the moment vanished as quickly as it came.

»He was one of my best teachers as I grew up.« Connor chose to reply quietly, not daring to speak the name in case it would provoke any more bitterness and resentment in the old man.

»You seem to be just as naive and idealistic as he, it was to be expected that someone like you would be taught by someone like him. If you follow this path the same way you are now, you won't live long and your end will be a bitter one, Connor Kenway. And just so you know my death will change nothing. There will be others and they will hunt you down when your time is ripe.«

He could have left the settlement and go back to Boston after his encounter with the old man of the hill, but he decided not to. He did not even quite understand why that was, only that he felt the unmistakable urge to stay just a little while longer - as if he was afraid to miss a crucial detail, the
last piece of the puzzle perhaps. Only that there was no puzzle to solve any longer. His mission was over for now. He had a little time to rest now, to go to London, to meet the other Templars and to decide what was going to happen with the Colonial Templar Order.

As he lay in his uncomfortable, small bed, he wondered how those strangers would react to him and how they would decide. Would they even acknowledge him as a rightful member of the Order? Shay had already tried to comfort him as he told him they would not have a chance when Connor would bring them those artifacts and the documents his father had stored at the bank. He felt a little uneasy knowing that he would soon take them out of his father's safe as if it was the most normal thing to do.

He had managed to get a room in the small inn of the settlement, though it had hardly proven to be a challenge whatsoever. It was obvious to him that business was running slow - not to say that it was pretty much nonexistent with the settlers being the only people that really came to have a drink once in a while. This settlement was a hopeless place and Connor could feel it with every fiber of his being. He was saddened by this, for the owners of the Mile's end, an elderly couple named Oliver and Corrine, were quite lovely people who deserved more than they got in life. They had not looked at him funny as he finally entered the inn a few hours ago and showed him nothing but hospitality in the meantime, even to Fenris they had been nothing but lovely.

He was sure that this piece of land, the Homestead, as the people called it, could thrive and bloom if someone would just take decent enough care of things, but the old man who owned this land was too weak - and maybe not even interested in taking care of something like this anymore. Connor could understand this and yet it was a shame. The people living here did not seem to be haunted by the same prejudice as most of the Bostonians or New Yorkers Connor had met, but his surprise about this had soon faltered as he had grown aware of the fact that they had known Kanen'tó:kon. He had not asked about him as he had been downstairs to eat. A few of the other inhabitants of the Homestead had been around too, but the mood had been grim and Connor not in the right state of mind to ask.

As the next day came, Connor had hardly even slept an hour or two. There was too much going on inside his stubborn head that he was not able to shake off even if he tried his hardest to do so. The crisp morning air, however, did it's best to not just soothe his uneasy mind, but also to wake up his spirits a new.

He was drawn back to the manor on the hill even though he himself could not tell why that was. The old man had made it unmistakably clear to him that he did not desire to further their little conversations and though Connor could understand this, he still felt the urge to visit him one last time. Perhaps he wanted to hear from him that he had been the driving factor behind Kanen'tó:kon's facade around Connor. It would not change a thing, of course, but perhaps his restless mind would finally manage to calm down and close this book. But in reality, nothing this man could potentially tell him would change how Connor felt and would feel about the death of his best friend. Kanen'tó:kon was dead and he did not regret killing him, even though the thought scared him. He would do it again if the situation would be the same.

As he left in the early morning hours he left the money for his room on his pillow. He did not wish to come back and he did not wish to talk to the innkeepers. As he and Fenris wandered downstairs he could hear Corrine humming from the kitchen, a cheerful little tune on her lips despite the circumstances she was currently living in. Connor could neither see nor hear Corrine's husband. Maybe he was still asleep, for as Connor left the inn, the morning fog still hovered over the ground and the crisp morning air sent chills down his spine. Fenris did not seem to mind as he stretched, yawned and ran off to the nearest bushes straight away. Connor only smiled at this but began wandering down the path nonetheless, knowing that his friend would follow soon enough.
Davenport Manor looked eerie to him as he arrived at the foot of the hill on which it towered over the Homestead. There were no columns of smoke protruding from the chimneys yet. The young maid from yesterday was probably not yet there to light the fires that would warm the house. Connor liked it better this way, for her absence meant less ears to hear what he wanted to say. Connor was as silent as a mouse as he entered the house through the front door. It was not locked, as was the case for most houses in areas as these - as reckless as it was. Fenris was not as silent, but there was no sound coming from Achilles’ room to indicate that the old man had heard them. He thought about the tales Shay had told him a long time ago. About how he had been taught by this very man who was by now only a shadow of his former self - or at least that was what Connor thought judging by Shay’s tales. He thought about how Shay had shown mercy to Achilles as his father had wanted to kill him all those years ago and wondered how much guilt Shay might suffer for doing so now.

If his father had killed Achilles, the old man would not have been around to teach Kanen'tó:kon later in his life and thus their brothers would not have died as they had. Maybe the outcome of all of this would have been a different one. Mayer his father would still be alive. Shay had shown mercy back then, maybe out of sentiment for his old teacher, maybe out of pity, but this mercy had cost them all a lot in the end and same was true for the mercy Connor had once shown Washington as he had had the chance to drown him in his dirty bathwater like the pig he had been. If he hadn’t done it, his father would still be alive. Charles would still be alive. Maybe all of them. Maybe he himself would have died.

As he reached the door to Achilles’ bedroom he found the door ajar and carefully peeked inside. Fenris had stayed behind and had chosen to sit by the door to wait for him. He knew when it was important to let Connor handle things on his own.

The old man lay in his bed, asleep presumably, but one could never be too sure. After all, Achilles was an Assassin and Assassins were tricky people. Maybe he was already aware of Connor's presence, maybe he only feigned sleep, and maybe he held a pistol hidden under his covers, ready to shoot him if he would dare to enter. Still, Connor was ready to take the risk as he found both hands of the old man folded on his stomach on top of the covers. Even if he tried to trick him, Connor could still dodge a shot, he guessed. He was careful not to make a sound as he opened the door further and carefully stepped inside.

