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**Short Change Heroes**

by sphinx81

Summary

**COMPLETED.** Fem!Connor AU, Kinkmeme fill.

Thomas Hickey was a lot of unsavory things, not that he gave a damn; a drunk, thief, smuggler, an opportunist, murderer, a whoring lout, to say the least. His services sold to the highest bidder, there was little he swore loyalty to. But there remained a few lines he would not cross. Including when Charles “gifted” him with the annoying little assassin during their stay in Bridewell.

Somehow, Hickey escaped Fem!Connor at the gallows and failed at killing Washington. Considering his extensive time in jail at Haytham's hands and Charles' increasingly unstable penchant for putting his personal vendettas first, Hickey started making himself scarce around his Templar brethren.

To add insult to injury, he swiftly found his path constantly crossing with the infernally
stubborn assassin's. Their goals in alignment more often than not, they acknowledged there was little gain in initially killing each other. And as loath as he was to admit it, a begrudging respect for Fem!Connor started to send him questioning his own truths. Yet, how long until Thomas found himself at the end of the assassin's blade? Or until he ended her life the sake of his own personal gain?
"Why in the bloody hell do ya always insist on crawlin' outta bed before the god-damned sun's up?" Hickey groused. Letting out a hiss of annoyance, he jerked his head towards the empty space in bed next to him. “It’s the middle of December, bloody freezin’ out,” he snorted, “And now you’ve gone and let the heat out, ya daft bugger!”

Her back to him as she chucked another log into the hearth, Connor distantly replied, “I have far more important concerns than your cold bed.”

“A likely story, mate,” Hickey quipped, eyes drinking her in.

Holy shit, she proved an infuriating piece of work. Most of the time, far more trouble than she was worth. But she admittedly wasn’t shy when it came to traipsing about as naked as the day she was born, at least during their liaisons. For fuck’s sake, the way the firelight danced along her bronzed skin as she idly ran her fingers through her tangled locks? Well, it was starting to make his mouth water and cock hard…

“What reasons have I to lie?” she lithely spun on her heel to face him. It startled him out of thoughts, causing him to withdraw his hand from under the blankets bunched at his groin. “And I am not your ‘mate.’ No matter what this,” she adamantly pointed between them, “Apparently is.”

“Oh?” he smirked, hand sweeping about the room. Their clothes were scattered all over and every which way. The empty bottles of liquor littering the table by the fireplace only added to the disarray. “I’d say this paints a pretty ‘lil picture of a night of carousin’ and fuckin’ all gone swimmingly well. Suprisin’, considering how many years we’ve been carryin’ this on. And don’t you go wrinkling up your nose at me like that,” he flicked his fingers at her as she precisely did just that, “You ain’t no angel yourself, sweet’art. It takes two to tango, after all.”

“Of course ya don’t, Assassin,” Hickey sarcastically quipped as she dropped her clothes on the foot of the bed, “‘Tis why you ended up right here last night, right-o?”

Lounging up against the headboard, his hands were now clasped behind his head. Short hair messy, cheeks scruffy with five o’clock shadow and gaze half-lidded, he looked every part the drunken libertine. Still, she absolutely refused to acknowledge how his current position in bed best illustrated the hard line of muscle along his arms. Not to mention, the remarkably firm angles of his torso. Or how the blanket barely covered his hips. The lout likely knew it, too, judging by his sly wink in her direction.

Worrying her lower lip with her teeth, Connor rolled her eyes as she pulled on her smallclothes. Somehow, the damn things ended up tossed to the other side of the room.

"Besides," Hickey languidly stretched his arms above his head and cracked his neck a bit, "I ain’t got shit to do for the next few days. So what’s your rush?"
"Unlike you, I have duties to attend to," she murmured.

"Or maybe I do a better job of not fuckin' off my time, lass?"

"I highly doubt that to be the case," Connor clucked, moving to the wash basin and quickly rinsing her face.

"Don't ya 'ave your 'lil network of baby assassins workin' for you?"

"Firstly," she shook her head in disagreement, "They are recruits. Adults, in fact. Secondly," she distractedly continued, eyes sweeping the room for her hair ribbon. Spotting it haphazardly hanging on the back of the chair next to the table, she snatched it up. "Should I reveal anything else to the likes of you, I shall be forced to end your life," she cast him a brief glare. Crossing the room and dropping to sit on the bed, she began quickly plaiting back her hair. Its length at mid-back, she made a mental note to take her dagger to it for a quick trim.

"C’mon now, poppet, no need to get all melodramatic and wot not," Hickey snickered, sitting up a bit more. Leaning over, he pressed a trail of slow, sloppy kisses down her spine. She let out a hitched grunt but did nothing to further dissuade him. Not even as he lightly pulled the braid from her fingertips. Finishing off the last of it, he swiftly wrapped the ribbon around its ends before neatly tying it off.

“How did you-?”

“Second of seven brats, includin’ four sisters,” he shrugged.

“I…see.”

Leaping to her feet, Connor took her chemise from where it hung on the doorknob. Watching as she gracefully pulled it on over her head, Hickey licked his lips and grunted, “No need to get all dressed up on account of me, sweet'art.” She all but ignored him, wandering around the room, collecting her weapons, sharpening and inspecting them before carefully sliding them into their various holsters.

Their quarters at the inn were sizeable and warm, mostly on account of the tidy bit of coin Hickey had spent. Then again, he always put up for their lodging while she paid for food. Interesting...these little clandestine meetings were occurring with more and more regularity as of late.

"You're a madwoman," he snorted, glancing at the shutters and still not seeing a single ray of sunlight falling to the floor. Seriously, it couldn’t be any later than around five in the morning.

"You certainly voiced no complaints about my supposedly troubled energies last night," she drawled from her seat at the table, surprising herself.

"What can I say, darlin’?" he lazily shrugged. The sinuous lines of his movement were made all the more so by the faint glow of the candlelit lanterns hanging from the ceiling. By the gods, she despised how she lost her train of thought for a few seconds. Subtlety shaking her head clear her mind, she went back to sharpening her dagger on her whetstone. "I was fuckin' distracted by those lovely tits 'o yours,” he blew her a kiss. “Then, there’s that shapely 'lil ass. Plus, your scrumptious 'lil mouth. And lest we forget, those devilishly eager 'lil hands-”

The color blooming to her cheeks, she breathed, “Thomas-”
"I ain't speakin' naught but the truth," he flashed a primal smile, dark gaze brimming with desire. "And ya need to quit your worryin'; it ain't the end 'o the bloody world that you be proving quite the delicious distraction every time we be crossin' paths, yeah?"

Letting out an annoyed sigh, she stood and searched around for her waistcoat while nodding in disagreement, "Which is why this is the last time."

"Come back to bed, me lovely," he interrupted, playfully patting the space beside him, "'Ole Hickey’s gettin’ cold and needs some company to warm ‘im up."

"Ugh," her hands flew to her hips, "Do you really think that will work on me?"

"Course I do," he cocked his head to the side, "'Cause the fact is, you’re contemplating it, any sod can see that. Particularly since you ain’t threatened to slice me balls off. At least not quite yet."

“I said I have to go-”

“The hell ya do,” he chortled.

“Do you ever listen to any of the words coming out of my mouth?!”

“Most always,” he drawled, rolling his shoulders a bit, “Especially when I'm in between those fetching legs 'o yours. You're awful vocal then, ya naughty 'lil wolf-"

"You are insufferable," she curled her lip.

"Like ya said before, ya definitely wasn't complain' last night."

Throwing up her hands in disbelief, she snapped, "Of all of the ridiculous things that come out of your-?!"

"You need to rest up," he retorted, "So quit your whinin' and get on with it," he flipped back the covers.

"I would rather not," she sniffed, even as her gaze lingered there, "Thank you."

"Liar," he darkly chuckled, "You're exhausted, that much is bloody obvious."

"I am most certainly not."

"Which is why it's takin' you forever 'n a day to get dressed and make your grand escape?" he arched a brow. Narrowing her eyes, she swiftly looked back and forth between the window and bed.

Alright, so she ached a bit. And her bones cracked and groaned a little more than usual when she attempted to sneak out. Frankly, the fact that he caught her in the first place was a fairly apt warning that she wasn’t at her prime this morning. Honestly, how could she successfully complete her missions if she could barely drag herself out of bed? So sleep deprivation was out of the question.