The old man did not move and as Connor stopped next to his bed he drew his hidden blade swiftly. As he had left the Mile's end this morning he had wanted to talk to the old man one last time, but now that he stood here, he thought about the cost of mercy once more and how his father should not have listened to Shay all those years ago. He thought about what his father had told him before they had entered Fort George and about what his last words had been. If anything, he would free the old man from his misery if he would now slit his throat, wouldn't he? If anything in killing him he would show mercy and no matter what the cost of mercy had been until now, there was still a part of him urging him to not give into his bitterness because otherwise soon darkness would consume him and that was something he could never risk. No, he decided as he retreated the blade yet again, it was not his place to decide whether the old man lived or died.

"There are a few things you should take before you leave.« The voice of the old man startled him so much that he almost drew the blade again to stab Achilles right in the chest and the little jump he had made surely amused the old man as was evident by the wrinkles around his dark eyes as he now opened them to look at Connor. Had he been awake this whole time? Was this a test? Surely. He had wanted to see what Connor would do and probably he had been prepared to fight him off if it would have come to this.

Connor wanted to say something, maybe to explain himself, but then again what could he say?
They both knew what he had wanted to do just now. Every word he could say seemed irrelevant and silly.

»Kanen'tó:kon's room was upstairs, feel free to have a look and there is a painting in the basement. Maybe you will find use for it - I most definitely won't.«
Chapter 32

July 1781

He came to with a jolt, the images of his nightmare still burned freshly in his mind. For a moment, he just stared at the wooden ceiling above him and tried to catch his breath in a desperate attempt to relax. He was drenched in sweat and knew that he needed to wash himself properly before leaving the ship. Already he could hear seagulls circling the sky. Their crows were like music to him, oddly enough. It meant land was nigh. It meant England was nigh. London was nigh and his journey almost over.

With a sharp and strangled sigh, he brushed the fingers of his left hand through his unruly dark mane and blinked slowly in hopes to ease the images of his nightmare out of his brain, wondering if he would ever be able to get rid of them, but it seemed not. He could hardly recall a night in which he had not been bothered by endless gruesome displays of his past misery for the last couple of years. The only difference now was that he did not dream of the monsters of his past any longer. They were gone. They were dead. He had taken care of them and they could not harm him any longer, not in his dreams and not in reality.

Now he was only haunted by regret and past mistakes that he desperately wished to make right again.

His hands were still shaking a bit, as he finally swung his legs over the edge of the narrow bed and slowly rose. His eyes fell upon his large standing mirror on the other side of the cabin immediately. It had been a present from his father and Connor could still very well remember how he had asked him for what he would need a mirror on a ship. Well, now he knew. He needed to look presentable when he would land in England. With not a care in the world for being presentable, Fenris rolled around in Connor's cot and did not even make the slightest impression of being willing to follow his example as he now had the bed to himself. It had been a short night anyway and he better be quick in getting dressed again and taking the helm again after a few hours of rest, his eyes were caught by the open book that still lay on his large wooden desk a few inches apart from the bed, facing the large door outside. He had read thrice through his father’s diary by now and yet he felt as if he had not even begun to understand a thing.

The voyage had been a long one. Seventy-three days at sea lay behind Connor and his crew of the _Aquila_ by now and it was not completely easy to keep his crew happy for such a long period of time, but up until now, there had not been a single voice that was raised against him or his orders, luckily. He knew that it could have been different, but his crew was loyal to him and he could deem himself lucky that it was so.

And yet for the longest time, he just stood there and stared at his reflection in the mirror. He had never been one to waste much time with looking at himself in any way but now he could not take off his eyes of his naked form in the once clean mirror that was now dusty and the once pristine glass smudgy. It seemed to him almost as if he was seeing himself for the first time like this although this was, of course, false. He knew his body well, its strengths and its weaknesses. He knew what he could do and what he couldn't do. But now he could not help but stare while his fingers slowly ghosted over the bumps on his skin that were all the little and big scars he had collected in the course of his still oh so very young life.

His fingers stopped at the large scar on his right side as he fondly remembered how his very own father had taken care of the wound as best he could in the circumstances they had been in, freezing
inside a cave in the middle of nowhere. The situation had not been one to remember with a fond
heart and he still ached when he thought about Charles and his last moments in this world, but his
father’s behavior towards him and the protectiveness he had shown for his son, was. Truly,
sometimes Connor found himself almost laughing. He had wanted to be the hero back then. He had
wanted to be the one who protected and rescued his father and in the end, he had once again
bridged his boundaries and failed in his quest. And yet he was not as embarrassed and angry
because of this anymore as he had been back then, for now, he remembered what a fuss his father
had made later in the presence of the doctor while he had probably thought Connor would not
notice, and it felt as though they had been a lot closer than Connor had always thought they had
been. Slowly, he sat back down on his cot in front of the mirror again and glanced at the reflection
of his feet. They were quite normal. They were maybe a little big, but he was a tall man, after all,
and his toes were long and quite bendy. He had ten of them, five on each foot, although his littlest
toes looked a bit weird to him and almost as if they wished not to be attached to him at all. They
were good feet. They had brought him to a lot of places.

It was moments like this one right here when he missed his father the most and when he truly
understood his absence.

As he stood again with a heavy heart, he turned around just enough so he could see his back in the
mirror and the large scar that had been burned into his skin after he pulled his mane away from his
skin in the process. His hair almost reached his hips by now. The Templar Cross would forever
shape his life and his entire being that much was certain and although Washington had meant it as a
mockery of his father and his ways, Connor was proud to be part of this Order. As he had been a
little younger and seen sailors for the first time with tattoos all over their bodies, he had wondered
if he should maybe try to have something tattooed over the scar on his back, but his father had
laughed the idea off and told him that, if he wanted to do this with every scar, his body would soon
be completely turned into black ink. Thinking of this now made him smirk a little. His father was
just like him. They both were not very humorous or lighthearted kind of guys and although his
father had always been the more playful one of them, he had rarely laughed - but when he did,
Connor could have hardly helped but joining.

Their life together had not been just business and seriousness all around, even though looking back
on the events of his life it seemed that way sometimes. His father had not just taught him
everything he deemed important, they had had good times together too and Connor hoped that he
would never forget the evenings he had spent with his father in the sitting room over a game of
checkers. They both were sore losers, that was a trait he clearly got from his father and while they
had been bickering after almost every game (because there had always been at least one loser,
naturally), they had had great fun in their little banter. Surely, otherwise, his father would have
never kept up with his son and his never ending taunting whenever he had managed to beat his
father in a game.

Oh, how awkward those first few weeks and months in his father's home had been. Now he could
laugh at his younger self for sure but back then he had been horrified by all these new things, not to
mention his very own, very strict father. His whole life he had spent yearning for a father - not just
some fatherly figure as the people of his tribe had thought would be enough, but his real father
because there was nothing even closely similar to the bond that was only shared between a father
and his son. He had learned this by now, although it had cost him a long time and he always
wondered if his father had known at all what he meant to Connor. Sometimes he was afraid that his
father might have thought that Connor would only see him as a means to get his revenge. As Fenris
yawned loudly again, Connor grew aware of the situation finally and made haste to get the sweat
off his skin and get dressed in his captain’s uniform as quickly as possible.

His father had never quite understood why Connor liked to sleep naked like this and ridiculed him
more often than once for it, but to him, it simply was more hygienic - probably because he had always been a twitchy sleeper. He always tossed and turned in his bed as his father had very well got to know when they had to share a bed at Fort West Point back in the day. Even this was comical to him now. But since he tended to move so much during his sleep he also was sweating more and the thought was horrifying to him to sleep in his clothes knowing that they would be drenched in sweat the next morning. Oh, he would never forget the frilly nightgown his father had worn to sleep and that he had once gifted one to his stubborn son too. Never in his life, Connor had laughed louder than when he had first seen his father in his nightgown and the image still brought a faint smile to his lips even now. The feared Haytham Edward Kenway, a beast among men, wearing a frilly nightgown to sleep.

It had been a blessing. But no matter how amusing the thought was, it also made him stop for a second as he reached the door to his cabin as his heart ached and his chest felt unbearably tight. He wasted another precious moment in which Shay needed to hold the position at the wheel for him to get his body and mind under control again, for as soon as he would leave the cabin he would be Captain Kenway again and his crew could not see him crumble and falter like this. He was alone now, but he also had the chance to build up something entirely new, something entirely his.

So, he took a deep breath, straightened his coat, and left the cabin to step out into the light of the sun rising at the horizon, seemingly just miles away.

C. R. H. Kenway was engraved in the large trunk that was carried off the Aquila after the large ship had landed in the harbor of London in the heart of this large country that was so alien to Connor. Connor had not wanted to take anything with him at first, for his stay should have been a short one to handle the business he came for and nothing else, but Shay had urged him to spend a little while in this town instead, to get to know his aunt and take his time in meeting the other Templars before they would set sail back to the New World again. Shay was of the opinion that it would benefit him if he would wander the streets in which his father had grown up for once.

»What about you?« Connor asked Shay quietly as he watched the trunk being carried down the board by two of his men and towards a waiting carriage. Everything had been well organized by his fellow but yet unnamed Templar brothers here in London and Connor was glad that they had taken I upon them, for he had not had the right mind to do so instead.

»What about me?« Shay asked with a faint grin on his face. Gist was already among the other sailors and helped to unload their cargo. Shay and Connor still remained on board, though. They still stood on the main deck while around them the sailors were busy with securing the ship. He felt like he was in the center of a beehive, but he had always loved this.

»You know that you do not have to follow me back, right? I mean … If this is your wish, you could finally go and find your luck in this world.« Connor carefully probed, although it was true that he did not want to have Shay leaving him. After everything that had happened, he wanted to have Shay by his side – and Gist too. And yet, on the same instant, he feared to stand in Shay’s or Gist’s way of pursuing happiness if they stayed by his side. They both had done more than enough for the Order.

»I make my own luck, Master Kenway. And as long as I am of any use, I would gladly assist our new Grand Master and see what great things will come from his reign.« Shay laughed as he gently clapped his back and drew him close for a moment as they watched another large item being carried off the ship. With Shay’s left arm wound around his shoulders, Connor watched as the coffin was carried down the board and then was loaded onto another, black carriage. As macabre as
it was, Connor was sure his father would have wanted to rest among his family in the soil he had been born on.

»I don't like being called this.« Connor scoffed. »Master Kenway was my father. I need to earn the title first, as he has. Besides, we don’t know yet how the council will decide. I am too young.« Who in their right mind would grant a position such as this to a whelp such as him?

»You already did, little wolf.« Shay hummed before he let go of Connor again – for just a heartbeat Connor wished he wouldn’t. No matter how much he despised being touched by strangers, he enjoyed the company of those dear to him. Shay was like a brother, or maybe an uncle to him after all these years and he had taught and shown him much. Having Shay by his side always put his mind at rest.

»Master Kenway!« Gist’s voice ripped through the early morning hours of the harbor. »Your carriage is waiting.« A part of him missed being just Connor for his friends and not Master Kenway.

But of course, duty called, Connor briefly thought as he looked towards the carriage waiting near the docks. His men just finished loading his trunk on the carriage while Connor had watched with a heavy heart how the coffin had been taken and loaded onto another one. A man dressed in black tipped his hat as Connor's eyes fell upon him and Connor mirrored his gesture quickly and without thinking too much about it. He did not like giving the coffin to anyone else, but what could he do about it? His men had not at all been happy to see a coffin on board at all, for apparently, it meant bad luck, and yet they had all survived the journey quite fine anyway. Well, he would be lying if he said he had not worried about it too, even though he had done his best to act as though their superstition was absurd to him. Then again, everything from stepping onto a ship with the left foot first to having a woman on board meant equally bad things to happen, apparently.

»I could come with you if you wish.« Shay once more demanded his attention, but Connor gently shook his head as he then clasped Shay’s shoulder shortly only to have the gesture mirrored by his friend.