A little bit more rest wouldn't do too much harm.

"One. Hour," she emphasized, all but flopping down into bed. It was somewhat hard not to notice how surprisingly comfortable the mattress was. Not that she'd ever admit it out loud.
"Well, would you look at that, eh?" he crowed, pulling up the blankets over her. "The stubborn little poppet isn't shootin' herself in the foot for once!"

"Hickey?"

"Yeah?"

"Cease your prattling before I strangle you, yes?"

"Right-oh, boyo," he snickered. It was impossible to understand her grumbled reply in her native language. So he settled for puffing up his pillows and gingerly pulling her closer. That she didn’t conjure up a hidden knife from somewhere and casually drive it into his sternum had to be a good sign. Hence, he let himself drop a protective leg over hers. Nope, he wasn’t met by her fist crushing his windpipe at that action either.

How kind of her.

Letting out a heavy sigh and rolling over to her side, she murmured, “I must be gone by mid-morning, at the absolute latest–”

"Don't go worryin' yourself to death, I'll wake ya in a bit," he retorted, even as he soothed a hand up and down her side.

"We shall see," she slurred, eyes sliding closed.

She drifted off, her back spooned against his chest and head resting on one of his arms. His other arm carelessly draped across her waist, she utterly refused to dwell on the fact that she didn’t mind how his hand was comfortably lodged between her breasts. After all, there would be plenty of time contemplate her current madness when she awoke.

Apparently, Hickey had some rather original ideas when it came to rousing her from her sleep. It was the only explanation as to why she woke up to him sucking on her tits and licking at her skin like a parched man at an oasis. All while lightly teasing her dampening sex with the calloused pad of his thumb. She was instinctively riding his hand and halfway to coming by the time her eyes fluttered open and she was fully aware of her bearings.

“Of course, I’ll gladly take me paws off of ya,” his words caressed her jaw before gave her a playful nip along her clavicle, “If you like.”

Her intense gaze sliding to brief amusement that lit up her comely face only served to make him bark out a laugh. It got even louder as she hastily yanked off her chemise over her head and hurled it to the floor. Somehow, she managed to keep up her expression in spite of her hips twitching in response to him lightly pressing his thumb into her.

“I’ll take that as a yes ‘en, sweet’art?” he paused, looking up at her with a lewd smirk.

"What else would it mean, Hickey?” she impatiently snorted.

"Just makin’ sure, sweetness,” he dragged her smallclothes down her legs and tugged them off her, tossing them over his shoulder.
Her expression swiftly slid to a pleased yip as he took a nipple between eager teeth. Judging by the way her fingers dug into his broad shoulders as he then switched tactics to lap at her, soothing the bite with his tongue, it was pretty damn clear that she was plenty alright with not going anywhere. At least not for a while.

Her tits lavished with enough attention, he licked a trail down her stomach. Pressing a lingering kiss to her sex rewarded him with an impatient buck of her hips. Finding her hot and whimpering for him made his cock throb with almost painful need. But hearing his comely ‘lil killer wolf snap and snarl for him first would be well worth the wait. Eying her, he growled in appreciation as her hands fisted in his hair and his thumb was quickly replaced by his hungry lips on her pussy. Exploring her folds with his tongue, he dipped in and out of her. Her increasingly keening cries doggedly drove him onwards. Particularly when he sucked her clit into his devious little mouth before finally slicking two fingers into her.

She nearly jerked him up off the bed. But his broad chest pinned her legs, allowing him to drop a heavy arm over her belly and hold her in place. It created a delectable friction, encouraging her twist and wriggle under him as he buried his face in her wetness. He eagerly sucked at her in between teasing licks. The thrum of fingers working in and out, he finally hit that delicate, highly responsive bundle of nerves within her with a deliberate twist of his hand. She nearly screamed at that, the trembling jerk of her hips upwards his carnal reward. Steadily increasing his movements, her groaning and cursing encouraged him. Chiefly since it was punctuated by the breathless, panting sounds of his name spilling from her tasty mouth. He welcomed it, chuckling against her sensitive skin, "Lord, ya taste like fuckin’ heaven on high, love," before lashing the tip of his tongue against her clit.

She gifted him with one of her fierce yowls, her eyes squeezing shut. The melodic words of her native language now flew unhindered from her. As her hips spasmed and shuddered up to meet him, he redoubled his efforts. And no, she most certainly was not babbling like a daft woman as he heartily lapped and slurped and thrust his fingers into her in languorous rhythm, drawing out her orgasm.

Quaking and coming down from her peak didn’t allow her to do much else besides shakily knock his hand away. Then again, she almost came a second time at the sight of him greedily licking at his fingers, his half-lidded gaze never leaving hers.

“Sorry I didn’t ask of her highness’ preferences as to how she like getting woke up,” he smirked, leaving a trail of languid kisses along the line of her body as he crawled upwards before plopping down beside her.

“Hmmm,” she tiredly retorted, allowing him to pull her to his chest. She didn’t miss the way his hard cock twitched against her behind. “It may be assumed that one can teach an old dog new tricks.”

“Well, fuck you too, Connor-”

“Did you not just do that?” she arched a brow as she looked back over her shoulder at him, “Unless I am otherwise mistaken?”

“You got all sorts of ‘lil bits ‘o insanity to ya, but ‘stupid’ ain’t one of ‘em,” he lightly swatted her bottom. “Playing dumb don’t become ya, freckles.”

“So what has been your excuse all this time, Hickey?”
Her feral laugh taunted him as he flipped her over and yanked to her knees. Arching up into him as he lightly sank his teeth into her neck, right where it met her shoulder, she grabbed at the headboard to anchor herself. Still wet from his earlier efforts, she was properly prepared when he swiftly sank his thick cock into her from behind.

“Ho-ley fuck,” he grit as she purposely ground back into him, “So bloody tight.” Sucking an eager trail of bites down her back, he entwined his fingers with hers where they gripped the headboard. His other hand reached around to give her breast an affectionate squeeze, causing her to let out a breathless moan. “So bloody delicious,” he began driving into her. “Ya dirty ‘lil minx,” he rocked into her, “Ya love it when I give ya the what for, eh? Oi!…ya fuckin’ undo me, sweetness-”

“Less…talking!” she growled, pushing back against him.

“You’re bloody impossible, pet!” he gave a bawdy guffaw, surging forward.

Pounding into her, another flex of his hips sent her writhing beneath him. His angle deep and pitched, it nearly stole her breath away. Clenching around him when his hands dropped to grip her sides, he nearly lost it at the shameless sounds of her pitched mews. Finding his feverish rhythm, he couldn’t hold back a pleased grunt as the wanton chit met him stroke for stroke. Leaning down, he brushed her messy braid away and pressed his lips to the nape of her neck. Swirling his tongue along her heated skin, he ran his other hand up her side until he caressed the heavy weight of her breast again. Thumbing her nipple as he drove into her, he rattled off a curse at how lusciously taut and wet she felt around him.

He couldn’t understand her gasping reply, as it was in her language. But the familiar, melodic sound of it echoing in his ears stirred something fiery and primal in him. Feeling himself tighten, he slowed a bit, catching his breath. Yet he still grinded against her. Plumbing her depths, he squeezed his eyes shut while muttering all sorts of filthy promises into her ear.

Without warning, she shoved back against him, easily throwing him off balance. It was the few seconds she needed to scoot forward, roll to her back and clasp her thighs about his waist. A twist of her legs, and he was sent flying to his back and tangling in the blankets. Before he could fully register the change in position, she was straddling him and slowly sinking down onto his cock.

“Fuuuuck,” he grit out, eyes snapping open and taking her in, ”You bein' so bloody beautiful like this ain't fuckin' fair!” he hotly whispered.

Her head thrown back and eyes fluttering closed, her breasts tantalizingly bounced in time to her increasingly frantic exertions. Mercilessly digging her fingertips into his chest for anchor, her nails left wicked little pink half-moons in his skin. Regardless, the tinge of pain created a dizzying contrast to the slick, snug feel of her riding him to utter ruin. As he hooked his grip to her knees in a vain attempt to control the pace, of course, she was having none of it. Not slowing down in the slightest, her powerful thighs grasped his sides, nearly holding him prisoner.