»No, it's alright. We meet again tomorrow at the gathering, I suppose. I don't wish to overwhelm my aunt. I don't know how she is going to react anyway, even though she knows that I am here and awaits my visit.« He still wondered what kind of a person his aunt might be and how she really would welcome him at his father's birth house. Her letters had been far from being enough to get to know her. She wrote like one would expect a fine English lady to write, he guessed. Her choice of words had always been deliberate and on point with no room for questions at her intentions and yet the person behind them seemed to be a stranger to Connor. His father had always scolded him that his writing lacked finesse and grace, that his choice of words was too blunt for his standing in the social hierarchy, even though he was the descendant of a former pirate - to be honest for once.

»I will pick you up tomorrow at Queen Anne’s Square then, little Wolf.« Shay smirked but before Connor decided to leave the ship, he turned towards him again.

»So what are you going to do in the meantime?«

»Well, this is London, after all, right? I think I will find something to entertain myself with. You will probably find me in a tavern or a pub very close by if you need me for anything.« Shay’s grin made him spur into motion again as Connor straightened his back a little more and petted Fenris' head shortly as the wolf rubbed his nose against his leg impatiently. Then, with a short nod directed at Shay, he finally wandered down the ship and into the harbor with heads turning at his sight immediately. If he had drawn attention towards him before in Boston or New York, London was truly not so very different, but that had to be expected and Connor was not all too bothered because
of the curious looks he got as he and Fenris walked towards his carriage.

He felt uneasy as he saw the other carriage with his father's body drive off, knowing that he would see Shay and Gist - and all these other Templars - not before tomorrow again, at his father's funeral ceremony. His heart felt heavy thinking about this, but he knew that it was the right thing to do. His father had been born on British soil and that was where he should find his final rest, just as Connor wanted to be laid to rest in the Colonies - in America - when his time would have come. Naturally, a part of him had wanted to keep his father by his side, to have him buried in Boston or New York, but the more he had thought about it, the clearer it became to him that he did not need a stone with his father’s name engraved on it or his rotting corpse in the ground to mourn or remember him. And one day, when his time would come, they would meet again in the afterlife.

With much hesitation, he finally climbed inside the carriage that was waiting for him to bring him to his aunt and the nervous knot he felt in his stomach only tightened as Gist, with a smile, closed the door behind Connor.

The drive to Queen Anne’s Square was not as long as Connor had thought it would be. His original plans had included finding a room in a nearby inn or hotel to not bother his aunt with his presence at the house, but it had been Shay urging him to take quarter in his father's home because now it was his. Connor did not like to think about things like these, but it was true. His father had inherited the house and all the fortunes his own father had possessed as his oldest son - and now all of this belonged to Connor. He had never grown aware that this was how it was going to be and he wondered how his aunt might feel about this as well. Surely, she feared that her own nephew would demand her leaving the house - but of course he would not. He was now the head of the family, but he still did not feel like it and he wondered if he ever would. He could not even imagine how something like this was supposed to feel.

The Kenway Mansion loomed large over the Square. Four floors and what appeared to be an attic of sorts. The house itself was larger than he had ever seen anything before and yet it was not nearly as large as some of the surrounding buildings. Connor could hardly fathom how many rooms this house might have and he could imagine that it was easy to get lost inside. Surely, his father must have had great fun playing hide and seek in there. The house was built in the U-shape that seemed to be typical for this style of building, in front of the large entry, a nice little yard with a happily gurgling fountain in the center surrounded by greenery, well-manicured and groomed as was to be expected from a house like this. There was, oddly enough, no front gate and so, after leaving the carriage with Fenris, Connor slowly stepped onto the plot and walked up to the front door with no further hesitation.

The door was opened for him in mere seconds after he carefully knocked at the black painted wood, still fighting his own nervousness as best as he could at this moment in time. Having Fenris with him usually helped, but even the wolf seemed to be nervous by his side. He was greeted by a grim looking man, the butler, for sure who stepped aside to let him and the wolf in right after he welcomed him as Master Kenway without hesitation, not even batting a lash at Connor's appearance or his wolf. He could be anybody of course, but then again somehow he doubted that his aunt got many visitors. She seemed to live a quiet and secluded life. After reading his father's diary on the journey to London, he could understand why too. It had been quite odd to visit the bank and grab the documents and artifacts that his father had stored in the safe. But no one had looked at him funny as he came to take the things, quite the opposite actually. They had treated him like they usually did with his father and that had been all the more odd and uncomfortable to him.

Inside the safe, he had not just found the artifacts and the Templar Rings, but also his father's diaries, his last will and - the most extraordinary thing - a feigned birth-certificate of Connor R.
Kenway. It was Connor who, with Shay’s connections to Thomas’ old acquaintances, had added the H for Haytham into his name – and frankly, he did not care how long his name now was or that he now officially wore the name he had been given by Washington, for Connor was his name. Connor was who he had become. Ratonhnhakéton was the boy he had left behind.

His father had liked to sketch things into his diary, mostly things of certain importance, like the amulet which Connor still wore around his neck at all times and felt the metal tingling on his skin every once in a while. He had not yet hidden it, but he knew where he would hide it. The amulet would once again be reunited with his father, he had decided. However, amongst the sketches of artifacts or persons his father had deemed important, he also had once sketched the entry hall of the Kenway Mansion and standing inside now made Connor stop in awe for a moment. He had never seen something comparable, not even the Weatley house. It was grand and elegant and he felt horribly out of place immediately as he stood in front of the grand staircase leading to the first floor with the precursor box in his left hand and Fenris by his side.

This feeling never left him as he was guided through a large wooden door into the west wing of the building by the butler. Behind that very door, Connor was greeted by a large room with various elegant dark sofas and chairs standing all around the place, gathered in small groups or discarded to the sides and corners, giving life to the room itself. Only two doors left the room: The one Connor had walked through and another probably leading into the next room or hallway to his right-hand side. In the grand fireplace at the far wall were flames dancing quietly. While Connor almost lost himself in the examination of the heavy draperies and the dark red tapestry, he almost overlooked the woman sitting close to the fire. Only when he truly stepped through the door, the woman rose from her spot and drew Connor's attention towards her.

Jennifer Scott-Kenway had the same sharp eyes as his father had and the little freckles dusting the bridge of her nose reminded him of his mother. Her once red hair had turned a dull gray by now, but she wore it quite elegantly in an up-do. She was sixty-eight years and thus twelve years his father’s senior, but although that made her an elderly lady, the wrinkles on her face were deeper than they should be. She looked haggard and haunted, betrayed by age and the horrors of her past. Her clothes were more extravagant than Connor had seen the fine ladies of New York or Boston wearing, but probably a lot more simple than those of other ladies her age and standing here in London. No corset, hardly any frills. Her skirts were wide and yet her whole demeanor and her whole physique had something entirely strict, even and harsh about her. Sharp edges to cut everyone who dared to come too close like a rose that was protecting its blossom with large thorns. While her posture was entirely that of his father, they could not be any more different. Though his father had been harsh and brutal, he had always had a playful edge to him too, something Jennifer seemed to be missing entirely. Even her mouth was a thin line on her face that made it almost impossible for Connor to know what she was thinking as she looked at him now. Maybe he did not want to know even.

In the letters they had shared they had never quite discussed the topic because he had had no reason to do so and for her it would have been impolite, but he knew how elitist the British usually were and that it was considered an affront to not only have bastard children but to have bastard children of mixed-race. It was of course not uncommon, but it was usually unheard of that those children would be integrated, yes accepted even, into the family. Josephine had once explained that to him in one of her letters because his father had never wasted a moment to have this conversation with his son.

Before the butler could close the door behind him again, he heard the little ruckus as his trunk was delivered to the house by some other servants as it appeared, but he did not dare to turn his head to see if his assumption was indeed correct.
»Have you ever had your portrait painted, nephew?« Jennifer suddenly asked and her voice was loud and sharp like a blade and took Connor entirely by surprise. There really was nothing warm about her and yet he felt that she was not entirely opposed to having him here. For a moment the thought crossed his mind that his aunt might be just as clumsy when it came to situations like these as he was. The only difference was that Jennifer chose to be that way after the things she had endured while Connor just was.

»No.« Connor replied as he cleared his throat and carefully stepped closer towards her. Only when they were inches apart she outstretched her hand for him to kiss and Connor did because it was demanded of him. »I am glad to meet you at last, Aunt Jennifer.« He murmured and was once again surprised by the sharp laugh that left her.

»Drop this courtly ado, nephew - We are both not the type.« Somehow he did not even doubt her sincerity in this regard. Yes, his father had told him stories of Jenny’s princess-like behavior, but also that his sister had wanted nothing more than to be treated like him as well. His father had once even told him that he had thought his sister would have made a fine Assassin if his father would have trained her too - that was something Jennifer seemed to have wanted. A little she reminded Connor of his mother and of Josephine. They all were women who stood their ground and desired nothing more than to be seen as equals to their male counterparts, women willing to fight not only for their own rights but for those of others too.

With a small grin pulling at his lips, he stepped back again while Fenris sat down behind him on the carpet, but he used the moment to hand his aunt the box without wasting big words for it. They had not spoken about it in their letters, but he was sure that Jenny knew what it was and that she needed to be careful of the box until the day would come to hand the box over to someone else for safekeeping.

»And that is your wolf then, Fenris.« She said directing her eyes towards the bundle of fur behind him. »Your father wrote to me about it. What a fitting pet.« For a moment, he was sure that this should be seen as an insult, but he could not bring himself to feel that way. Fenris was one of the most loyal friends he had ever had. »You really should have your portrait painted while you are still young, nephew. Do not make the same mistake as I - nobody wants to have the portrait of an old hag hanging in their house. But on the other hand, as cruel mother nature has it, men tend to only grow in attractiveness with the years while only we women are doomed to wither away and lose our dignity with each new wrinkle on our sagging faces.«

With that she gestured towards the sofa opposite the fireplace and Connor followed the silent request for him to sit swiftly as his aunt took her seat on one of the other sofas next to the one he was sitting on and closer by the fire. As usual, he felt a little uneasy having the door in his back. »I am too impatient to sit still long enough.« Connor quietly replied, flustered by her remarks. »Father once told me that he had hated every second of it.«

»He can be glad then that he has had his portrait copied and send the here before the original one got stolen.« His aunt replied with a look that clearly told Connor that she was aware in whose possession that portrait of her brother had been all those years. Now it was in his, secured in Shay’s house until he would find his own place. »It seems you quite adored my brother, as I’ve read in your last letter you even adopted his name as yours.«

He could feel the heat creeping up his neck and was for once glad that his long mane was covering up the skin turning red. To hear that he had adored his father sounded odd to him. »I greatly respected him.« He corrected her carefully not wishing to offend her in any way. To him, his aunt was like a keg of gunpowder ready to explode at any second. »He made me the man I am now and I have to thank him for many things. I would be dead if not for him.«
Well, I can't say that my brother and I would have had a close relationship like this, but it is obvious that you miss him, so there must have been at least something good and redeeming about him, even though he kept fighting for the wrong side and refused to see that. Once again her tone was a lot sharper, but Connor did not falter as he straightened his back.

There is no right or wrong side, Aunt Jenny, only people and convictions. Templars and Assassins are much alike at their cores, what people make of this core is what makes the difference. A few years ago I was fairly certain that our way of seeing the world was the right path, but now I know that it is not so easy. Our ideals might be good, but we need to take good care that they are not getting perverted and the same is true for the Assassins too. Even good men can fall when they get tempted to stray from their path. As he spoke his eyes moved across the room once again and grazed the small bookshelves standing around or the paintings hanging from the walls, a lot of them showed imagery of the sea or ships. He wondered where his father's portrait might hang in this house. Was there something like a gallery? Was there a painting of his grandfather too or had it been lost in the flames all those years ago? We have seen it before. Achilles and his brotherhood, before they have been destroyed. They had noble intentions at first, but they strayed from their path, not willingly, not out of bad intentions, but out of ignorance for the destruction they caused. Assassins and Templars are able to make peace and work together, just look at France. Monsieur François de la Serre works with the Assassins because their causes are equal in all this turmoil and the brooding conflict.