She never said much when they went at it. And mostly, it was in her native language. Nevertheless, he’d gotten plenty of practice in gauging the rolling sounds of her gasping howls and breathy exhalations. She was close, as was he.

He tensed a hand around her thigh as she finally slowed, snaking her hips around in little circles of frustrating delight on him. His other hand dropping to the small of her back, he shoved her forward, her breasts now in perfect alignment with his mouth. As he sucked and laved at them, he thrust up into her with renewed vigor. Feeling her suddenly tremble and hearing her swallow down a shriek,
he knew he hit that sweet little spot within her. So he set a dogged pace, trying for it with each stroke. Every time he succeeded, he was rewarded with a lovely litany of garbled English and her language falling from her mouth.

“Connor!” he hissed after a bit, cock tightening within her as he scrambled for purchase, "Ah, fuck, me Connor!” His hand on her back drifting downwards to her ass, he clutched her to him as he climaxed. Repeatedly muttering her name along with a snarl of cursed satisfaction, he spilled into her.

She wasn’t far behind. Alternately wailing and moaning against his forehead, she shuddered as his lips latched onto her breast again. The taut muscles of his chest and stomach quivering with effort, he kept up his tempo as much as he could. Thrusting up into her, his hand slid down between them. A naughty little twist of his fingers and he found her clit. Mercilessly teasing and sliding against her, it sent her reeling. Her tight walls contracting around him in one final pull, her hitched breath flew into a long, earnest cry of his name as she came, thoroughly undone.

Collapsing on top of him, she let out a pleased sigh. He grinned against her skin before licking at the pulse point on her neck, like a cat to the cream, in between his presses of his mouth to her. Soon, their ragged panting slowed to deep and even breaths. Softening and sliding out of her, he yanked up the blankets to cover them.

“Eh, Connor?” he sleepily slurred.

“What?” she murmured after a while.

“I need me a beer, sweet’art. Be a good ’lil kitty and fetch me one, yeah?”

He cackled in amusement as she lightly punched him in his shoulder and drowsily replied, “Go fetch it yourself.” She reeled off a few more words in her language that he now recognized as an insult.

“Wot’s this ‘en? Ya finally resortin’ to cursin’ at me, girlie?” he snickered in feigned shock, “Cheeky! Looks like I’m rubbing off on ya yet.”

“Hardly,” she yawned, burrowing deeper into the blankets as he sat up and grabbed a half-full bottle of gin that somehow ended up rolling beneath the bed.

Gulping down a long swig, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “Wanna drink?” he offered.

“I will pass on that,” she steadily replied.

“Good ‘en, more for me,” he took another sip before abruptly dropping it back on the floor with a clatter. As she’d moved back to lying halfway on top of him, he began absentmindedly rubbing little circles along the small of her back. Feeling her lightly swat his cheek, he shifted a bit as she tucked her head into the crook of his shoulder to get more comfortable.

“Connor?”

“Hmm?” she cracked one eye open.

“How long ‘ave we been at our little games and wot not?”
“Far too long,” she exhaustedly replied.

“Ouch,” he chuckled, the sound low and deep in his chest where her ear was pressed to him, “You go woundin' me, me dear 'lil huntress.”

“Someone has to,” she rejoined, beginning to nod off again. So much for leaving here on time…

“Come now, I’m bein’ serious here,” he lightly jostled her. It caused her to start and glance up at him with an annoyed expression. However, she was a bit astounded to see him furrowing a brow in concentration. Especially considering there wasn’t a freshly poured beer or new pair tits anywhere in the immediate vicinity. Schooling her expression to indifferent, she shrugged as he continued, “It’s gotta be, what, a few years or so, yeah?”

Closing her eyes once more, Connor thought back to the first time she crossed paths with the Templar beneath her. And of how she should’ve killed him years ago.

So much for the best laid plans, eh?
Bridewell Prison

*I can't see where you comin' from,
But I know just what you runnin' from:
And what matters ain't the "who's baddest," but
The ones who stop you fallin' from your ladder, baby.

--Short Change Hero, The Heavy

**Mid-June, 1776**

The last time someone held a blade to Thomas’ family jewels, it was through no fault of his own. The tasty little poppet smiling up at him from where she lay naked in bed had failed to disclose that she was married. Or that her husband was back in town and on leave from the local militia. No matter, as cold-cocking said cuckhold in the face gave him ample time to go crashing through the window and tear off out of the backyard. If he had to grade himself on the execution of his getaway, he’d determine it was a solid seven on a scale of one to ten. Yeah, it didn’t employ much in the way of finesse. Nevertheless, he had to give himself a couple of pats on the back for sheer style.

But that was few months ago. Just now, he tried the same trick with the Assassin. Because as far as he was concerned, it was pretty fucking rude to let the little git manhandle him up against the wall of the building they’d found themselves next to. Especially after such a bloody long chase through the streets of New York.

Apparently, me skills need a bit ‘o polishin’, he distantly mused, Or me age is catchin’ up with me. Having 37 years to you didn’t exactly make anyone a spring chicken. Not to mention, his pride had taken a bit of a bruising as well. The stupid blighter was wet behind the ears and likely still proverbially sucking on his mama’s teats. Yet he still managed to tackle him to the ground in the middle of the god-damned street. All despite his best efforts to distract the crowds by tossing out counterfeit money in his wake.

For fuck’s sake, didn’t Haytham swear up and down that the boy’s laughable ilk were all dead and gone?

“Be still. You will do no more harm.”

Thomas froze at the feel of cold steel against his inner thigh as he reeled back for the punch. Well, that and the fact that the self-righteous little voice proved on the high side. Then there was also the rather glaring detail that he could feel the fetching curve of her tits beneath her clothes. Mostly due to her being pressed all up against him as she securely balled her other fist into his collar. Mostly due to her being pressed all up against him as she securely balled her other fist into his collar. Mostly due to her being pressed all up against him as she securely balled her other fist into his collar.

Peering closer and really paying attention now, he arched a surprised brow. Well fancy that, it was apparently a woman beneath the white hood. She was on the tall side, the top of her head reaching above his shoulder. Her layers of clothes also hid most of her curve. Combined with her bristling with a menagerie of weapons, it was no surprise that he’d initially mistaken her for a smaller man. Yet she proved quite the comely bit ‘o fresh morsel. At least judging by the flash of her dark eyes and the charming spray of freckles across her button nose and chiseled cheeks. The scar across the top of her right cheekbone wasn’t even that bad. She bore a nice ‘lil mouth on her too, in spite of its current sneer. Her deeply tanned skin strikingly unusual, it didn’t detract from her lovely visage. Nope, not in the slightest.
Without warning, her countenance stirred some distant, uncanny recollection in him. As though he’d seen her before, though that had to be impossible. There’s no way he’d forget a face like that… unless he was utterly shit-faced at the time? He was admittedly distracted by the way her blade kept shifting upwards and way too fucking close to his balls. So his biggest concerns at present boiled down to two key things:

1.) Her knife threatening to castrate him. Really, it wasn’t fucking funny anymore, how close it was to his cock. Just, no.
2.) Getting her to shut the fuck up as she kept yammering on and on about that tosser, Washington. How could this little chit be so bloody naïve?

It certainly didn’t help when he spotted over her shoulders an approaching patrol of soldiers sizing them up. To add insult to injury, they looked to be carrying his bag of counterfeit money. Great, now that could be pretty fucking incriminating.

Trying to shove her away only earned him her even tighter grip on his collar. She was damn near about to choke him out if she pulled it any harder…and now, here were the soldiers. Bloody fucking hell.

Of course, the silly nitwit tried to talk them out arresting her. Jesus Christ, she should’ve just shut the hell up and let him grease their palms a bit. No harm, no foul and they could both be on their merry way. She, back to whatever rock she crawled out from under. He, off to lay low for a bit and let Haytham know that there was likely going to be a change in plans when it came to sliding in Lee to command the Continentals.

They must have been just as fed up with her prattle as he was, for one of them knocked her out with the butt of their rifle. As loath as he was to admit it, Hickey couldn’t bite back a wince as her eyes rolled to the back of her head and she collapsed to the cobblestones. That was certainly going to leave a mark. And one hell of a headache.