What about Reginald Birch? Jennifer asked and her eyes almost sprayed poison as he looked at her again, making it very clear to him that he better chose his next words wisely now.

I never knew him, but from what I have heard he was a man corrupted by the greed for power. There are always bad apples, but it is our duty to find and eliminate them before they can do harm to protect the convictions the Order or the Brotherhood are holding.

It seems odd to me though that these bad apples as you call them are seemingly piling up in the Templar Order in greater numbers. And finally, it dawned on Connor that this was a test. A test for what or whom he did not quite know yet, maybe only a test of his character of conviction but a test nonetheless.

Baptiste betrayed the Assassins for a position among the Templar Order of New Orleans and was subsequently killed by an Assassin for it. His motives were led by greed and the thrive for power and he got what he deserved. François Mackandal caused great destruction and killed hundreds of innocents on Haiti and tried to poison a large group of colonists in Saint-Dominique - innocents too. Madeleine de L'Isle, a fellow Templar, has orchestrated a slave trafficking operation in 1765, killed her own husband with poison and died as a result of her crimes. I could keep going on and find more and more examples, but I do not believe that this is necessary to proof my point. I believe many, especially amongst the Assassins, have seen my father as a monster too, but that is because they failed to see the tremendous amount of good things he has done also. His goal was never greed or to rule, only to nudge the world into the right direction.

Would you consider a truce with the Assassins then yourself?

I'm afraid there are no Assassins left in North America now. Connor replied, even though he knew that it was only a matter of time until they would rise again. He had heard many things about the Assassins of Louisiana, especially about a young Lady by the name of Aveline de Grandpré. I heard Achilles Davenport, the last one of them, died a little while ago. But to answer your question: I do. And I did, but it was impossible at the time. I think together we could achieve much more.

These are wise words for a puppy wolf indeed. Connor almost jumped as the voice sounded
from behind him. He had not heard anyone coming in and for the brief second as he whirled around on the spot he was sitting on, a tiny, ridiculous little part of him was sure to see his father standing at the door. Of course, he did not. But a man it was who stood near the now open door through which Connor had previously come. How long the man had been there already, he could not tell, but he had been silent as a mouse and not even Fenris had noticed him in any way as it seemed until now that he was craning his neck to look at the stranger and produced a very half-hearted little bark.

The old man stood tall and not at all hunched. It was almost impossible to tell his age just by the looks of him. His long hair was almost white but still nicely groomed and pulled back into a ponytail as was fashion at the moment and his sharp blue eyes drilled into Connor's very being as he just stared at the man. He was dressed in a bright red overcoat, dark breeches and stockings, clothes for a nobleman judging by the choice of fabric. Maybe an acquaintance of Jenny’s, he first thought, but something was odd about the man. The scars on his face told stories about adventure and his eyes, though sharp as knives, were haunted by the past. There was a certain sense of grief and familiarity, Connor could feel about him, but he could not pinpoint it. Whatever it was about the old man, it brought Connor to rise from his spot again, if only to properly greet the man and the rustling of fabric behind him then told him that his aunt did the same thing.

»If I would be your enemy, you would be dead already. You are very much unaware of your surroundings, boy - but I guess you are grieving, as we all are and thus it is forgiven.« The old man continued. His accent sounded a little off, or at least not like Connor was used from his father even though their voices sounded a little similar. It was definitely no London-accent, as the one his father had portrayed. His skin was pale, but it looked as it had used to be darkened by the sun for a big part of his life. »Or maybe I just still know how to move without sound.«

»Certain things one never unlearns.« His aunt replied and her voice sounded a lot more gentle this time as she crossed the room to walk up to the man. Connor carefully followed her, still not fully grasping what was happening. Had he stepped into a trap at last? His aunt seemed to be more supportive of the Assassins and maybe she had just waited to get rid of him here to secure herself in this world. He did not know what to say as he walked up to the old man, but standing in front of him made him feel uneasy somehow. It was a weird feeling. There was no sense of danger, but of something different as though the man had something to say he would much rather not hear.

»So this is him.« The old man said with a little sigh as he took in Connor's appearance now what he was so close in front of him. He could see how his eyes were darting over his face and his clothes slowly, carefully to not miss the tiniest detail, while Connor himself swiftly glanced at the man’s wrists. He could see no hidden blades, but this did not mean that he was no Assassin and though he was not wearing visible weapons, it did not mean he was not wearing any. Connor himself almost never left his hidden blade behind. It was a little comfort now to know that he would be able to protect himself with its help if necessary.

»Yes, this is Haytham's son.« Jennifer said but the frown was finally gone from her face. Shortly, Connor flinched as the old man suddenly grabbed his shoulders with a strength he would not have thought possible for such an old man to possess. His hands were firm and calloused like those of a sailor, used to grabbing rough ropes and biting seawater. His touch was not uncomfortable to him as it was with most people and yet he had flinched out of surprise and the subconscious fear to be attacked now that his wounds had finally healed fully.

»He truly looks like a Kenway, doesn't he, Darling?« The old man grinned as he turned his gaze to his aunt and Connor could very well see the little sparkle in his blue eyes as he did and the pearly white teeth he showed. Only then, when the old man turned his gaze back to him, it struck Connor what was so odd about him, but his mind was roaring and he could not even begin to fathom the
true horror of this very moment. »Welcome home.« The old man said and Connor felt his knees growing soft and wobbly as the full impact of those words hit him.

Edward James Kenway’s eyes were the same as his fathers and before Connor could even reply anything or start to make sense of this all, something entirely different spurted out of him. »I-I am going to marry soon. I-I have a ship.« He stuttered and his brain was screaming an endless stream of questions at him. How was he alive? Why had he never tried to come into contact with his son or Connor? Where had he been all those years? Why was he back? What had happened? All of this, suddenly, did not seem important as he stared wide-eyed at his grandfather and for the first time since his father’s death, started to feel hope blossoming inside of him once again. »You need to come.«
Epilog

If he had been certain of anything in his entire life, then of the fact that he would never have to witness the burial of any of his children. Edward J. Kenway would have never even fathomed that the day might come when he would find himself standing beside his own son’s grave and yet he could only watch as the coffin was slowly lowered into the ground under the monotone rambling of some priest he neither knew nor cared for. And while his heart was aching for the son he had lost, the man inside the coffin was a stranger to him. Beside him stood his daughter, who did not even force herself to weep beneath the black veil she used to cover her face with and on the other side of the pit, tall and strong, stood his grandson.