“Serves her right, yeah?” he attempted to garner the soldiers' camaraderie. "Bloody lil tosser should know 'er place, eh?"

Regrettably, that didn't go over as well as he hoped, judging by their sneers. “You want some more of where that came from?” one of them snarled, smacking him across the back of head as he led them away. Thankfully, it was with his hand rather than the same treatment he’d doled out to the assassin. “No?” he jeered, “Then I suggest you shut it!” Gritting his teeth, Hickey shot the soldier a murderous glare. Left with no room for escape at the moment, he found himself being marched to Bridewell Prison.

Lee had better have a solution for this little muck-up, that was for damn sure.

Hickey wasn’t particularly surprised when the key jangled in the lock of his cell. Lying in bed (a real one, too. With an actual stuffed mattress, a couple of pillows and a heavily knit blanket. It was a fuck-ton better than the disgusting straw mattress that passed for one in the cell he they’d tossed him into before his little upgrade) and staring up at the boring array of stones in the ceiling for a moment, he leapt to his feet as the door creaked open.

However, the sight that met him caused his gleeful expression of victory to fall from his face.
“Good, you’re awake,” Charles sniffed, scurrying into the cell. “I’ve a gift for you, Hickey.”

“Unless it’s me walkin’ papers, I ain’t interested!” he snapped. “Wot’s with all this funny business ‘bout gettin’ me out?! I been in ‘ere for damn near a fortnight!”

“Patience!” Charles chastised, “Haytham is employing all options at his disposal to release you. In the meantime, this should serve you well.” With little care, he tossed a blanket-covered, body-sized bundle onto the bed. “Do with the little bitch what you wish,” he dismissively waved.

"Wot's this 'en?" Hickey shot Charles a suspicious look. Lee only shrugged before inspecting his nails for a bit. In one, fluid motion, Hickey yanked the blanket from around his apparent sacrifice. It revealed the knocked out, dusky-skinned wildcat who led to his arrest. She was bound hand and foot, her hair loosened of its braid. In a thin, filthy tunic that did little to hide her bodice beneath it and torn trousers, she appeared every inch the prisoner. Her black eye, swollen cheek and corner of her mouth, the mottle of bruises along her forearms and her thinner figure added to the effect.

For some reason that he had no desire to address aloud, Hickey’s stomach lurched at the sight of her. Sure, she was a bloody assassin who’d killed a shit-ton of his allies. And she was better off dead instead of constantly fucking up their plans. But this? This was bordering a bit on the side of ridiculous. Not to mention, a god-damned waste of time. Better for a clean kill then whatever revenge-driven madness Charles was plotting. Put the girl out of her misery once and for all is how he saw it. Then again, that’d always been Lee’s shortcoming; his plans were way too damn complicated, so it was inevitable that he constantly allowed the most minor of setbacks to affect him far too personally. In all honesty, his sheer arrogance was getting to be a problem.

Thomas was glad he didn’t have some knob-headed, blind allegiance to the Templars’ ridiculous creed. A nice tidy little fortune for his efforts was plenty enough to keep him going. Well, at least for now.

“What in the hell would I want to do with that?” he pointed accusingly at her on the bed. Walking towards the door, Charles was stopped by Hickey’s heavy hand on his shoulder. Spinning about on his heel, he gave a dark chuckle at the other man’s confused expression. “What?” he sang-soned, “I can’t imagine how hard it is for you to think straight when you haven’t had your cock properly serviced in the last fortnight or so, eh?”

Thomas had never liked Haytham’s creepy little lap dog. Especially not with the way the other man’s icy blue eyes lewdly trailed down to his crotch at the moment. Not that he wasn’t the equal opportunity sort when it came to his own bedmates. Before he went and got himself killed, Johnson had certainly enjoyed his attentions, to say the least. But Charles’ constant expressions of lustful adoration for the Grandmaster always left a nasty taste in his mouth. Perhaps like Kenway did in Charles’?

He snickered at that. His mind easily drummed up the image of the grandmaster sitting back in that big, comfy, leather chair of his in his office. Charles would gladly be on his knees, like one of his bloody Pomeranians, begging to suck him off. Of course, Haytham would last for a while, dismissive and bored, as always. Maybe he liked tying up the little lapdog and having him watch in frustration as he jerked himself off. Or fucked one of the tavern wenches from the Green Dragon, her buxom body bent over his office desk. Oh, Charles would be so deliciously frustrated. Likely whining and
crying for release like the little lickspittle he was.

Thomas didn’t realize he was actually laughing out loud until Charles smacked him across the shoulder. “Shut-up, you imbecile!” he hissed, nodding towards the door. “I had to bribe the guards a hefty bit of coin to look the other way as I brought the savage to you. I shouldn’t even be here in the first place!”

“Well ‘en,” Thomas gave him a mocking bow with a flourish of his hand, “By you leave, m’lord?”

Rolling his eyes and gritting his teeth, Charles stomped out of the cell. As he closed it, pulling on the door to ensure it was locked, he snapped out, “Frankly, it’s a waste of perfectly good funds that we’re getting you released.”

“Apparently, the boss-man don’t think that,” Thomas smirked with a feral flash of his teeth.

“Ass!” Charles muttered, gesturing for the guard at the top of stairs to lead him out.

Hearing the retreating steps, Thomas crossed his cell and took a seat on his bed, next to his apparent target. She didn’t stir. Not even when he slapped her cheek a couple of times to wake her up. Shrugging, he picked her up and unceremoniously dumped her on the floor next to the bed. She was lucky that there were fresh rushes spread across it. No doubt, it was miles cleaner than the shit hole they had her locked up in. Pulling the blanket up over himself, he soon drifted off to sleep.

Seriously, why in the fuck did Charles have to be such a god-damned inconvenience?

She was still asleep when Hickey awoke the next morning. But she’d moved in the night, curling herself up against the wall. Her feet were still bound, as were her hands in front of her.

Judging by how the guard didn’t say a word as he pushed in his breakfast through the steel grate in the middle of the door, Thomas figured Haytham’s pockets must have run nice and deep for this level of bribery. From what he heard when they let him out for his daily hours in the prison yard (outside and away from the general, broke-ass prison population, of course), there had been no word of a prisoner escape. Meaning the guards knew that she wasn’t in her cell.

How fucked up was that?

In fact, he was so focused on the fact that Charles' deranged arse expected him to use her for a bit of fun that he missed that she still wasn’t on the floor when he returned that afternoon. It was his first mistake.

As soon as the door to his cell clicked closed behind him, his knee was kicked out from behind him. In the next split second, something wild and clawing then landed on his back, effectively knocking the air out of him. Within the blink of an eye, she boxed him twice the kidney. He nearly threw up his supper at the wblaze of agony that ricocheted up his side. Sluggishly crawling back to his knees, his fingers blindly clambered for purchase along the floor. Unfortunately for him, she briskly followed up her initial attack with a driving punch to the back of his neck.

If she were a man, the sheer force of the strike would’ve snapped his neck like a dry twig. Thank the lord above for small miracles.

As he once again hit the floor like a bag of bricks, a distant part of his mind had to give her some
credit at her speed and efficiency. However, he was currently far more concerned with the rope that suddenly appeared in front of his eyes. Instinctively throwing up a hand to protect himself, he could do nothing else to stop her as she yanked it around his throat with vicious aplomb. Now, she was effectively strangling him.

Breath seizing and lungs on fire, his vision was already beginning to darken around the edges. If he didn’t do something quick, he was going to be dead in the matter of a few minutes. Probably sooner, judging by how she suddenly clutched his torso between her thighs and settled all her weight on his lower back. As his head jerked backwards, he knew all she needed was a little more force to allow her to cleanly snap his neck.

What a clever fucking cunt.

Without warning, he suddenly went limp. While it didn’t allow him to completely surprise her, it gave him the precious seconds he needed to slide his hand even further under her makeshift garrote. Ignoring the rope burn tearing into his hand, he rocked forward. At the same time, snapping his hips upwards threw her off balance. At least the rope was slightly looser now, allowing him to suck in a few desperately needed gulps of air. But her well-aimed hit to the back of his other knee sent him sprawling again. She must have connected with a nerve of some sort, as his thigh spasmed its own volition. His irate grunt echoing off the walls of his cell did nothing to slow how she wrapped both the edges of the rope around one of her hands.

At the same time, she bounced the side of his head off the floor with her other one. Light exploded in front of his eyes at the impact, making him roar out a curse of retort. Hands scrambling back, he viciously raked his nails down her arm. While he could feel himself drawing blood, she simply smacked his hand away while rocking back her weight again.

Holy shit, this bitch was serious.

Eyes desperately searching for anything to use to his advantage, he let out a gurgle of triumph as he spotted a loosened tile next to his nose. Grabbing at it, he yanked it from the floor. Reeling back, he smashed it against the side of her head where she leaned over him. While she groaned and seized when it shattered on impact, it didn’t cause her to drop the rope. But it was enough to force her to loosen a bit of slack while giving him the leverage he needed to struggle to his knees. He expected her to release him, what, with her equilibrium finally thrown off. But all she did was firmly wrap her legs around his waist and lock her feet together. Great, now he had the crazed savage on his back yet again. And she still had the bloody rope secured around his god-damned neck.

Enough of this bullshit.

Eyes darting around to get his bearings as he stumbled to his feet, he flailed backwards and hit the wall. Her snarled grunt of pain rang in his ears as her back connected with the stone. An idea swiftly forming in his head and realizing he likely had around two to three stone of weight on her, he reared back and propelled her into the wall again. This time, with brutal intent and throwing his full weight into it. He was rewarded with her louder yowl and the feel of her feet loosening from around his waist. Pitching forward, he ran backwards yet again. The third time was the charm as the breath was knocked out of her with a bellow of frustration, her grip on the rope finally faltering. Snatching it from around his throat, he hurled it to ground and doubled over. Shaking and gasping for breath as she slid to the ground behind him, he was forced to focus on not passing out.

That was his second mistake.
Did that bloody savage just launch ‘erself off the fuckin’ wall?! His mind reeled as she inexplicably appeared in front of him, letting out an eerily wolfish growl and shoving her shoulder into his chest. It was made even worse when her punch connected with his mouth, effectively splitting his lip. A little higher and she would’ve solidly broken his nose. Only luck allowed him to reach out and snatch her by the hair. But yanking her head back did nothing stop her hands from popping up through his arms and aiming a punch or two at his throat. Hell, she didn’t even shriek at the pain he know he was causing at almost tearing her hair out at the root.

Thankfully he was a soldier, as a civilian would’ve contained laughably poor reflexes. Likely, he’d be currently choking to death in a vain attempt to get air through his newly crushed trachea. But he was used to attacks from his time in the field. So he jerked his head just to left, causing her first punch to land on his clavicle, the second on his cheek. Gritting out a litany of curses at he felt his face already beginning to swell up, he reached out and smacked her across the face.

She ducked roughly halfway of his reach, though her nose was bloodied, her teeth clattering at the impact so hard she bit down on her lip and drew blood. Yet it allowed him to snap his other arm around her neck and grind it down against her throat. Unfortunately, it still didn’t stop her next attack. In fact, she reared back to head-butt him. Only his height saved him, as well as the way he yanked on her hair again, wrenching her neck backward and causing her to let out a hiss of agony.

She was still a whirling fury of spinning limbs. Changing tactics a third time, she kicked at the floor in an effort to get some momentum going. It wasn’t hard to tell that she was attempting to use his superior weight against him. Likely, in order to smash him back into the floor and finish off the job of throttling him to death. Frankly, he was a bit stunned that she wasn’t screaming and panicked. Outside of a swift babble of what he assumed were curses in her native language, she was silent. Doubtless, she wholly focused on killing him, the murderous little savage.

The chit had more balls than most men he knew, he had to begrudgingly give her that. But her game was getting old pretty damn fast. Thankfully, he was able kick a leg under hers and shove his legs further apart to better anchor himself. It prevented her from getting enough force to use him as a counterweight.

Somewhere in his brain, it clicked that he was pretty fucking lucky that she was probably not at her best due to increasingly lengthy time in prison. Or else he would’ve been dead in the matter of a few hits. A shame for her, though he’d never in a million years trade places with the little beast. It wasn’t his fucking fault that her luck had run out.

Her body went stiff when he pressed his arm even harder to her windpipe in warning. “Good,” he snarled, tongue licking at the blood trickling down his lip, the taste coppery and warm, “‘Cause if ya move one more fuckin’ time, I’ll snap that pretty ‘lil neck ‘o yours, yeah?” She remained silent, so he took it for acceptance.

Gingerly letting go of her hair to ensure she didn’t reel back for another blow, he still kept his arm solidly clutched around her neck. Swiftly reaching down, he retrieved the rope. Looping it around her hands, he double checked the knots. Looked like that blighter, Charles, was a solid fuck-up when it came to restraining prisoners. That had to be the only explanation of how she could’ve escaped her bonds.

“Now,” he huffed, “I’m gonna to drop ya to the floor. And ya ain’t gonna fuckin’ move, got it?!” Her body went even more rigid at that, no doubt rearing up for another attack. His ears ringing from his head getting shoved into the floor, he was in no mood for another fight. Not at moment, at least. And fuck, his throat hurt. So he settled for threats.
“Look ‘ere, ya ‘lil shit! Ya try ‘n kill me again, God as me witness, I’ll give ya a sound beating ya won’t ever fuckin’ forget.”

In spite of his words, she still didn’t relax. Son of a bitch, what a stubborn little tosser. Well, time to step it up.

“And that’ll be after I stick my cock right up yer tight ‘lil rump for payment.” She certainly let out a hiss at that. “Then, I’ll hand ya over to the guards for their fun. And unlike most up in ‘ere, you’re a nice bit ‘o tits ‘n ass. So I wonder ‘ow long they’ll keep all their attentions focused on ya, eh?” His mother would’ve skinned him alive for such vileness. Then again, she never attempted to fucking choke him out. Besides, judging by the girl’s subtle nod, she was taking his words seriously. Good.

Feeling her relax, he let her go. She hit to the floor with little more than a grunt. Bringing his hand to his mouth, he inspected the damage with his fingertips. It wasn’t much. But his vision was swimming, the ringing in his ears hadn’t let up and half of his face was swelling up. His lungs also still burned from a lack of air.

Frustrated, he growled and raised a hand to smack her across her insolent face. She didn’t even bother to flinching at his action. Stock still and bracing for the impact, her eyes were narrowed to dangerous slits of black. Her split lip curled with derision and teeth bared, it lent her the look of a rabid dog ready to rip out his throat at the latest provocation.

He surprised himself when he paused mid swing. She barely reacted to it.

Letting out a hiss of retort, he settled for shoving her cheek into the wall with a rough hand while scuffing at her calf with the edge of his boot. Outside of a wince and "oomph!" of impact as she connected with the stone, she said not a word. Crouching to where she was haphazardly slumped on the floor, he snatched her by the chin, forcing her to meet his incensed gaze. “Now, stay put, ya daft ‘lil mongrel,” he growled, taking in the way her dark gaze was still narrowed at him, fierce and unbowed. Her swelling, bloody nose twitched, almost as though she was sniffing at him, the barbarous wench. “Daddy’s gotta see how much damage ya bloody wrought so he can go thinkin’ up the proper punishment, eh?” She still didn’t reply, save a mutter of foreign words.

Cuffing her ear for her efforts, he leaned down and tied up her feet as well. Considering he was due to be released today, there was no need to worry about her nearly escaping again. At least that’s what he had to tell himself as he doubled and tripled checked his knots. If only because he was dangerously close to getting killed just now. Way bloody close, in fact.

For the love of fucking God, why in the bloody hell had Charles dumped this feral little bitch on his doorstep?

“Why have you not…assaulted me?” It was not said with fear. Or anger. Or murderous intent. Rather, with an exhausted sort of acceptance.

“Wot, love?” Hickey snarled, flipping a page of the newspaper, “Don’t tell me our little brawl got ya all wet and wantin’? Wot, ya bloodlust need a bit of a fix?” he let out a spiteful chuckle. Hopefully, the threat would shut her up.