It was not the first time that he was able to fully grasp what had happened to him and yet it hit him harder than any time before, maybe because his grandson was a constant reminder of the time he had lost. His life had been stolen from him. Forty-six years of it, just gone and only because of Reginald Birch and the plans he had had in the past and yet, his once fierce hatred towards the Templars faltered as he watched his young grandson who still had so very much ahead of him even though the death of his father seemed to have distraught him, made him stumble in uncertainty and had filled him with grief.

Edward hardly even paid attention to the other two Templars, men going by the names of Christopher Gist and Shay Patrick Cormac, as Connor had told him earlier this day when the two men arrived at Queen Anne’s Square to pick them up. The young man had introduced his fellow Templars as his friends and Edward had no reason to mistrust his grandson’s judgment just yet. They stood beside Connor, supporting the young lad for the journey that was lying ahead of him now that he was fatherless once again. One of them, Shay, had his left hand resting on Connor’s right shoulder in an almost fatherly gesture, while the boy seemed to lean into the comfort of the familiar presence. Edward almost felt a sting at the sight, for if anyone, he should be the person to be standing next to his grandson in that fashion. However, no matter the enthusiasm Connor had shown yesterday, they were strangers to each other. He even wondered if Connor might have shied away from him after he had realized that they were supposed to be enemies, but Edward had decided a long time ago that he was too old to care for the fight between their groups by now.

As he came back to London a few weeks ago, he had been certain to find his house vanished and his family and legacy dead and forgotten, not even worth a footnote in the history books. It would have been a fitting conclusion to his life, he had assumed, even though he had tried to follow the advice of his friends as he had settled down in his youth. He had tried to build something here, not to ruin everything again and yet the disaster always seemed to find him. Instead, he had found his daughter Jennifer, herself an old woman by now deprived of her youth and former beauty, telling him of his son's death and that his grandson was about to visit for his father's funeral. He had had his entire life to prepare for the news of the death of his children and yet it had hurt all the same.

Jenny had told him everything that had happened after that fateful night in December in the year 1735 and his heart was hurting. It had been his fault that his children had to suffer and that only because he had decided to trust a man like Reginald Birch and as he had learned about his affiliations to the Templar Order, it had already been too late and he had been too proud and to blind to see the storm coming his way. He should have known. He could have spared his children the fate they had suffered but yet he could not turn back the time and the future of his family now lay in the hands of young Connor.

As Jenny had told him about her brother’s decision to stay with the Templars after they had killed Reginald in revenge and that he had indoctrinated his son too, as she told him that they might be
able to still sway Connor to become an Assassin instead after all this time, Edward had not even felt anger towards his son or grandson for the paths they had chosen. It had never been his decision what would become of his son and it was not his decision to make with Connor either. The boy had chosen his path already and Connor seemed to be a good young man.

Jenny was adamant in her belief that the Templars, without a doubt and without exception, were evil and vile creatures, who did not care for the suffering they brought upon innocent people in their wake, and although he could understand how she came to this radical conclusion, the tears that Connor shed for his father and the desperation in his dark eyes, told Edward that it was not so. He did not know the man his son came to be. He only knew the little boy he had taught to think for himself and even though Haytham became a Templar, he was proud of him nonetheless. Whatever kind of person his son might have been, at least to Connor he had been a good father and a person who would be greatly mourned and missed by his son, and that was more than Edwards could have ever hoped for.

They had left Connor after the sermon by his father's side. He had wanted to be alone for a little while, he had said and they had complied to his wish as they had left the graveyard to venture back home to the large mansion towering over Queen Anne’s Square, while the other two Templars had left the graveside in silence.

It was already late when he saw the young man again this day. Wandering the halls of his house was odd to Edward still after he came back, but then again this was not the house he had known. Jenny had told him that the original house had burned to the ground all those years ago and that this was only the rebuild one. It was not the same and yet it sufficed, even though the ghosts of their past had vanished together with the house itself. He could not hear the laughter of his wife or kids in these halls anymore, he could not find the spot on the dusty floorboards where Haytham had used to sit in the hallway in front of his office to play with his tin soldiers anymore.

He was alone, sitting by the fire in the salon and wondered what different path his life might have taken if he would have been more careful. Adéwalé had always warned him that his risky behavior would someday be his undoing and he was right. He should be dead but he wasn't. He should have died in the flames of his house, but he hadn't. But why he still could not fathom.

Connor was silent as a mouse as he slowly walked inside, careful not to make a sound as he probably thought his grandfather to have fallen asleep in front of the fireplace and yet Edward could hear his every move just fine. As Edward looked over his shoulder the boy paused awkwardly near a bookshelf and brushed his left hand over the dusty shelf, then averted his eyes, straightened his posture and came closer as if realizing that he had no reason to fear an old man like him - or maybe even that this was his house too. A part of Edward even found himself wondering if the boy might be irritated or disappointed that his inheritance needed to wait a little while longer now.

»You have been out the whole day.« Edward silently addressed the young man, even though it was not his place to critique anything the boy did - and he did not mean it as critique anyway. Instead, he wanted to use the moment to talk to the young man of whom he knew only so little. The little he knew, he got from the letters Jenny had allowed him to read. It had only been a few as though there were secrets contained in the rest of them which she did not want to share with her elderly father just yet. Lazily he gestured towards the second dark red leather armchair standing close to the fireplace so that is grandson would take the opportunity to sit with him. It was, however, Fenris who first slumped down in front of the fire on the small rug.