After all, they were the first words she’d spoken in well over two hours. From her position securely trussed on the floor the cell and next to his bed, she’d made barely a scrape of noise. Yet he knew
was awake the entire time. The feel of her eyes boring into his back where he sat at his desk, his feet propped up and reading the afternoon paper, was unmistakable. He could only chalk it up to her sheer frustration of not being able to strangle him when she had the chance. Now, he had a pounding headache, split lip, black eye, bruised throat, and a half-swollen face for her troubles. Meanwhile, the rivulent of dried, flaking blood down the side of her forehead, her bloodied nose, bruised ribs and the nail marks all up and down her arms were his malevolent gifts to her.

They would’ve made a comical sight, the pair of them now looking like old, battered, bare-knuckle boxers. Well, except for the fact that she’d fucking tried to kill him. Yet a distant part of his mind couldn’t blame her; you could sure as shit bet that he would’ve fought just as dirty, had their roles been reversed. Admittedly, he’d always had a predilection for shit-stirring little scrappers.

Then again, she could’ve been a bit more civil and not tried to fucking kill him.

“Hardly,” she quietly retorted after a long while. He let out a long, exasperated sigh at the fact that she couldn’t take the hint and snap up her yap as she continued, “I simply expect it of you.”

Who in the hell did she think he was?!

Oh, he’d lost what little honor he had long ago, of that there was no doubt. His life’s blood was smuggling and espionage. He’d unapologetically lied and cheated his way to the top of the black market. Of course, he’d killed men. To the point where it’d become almost bothersome whenever he was called upon to do so for the sake of necessity. He was certainly a man of all sorts of lechery. Never too picky about the skirts he chased and bedded, a bit of coin and a draft of beer completed his usual trifecta of appetites. But there was a world of difference between taking a wanting lass and stealing what hadn’t been freely given. And he sure as shit wasn’t no thief of that sort of thing.

Then again, he had little desire to explore why exactly the dodgy little git’s assumption of that sort of contemptible behavior from him pissed him off even more. He’d never bothered thinking too much on such complexities. Mostly because it’d never done damn a thing to either fatten his pockets or contribute to his various indulgences. So he settled for the usual insult and intimidation.

“Well, if ya don’t shut ya yap,” he jeered, still not bothering to look back at her, “I ain’t makin’ no promises that a piece of ‘ole Hickey won’t end up all up in ya!”

“Understood,” she steadily said.

Thank whatever savage gods ya pray to that I ain’t no right proper deviant, poppet. No matter what Lee and the lot ‘o ‘em be thinkin’ of me supposed inclinations, he furiously mused. Which has gotta be the only bloody reason why that wanker dumped you in me lap.

Within a half hour, the sounds of her even breathing signaled that she was finally asleep. Glancing back at the setting sun through the bars of his window, he shook his head in irritated dismay. For fuck’s sake, Lee was supposed to bail him out hours ago.

Ugh, what a bloody prat.

Thankfully, Lee finally decided to drag his sorry arse back up to Bridewell the next morning. Along with some longwinded plan to frame his temporary cellmate for their plot against Washington. Plus, the murder of the warden. Though Hickey personally didn’t think was the best idea to inform her of entire fucking thing. Then again, what did he care? He was finally getting the fuck out of here.
He found himself rolling his eyes as Charles made his usual megalomaniacal threats at the little beast. Seriously, if he kept waving his flintlock about like that, the whiny bugger was bound to end up shooting him. Couldn’t they just say their goodbyes and be on their way? Being in the clink for over a fortnight was plenty of time for him to decide he that he pretty much despised enclosed spaces. No matter a better cell and whatnot.

Alright, so he couldn’t hold back a chuckle at the ‘lil wolf’s astonishment that their apparent order expected everyone to fall in line. Such was life. Either you swam with big fish, or got ripped to bits by the lot of them. Looked like she was about to get eaten. And not in the good way.

Oh well.

“What in the hell happened to your face, Thomas?” Charles snorted, his irksome voice snapping Hickey out of his thoughts as he slammed the woman’s cell door closed. “Please don’t tell me our guest,” he nodded to where Connor appeared as though she was mentally calculating the slowest, bloodiest and most vicious way to flay them both, “Gave you much trouble?” he chuckled. “Because it would be a true pity if she has yet to learn the valuable lesson of obedience.”

Gaze narrowing and taking in how Lee’s hand lingered on the lock to her cell, Hickey suddenly found himself sneering, “Got into a bit of fisticuffs in the yard. Not that it be any of ya fuckin’ concern.” Eyes snapping to his at his supposed explanation, she arched a brow of utter surprise. He could almost see the wheels of confusion spinning in her head at his unexpected lie.

Frankly, he didn’t want to dwell on it either.

“Well, I certainly hope the other lout looks worse,” Charles scoffed.

“Ya assumin’ he lived through it,” Hickey rolled his eyes. “Besides, it ain’t like I’ve ever let ya down on that front, eh?” he snickered, ignoring the peculiar pull at his gut as she continued silently staring at him.

“Surprise, surprise, you still serve some use,” Charles retorted with a dismissive wave, spinning on his heel and finally leading him out of this hellhole.

Shooting him a cross expression, Hickey growled, “Oh, go knock off o it, ya feckless pillock!”

Soon, the assassin’s fate was the furthest thing from his mind. He had some tail to chase and copious of amounts of drinking to catch up on, after all.
June 28, 1776

"'Ello Connor! Didn't think I'd miss ya goin' away party, did ya?" Hickey brightly declared, dragging her out of the wagon some feet from the gallows. She remained silent, reduced to fixing him with an expression of pure, unadulterated hatred. If he were a lesser man, he would've flinched under that lethal gaze. Instead, he settled for the usual taunting. "I hear Washington 'imself is gonna be in attendance. Hope nothin' bad 'appens to him!"

Her eyes widened for a split second as she spat out, "You said there would be a trial!"

"Ah, no trials for traitors I'm afraid," Hickey sighed with exaggerated regret. Though he didn't really know if he was serious or relieved.

This whole affair was quickly turning into a clusterfuck of constantly shifting bullshit. Frankly, he was getting bloody sick of it. Particularly with the big bosses making all sorts of preposterous demands of him. If they would've just let him carry out his plan and quietly knock off Washington, the deed would've been done weeks ago. Now, they were offering up their sacrificial lamb to the hordes. What a waste, she could've been quite useful to Haytham and his grand schemes. Especially considering the little nutter had a mean left hook and a tendency towards attempting to kill whatever got in her way. His bruised face and neck bore the rather glaring signs of that, along with his dead accomplices. Then again, her reckless tendencies proved an irritating thorn in his side. So yeah, it would be best to rid the world of her.

…maybe?

Hmm, perhaps this was why the Order never left him to make any of the big decisions.

Thoughts swiftly returning back to the present, he shrugged, "Lee and Haytham saw to that. It's straight to the gallows for you."

Her expression suddenly brokered no tolerance for negotiation as she turned and cast him a steady stare. He could blame it on the blurriness of the rain. Or the addictive bloodlust of the crowd addling his brain. But he could swear her cracked lip twitched upwards in a smirk as she firmly promised, "I will not die today. The same cannot be said for you."

Hickey's blood ran cold, his boots seeming stuck in mud as he froze. Rapidly blinking, his mind reeled at her insinuation.

Sure, he'd willingly thrown in his lot with the Templars, mostly at 'ole Willie Johnson's urging. But it wasn't due to any hair-brained allegiance to some hazy, ridiculous, higher power. Screw the hierarchy, he was here to get a leg up and avoid the poor house. That it was pretty convenient and paid exceedingly well was an added bonus. Aye, they went on and on about their supposedly lofty goals. What, with their diatribes about seeking world peace through order and combating chaos with an unyielding hand and blah de fucking blah. But if he was to be honest (and how long had it been since there'd been a need to do that?), it was all a bunch of bollocks.

Except, now there was the asinine conviction of the homicidal little chit as she walked her way to the gallows. Seriously, she couldn't bother to give a flying fuck about the fact that she due for a long
drop and a short stop in the matter of a few minutes? A broken neck, the mocking of the crowds and then a pine box. Assuming she was lucky and they didn't rush to desecrate her corpse, that is. How could she not see there was no way back?

He was glad the other officer shoved her forward with a threat to shut her mouth. He didn't intervene when some strumpet decided to send her reeling to the ground with a solid clock to the face.

He snorted in derision as Lee read out the final condemnation.