»I needed to think.« Connor replied as he sat down on the other armchair and shortly patted his wolf’s back, before leaning back. He slumped a little in his seat, draping his arms leisurely over the
armrests and looked all in all exhausted. Edward even wondered if the boy had slept at all last night. Of course, it must have been a shock to Connor to learn that his grandfather was still alive, after he had thought him dead for all these years. Edward for his part had found a liking to the boy right away. He could not even pinpoint what it was about him, maybe a kindred spirit. However, suffering seemed to be greatly woven into the name Kenway from everything he had learned since his homecoming. There was not one member of their family, who did not know the meaning of this word and this had started after he, Edward, had deemed himself something better than a simple-minded farmer from Swansea like his father.

»May I ask what came of this thinking?« Edward chuckled as he took a sip from his whiskey glass. He could not handle as much as he did as a young man anymore, but he still liked the taste, even though he liked rum better. It was not so much the taste of rum, though. It were the memories connected with it, the smell of the salty air, the wind and the crashing waves, the friends he had so sorely missed.

As Connor looked at him, he was sure for a moment that the boy wanted to tell him exactly what he had been thinking about and the conclusion to which he came, but then he did not and closed his mouth without talking at all - at least for a few seconds. »I still don't understand how this is possible.« He finally sighed. »How are you still alive?«

»A good question and one of which I do not know the answer, son.« Edward replied with a faint smile, even though sometimes he was sure that he had forgotten how to smile in the past forty-six years. »I remember being attacked and pierced by a sword. I remember bleeding out on the floor of my very own study. I remember Haytham and how he tried to help and defend me from my attackers and I was sure that I would die. I didn't, apparently and when I regained consciousness, I was not even in London anymore and months had passed.« He could still remember the smell of the flames, the sulfur of hellfire that came to collect his debts once and for all, and the taste of iron in his mouth. He still remembered how he, naively maybe, had thought that maybe Adéwalé had been there to help, as his friend had always been there to help in some way or another when Edward had dug himself a pit too deep to climb out by himself. »It took me a while until I realized that I was being held captive and for years I never saw anything but the cell I was in. I was treated decently enough for a prisoner and I was quick to figure out that it had been the Templars holding me captive. There was no way to escape, even for me, although I did try.«

»Were you released?« Connor asked and only then Edward noticed how his grandson’s eyes were fixed on his face. He had quite the intense stare and if he would not be his grandson, it would be unsettling for the former Pirate and Assassin. The wolf Connor had chosen as his companion was lying curled up in front of the fireplace, never leaving the side of his master apparently. A very fitting pet for a man like Connor.

»Not exactly. I don't know how many years had passed, but I was released from my cell at one point. I never saw my jailors, I can only suspect that it was Reginald Birch and his fellow Templars. I was in France, but not for long as I was soon relocated to yet another prison. That was how I spent the last forty-six years of my life, being shipped all over the world only to sit in a dungeon. For the last ten years I was working on a prison ship under Templar control somewhere on the North Atlantic and when I finally got the chance to escape, I did. There was a big storm one night and the entire ship in turmoil. I managed to free myself from my bounds and knowing that they would bring the much-needed chaos, I too freed my fellow inmates - or at least as much as I could in time - before I waited for the right opportunity. I climbed into an empty barrel of rum standing on deck and was subsequently thrust from the ship by a huge wave. Like this, I was drifting on the ocean for a few days until the first ship found me and rescued me. That was how I came here, not knowing what to expect.«
Connor seemed uncomfortable as he retold his little adventure and it did not need a genius to figure out why. »I am sorry for what has happened to you, grandfather.«

»It was not your fault.« Edward sighed. »As your aunt told me about Haytham and you, I was not sure what to feel or think, but when I met you yesterday, I was glad to see what became of my son. Apparently, he taught you good, he raised you to be a good man and that is more than enough.« He took another swipe from his drink and saw, out of the corner of his eyes, how Connor rubbed his eyes quickly. He was not sure if the boy was just tired or still fighting the urge to cry. It seemed as though the weight he was carrying on his young, but broad shoulders came slowly crushing down on him. He would fall apart if there was no one to help him. »As I was first introduced to the Assassins and Templars, I was not exactly interested in joining either one of them. I just wanted the gold and be rich.« He found himself explaining but tried his best not to think of his former self, of the dashing, brash young captain he had been.

»But you decided to become an Assassin.« Connor stated as a matter of fact as he leaned his head back against the backrest of his chair. Edward liked the sound of his voice greatly. His accent was not as polished as his daughter’s or even Haytham's as he had been a child, but he liked the sound of it. Connor's voice was deep and soft, but there was something crisp and sharp about it that clearly spoke of his heritage. He chose his words carefully and was always mindful of his pronunciation.

»Reluctantly, but yes. And as I did, I was sure that I was doing the right thing. I still am, but the situation was different back then. It is as you said, there is no Black and White, no Good and Evil. No one can tell what the right decision might be, we can only hope to figure it out for ourselves and follow our own paths as long as our hearts tell us to do so. The Templars who have burned down my house and destroyed my family and life, are not the same as now. And at least with someone like you at the top of the Order, I can hope that things might be a little less brutal in the future.«

Connor scoffed as he turned his attention to the fireplace for a moment to watch the flames before he looked at his grandfather again with one slightly raised eyebrow. »What makes you think that I am going to be at the top of the Order anyway - and what makes you think I would be less brutal?«

It was true that he hardly knew the young man and no matter how gentle he might seem, to Edward, it was clear that he was a dangerous young man. He could feel his power and strength protruding from his pores almost, no matter how powerless he might feel himself. »Yours is a noble heart, I could see that right away. You are gentle and still maybe a little naive. I read a few of the letters you wrote to your aunt, as I wanted to paint a picture of you in my head.« And the picture seemed to be quite accurate now. »You are the son of the late Grand Master of the Colonial Rite, of course, you are going to be the next one.« He added scoffing as he grinned at Connor mockingly. Even if this was not his way, he could still be proud anyway. He was sure that Connor would make a good job, that he would bring peace to his land, even though Connor did not seem too sure himself.

»I don't know if I am ready for this.«

»You will be.« Edward decided as he reached out to his right-hand side and patted Connor’s left hand with his own calloused one. They seemed to have much in common for sure, but Connor would need a lot more time to figure this out for himself. Until then, Edward was eager to stay by his side, to help and guide him as best he could. »You have to show me your ship tomorrow.«

-End-
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