He looked away when the sound of the trapdoor snapped and reverberated in the air, a finality if he ever heard one.

A pity. That pretty little face wouldn't do her any damn good now.

Except the crowd suddenly let out a hushed groan. Their silence going on for far too long, Hickey cracked one eye open and looked up toward the gallows.

Oh, for fuck's sake! How in the bloody hell had the slippery little scrubber managed to get loose?!

Head snapping between the demon coming at him with a tomahawk (seriously, a mother-fuckin' ax?!) and where Washington stood about a hundred feet in front of him, Hickey knew his decision would result in one of two outcomes. Either it would cost him his life, or he could eke out an escape by the skin of his teeth. So, he did what any normal gent would do when dropped between a rock and the psychotic ruffian swiftly becoming his hard place.

He fled.

In spite of squinting against the driving rain and stumbling a few times along the wet, filthy ground, Connor's blood was singing. The beautifully familiar weight of her tomahawk in her grip was a welcome respite from prison. Artfully twirling it about in her hand, she sighed in relief. Now, to complete her mission.

Her quarry vainly attempting to shove past the press of people surrounding him, Connor's gaze flicked to where Washington was already being hustled away from the pandemonium. Well, that would make the task at hand a bit easier. Still, she was too far away to stop Hickey. She needed a back-up plan. Thankfully, it stepped in front of her in the form of a soldier snarling for her surrender and threatening to shoot her.

She didn't so much as pause as she ducked under the barrel of his musket and sent her elbow crashing into his nose. With him distracted, she swiped the dagger sheathed on his hip from his sword belt. A blink of an eye and he was swallowed back up the crowd, no longer her problem. Using the mob's panic to her advantage, she charged sideways to utilize a less congested pathway. It also gave her a clearer view of her recruits making their way towards her along the rooftops. It'd take them a bit to reach her, giving her a solid window of time to question Hickey.

Balancing the newly acquired blade on her fingertips, she hurled it at her target. It landed true, the contemptible lout crumbling to the cobblestones with a satisfying howl of pain.

"Dammit," Hickey indifferently sniffed, looking down at his bloodied hands as she stalked towards him, "I thought I'd at least live to see another day. Shame."

"If I wished you dead, you would not still be breathing," Connor vowed, dropping to her knees and leaning over him. Eyes alight with fiery determination, she grit, "I want answers."
"Why did Johnson try and buy my people's land?" she charged, dark eyes flashing with ire. "Why was Pitcairn targeting Adams and Hancock? What purpose would Washington's murder have served? Why does your order support the British?" she demanded.

"How should I know?" Hickey spat out a shaky cough before fixing her with a defiant stare. "The Templars. Lee. The big man, Haytham." He gave a ragged chuckle as she flinched at the mere mention of her apparent greatest enemy. "They 'as the money. They 'as the power. That's the reason I threw in with 'em. That's the only reason." Connor's expression slid to stunned as he continued, "Sure, they 'ave some sort of vision for the future too. I didn't give a damn about any of that. They can sing their songs about mankind and its troubles. They can make their plans and spring their traps, don't bother me none," he smirked. "They paid me, so I said yes. Didn't bother to ask who or how or why. Didn't care."

Connor shot him with a look of disgust, her gaze clouded with loathing. "You chose to side with men who would rob us of our humanity? Simply because it was more profitable?!"

"What else is there?" Hickey scowled. "I'm not some blind fool who'd give up all I've got on principle. What is principle anyway? Can ya bring it to the bank?"

Connor sadly shook her head in disbelief, causing Hickey to roll his eyes.

"Don't look at me like that. We're different, you and I; you're just some blind fool who's always chasin' butterflies, whereas I'm the type of guy who likes to have a beer in one hand and a titty in the other," he flexed his fingers. "Thing is, girl, I can have what I seek. Had it, even. You? Your hands will always be empty." Despite how she roughly grabbed him by his collar, he let out a short laugh at her expression of obvious confusion. "All of this soddin' trouble for the likes of ya? A pity we didn't wipe out the lot 'o ya like we was supposed to, all those years ago."

Face twisting into an ugly snarl, she pressed her knee a bit too close to his groin for his liking. "You would do well to cease your pointless blathering!"

"Make me, 'lil she-wolf-"

Her head jerked up at the worrisome sound of muskets suddenly being reloaded. Frantically looking around, she let out a growl of annoyance at seeing a handful of soldiers bearing down on them. Beneath her, Hickey's callous laugh echoed in her ears, even as she pressed her tomahawk hard enough into his neck to draw a cut of blood. "Looks like ya got some 'ard decisions to make, sweetheart," he mocked, even as he winced. "Do ya get shot to shit? Or do ya let 'Ole Hickey escape, eh?"

"Quiet your incessant chattering!" she hissed, digging her knee into his inner thigh and shaking him by collar hard enough to cause the back of his head to hit the wet cobblestones.

He spat him out a garbled curse of pain before sneering, "Ten seconds, darlin'!"

He wasn't going anywhere, by the looks of it. And she still had to warn Washington.

She reeled back and soundly punched Hickey in the jaw, not caring about how her fist ached at the
impact. It did its task, effectively knocking him out. *Let the soldiers collect him,* she mused. Besides, they were both still surrounded by the terrified, fleeing crowd. If they opened fire on her, they'd injure or even kill innocent civilians. She had to get the hell out of here.

Reaching down, she swiftly snatched up her newly acquired dagger and relieved Hickey of his overcoat. In spite of the large patch of fresh blood blooming across its ripped shoulder, it would be better at letting her blend in than nothing at all. Tossing it on, she leapt to her feet and shoved through the crowd. It wasn't hard to act to the part of the confused civilian trying to escape the square; she now couldn't see where Achilles or her recruits were.

She nearly stabbed the arm of whoever suddenly snatched at her wrist, shoving him away from with her other hand. "It's just me, miss!" a familiar voice slid across her ears as his grip slightly loosened. "'Tis alright, you're nice and safe now!"

Letting out a muffled sob at the familiar sound of Clipper's eager voice, she quickly collected herself as he dragged her up against a brick wall. It took a healthy bit of her resolve to steel her usual impassive expression to her face. She also furtively ran a hand across her eyes under the auspices of drying her face from the rain. It went a long way towards concealing the tears spilling down her cheeks. For now, she would blame it on the sheer relief of finally being not quite so near death.

"Clipper, thank you," she latched onto his arm and urged them forward. "How did you all-?"

"Tallmadge sent word to Mr. Davenport," he declared, trailing in her wake.

"Remind me to thank him for his assistance as well," she breathed. Desperately ignoring the flash of agony that flared through her body due to her bruised ribs from falling through the trap door, she gulped down mouthfuls of air. Shaking her head in an effort to get her bearings as her vision swam with the beginnings of a fever, Connor squared her shoulders and questioned, "Where is Washington?!"

"Don't you worry yourself none, Connor," Clipper flashed her a relieved smile, his sparkling blue eyes alight with triumph, "He's-"

The sound of an order to prepare to fire snapped Connor out of the conversation. Glancing over, she muttered a curse in her native language at finding a half-dozen soldiers with their weapons aimed right them. Gripping her knife and tightening her hold on her tomahawk, she shoved Clipper behind her as she dropped to fighting stance.

"At ease, men! *At ease!* I said lower your god-damned guns!"

Thankfully, there was no need to duck a volley of bullets as Israel Putnam barked out his order. Behind her, Connor could hear Clipper let out a deep sigh of relief. Not that she blamed him in the slightest.

"This woman's a hero!" Putnam bellowed, marching forward. "The general can be so stubborn sometimes," he grimaced, shaking his head and taking in the general anarchy of the square. "'Piffle,' he said when we warned him something like this would happen. 'Piffle!'"

"The traitor you are looking for is over there," Connor pointed in the general direction of where she'd left him. "His name is Thomas Hickey. He's an officer with the Connecticut militia and part of the general's bodyguard."

"Good!" Putnam declared. "Men, go gather him up!" he shouted, waving for them to do so, "We don't want to deny the people their blood sport today, eh? I believe a hanging was scheduled, and we
"Stop!" Connor held up an adamant hand as the soldiers fanned out to collect Hickey. "He deserves a fair trial."

"He wanted to kill the Commander!" Putnam retorted with disbelief, "Nearly killed you as well. He's a scoundrel!"

"But still a man," Connor steadily said. "For justice to be served, he must be tried for his actions."

"Even though he denied the very same to you, girl?!" Putnam shot her a look of absolute disbelief. As she silently nodded, he rolled his eyes and chomped on his cigar, snorting, "You're nothing, if not consistent."

As they discussed Washington's whereabouts, Connor nearly passed out from the waves of weariness washing over her. Finding out the general was heading to Philadelphia, she was thankful as Clipper politely made his excuses to Putnam that they had to leave. Ushering her away, he soon brought her to inn where he, the other recruits and Achilles were staying.

Ignoring everything else, she collapsed into bed. She attempted to brush off the doctor Achilles fetched for her and fall asleep right then and there. But Clipper, Stephane and Duncan were having none of it. Their concerned fuss over her caused her to alternately blush and stammer with grateful surprise. Distracting her from her embarrassment with a few bold tales of how they carried off her rescue, they swore to return as soon as the doctor finished with her.

She insisted to the physician that she hadn't been violated in prison. So there was no need for him to perform an incredibly awkward sort of personal exam. One small comfort was that the Templars apparently wanted her to survive long enough to make it to the gallows. No doubt, the damned guards were in on their plans, likely due to the promise of coin. Hence, why they constantly kept her in solitary confinement for the most part. At least before she earned her way into the pit and then ended up in Hickey's cell.

Otherwise, she'd suffered a black eye, a swollen cheek and split lip, bruised ribs, two broken fingers on her right hand, some cuts, lacerations and probably a mild concussion. Not to mention, the slight fever she was running. The doctor warned that her illness was the biggest concern, for it could easily grow worse if she wasn't fully rested. Patching her up, leaving her with a sleeping draught and ordering her to remain in bed for the next few days, he soon departed.

Achilles quickly had a bath brought up. "Hush up, girl, we'll discuss this later," he waved off her apology for getting herself into such a dire situation, "For there are always lessons to learn from one's mistakes." Dropping a fresh set of clothes on the bed, he retreated from her room. After the bath, he and her recruits promised her they would all have supper in her quarters.

What does my father have to do with all of this? Connor's mind tiredly wandered as she scrubbed off the last fortnight of filth with a groan of relief. And most importantly, what is the next step in putting an end to the Templars?

Lip curled with incredulity, Haytham took in the panicked crowds fleeing the scene of the would-be execution from his position in the alleyway. Just off the main square, it was hidden enough to not attract attention from the patrols of soldiers screaming and shouting for peace. In the few moments, they'd likely start arresting the stragglers. Or perhaps even shooting them, should it all descend into true anarchy. He had to get off the streets.
Forcing his breathing to slow, he shook his head to clear it of the sobering image of his daughter's drop through the trap door of the gallows. Thankfully, it appeared the girl (Woman, he swiftly corrected himself, She has some twenty years to her and ceased being a child long ago) had allies of some sort. That had to be the case, considering the arrow that snapped through the noose's rope a half-minute before his throwing knife finished their work.

Peeking out from his position once more, he shook his head in disbelief as Connor exchanged apparent pleasantries with that lunatic, Israel Putnam. As though that barbarian halfwit had anything to do with her rescue. To put it lightly, she had no idea that her life had been in his hands. And if he had anything to do with it, she would never come to find out he'd all but signed her death warrant. How she'd grown into such a naïve, impetuous sort was well beyond him. Frankly, it saved her from the noose, his curiosity solidly piqued.

So much like her mother, for better or worse. How she contained her mother's sharp, bright eyes, full mouth, the gentle curve of her chin and the charming smattering of freckles across her nose and cheeks made her heritage obvious. The instantly familiar pattern of the multicolored, beaded bracelet about her right wrist that obviously belonged to Zio served to only make it all the more painful. She also shared his own nose, jawline and the turn of his brow. It in turn made his failings all the more evident when he first laid eyes on her back in Bridewell.

"That 'lil wolf stabbed the ever livin' shit outta me!" Hickey's accusatory voice ripped Haytham from his musings. Panting in increasing distress from his position braced on Haytham's shoulder, Hickey let out a ragged sigh. "Seriously?" he protested, 'I'm starin' to get pretty fuckin' tired of that fussock layin' 'er hands on me and me always comin' out on the losin' end." He completely missed Haytham's flinch at his insult of Connor as he pouted, "It ain't bloody fair!"

"Well then, perhaps you should have avoided her path, now shouldn't you?" Haytham sniffed, readjusting the oaf's weight from where he'd dragged him from the middle of the street. When the hell had the boy gotten so damned heavy?

"C'mon then!" Hickey slurred, "I take bloody...offense at that, gov'nor! I did as ya said, goin' after Washington at the first chance it all went to shit!" Head lolling forward, the blood spilling from his shoulder was slowly beginning to stain Haytham's dark overcoat, much to the grandmaster's chagrin. Not to mention, Hickey was starting to babble. No doubt from the blood loss.

"See, that be the problem! You lot always go accusin' me 'o bein' thickheaded," he pointed a shaky finger in Haytham's face. "Of how I'm always cockin' up yer...grand schemes!" he waved his uninjured arm about in exaggerated circles. "But who's the one who took the fall for ya? Twice, I may say?" he shakily held up a second finger for emphasis. "Whose arse went 'n got tossed in the clink? Who went 'n just got a fuckin' knife to me shoulder?!" he growled, voice ebbing every so often as he winced in pain.

"For the love of God, boy, quiet your chattering!" Haytham ordered, continuing to drag him in the opposite direction of the square until they finally spilled out of the long alleyway. "You'll bring down the law on us. And neither I nor you are prepared to talk our way out of that one, at least not at the moment."

Hickey could barely hear the grandmaster over the increasingly loud roar of his own heartbeat. Sweat starting to pour down his face from his exertions, he let out a fevered guffaw of laughter. "Who stayed 'is base urges when she got thrown in me path, hmm?" he adamantly nodded. "I ne'ver laid a hand on 'er when Charles dumped 'er off in me cell. No siree bob, I swear on me lovely mother, I didn't."

"Wait, what?" Haytham was suddenly compelled to pull up short. Giving the area a cursory once-
over, he saw that this section of the city was virtually deserted. While the farmland bordering Fort George didn't offer much cover, they were closer to his usual physician and likely out of harm's way.

"Did I stutter, mate?" Hickey groused.

Shooting him a look of reproach, Haytham purposely dropped Hickey to a bench hard enough to cause him to let out a pitched grunt of pain. Wiping his brow, he insisted, "Now what of this business about how Charles supposedly moved her to your cell?" It was admittedly a struggle for him keep his voice composed. The years of training had served him exceptionally well in that regard. Particularly as his mind raced at Hickey's insinuations concerning Charles' behavior. Then again, he was well aware that there was no love lost between the two. How unfortunate, as they were quite similar in many aspects.

"Now lookee here," Hickey took a few deep, shaky breaths before closing his eyes and leaning back against the wall, "All I's sayin' is-

Without warning, the church bells from the square inexplicably began ringing again, which could only signal further trouble. It would best to make themselves scarce. As he waved for Hickey to get to his feet, Haytham retorted, "We will deal with this later."

Within a few minutes, they were in front of a nondescript, brick townhome that lay within sight of Fort George. Haytham rapped three firm knocks followed by two more in rapid succession upon the door. An old man of medium height answered it. However, the chain on door prevented it from being opened more than a few inches. "Hey now gents," he hissed through the crack of door, "I don't want no trouble-

"You will assist us, Dr. Jameson," Haytham snorted, swiftly shoving his boot into the doorway and preventing him from slamming it in their faces.

Startled, the old man narrowed his eyes. In his late sixties, he was short and stooped. Leaning heavily on his wicker cane, he peered out at them through his gold-rimmed glasses. His clothes shabby and threaded about the edges, the only hint of wealth about him was the gold chain of his pocket watch tucked into the fob of his dark waistcoat. Combined with his bald head riddled with age spots, he appeared thoroughly unassuming.

A glimmer of recognition clouding his face, he suddenly cracked a small smile. "Ah, master Kenway!" he finally exclaimed. His entire demeanor shifting to deferential, he unhooked the chain and flung open the door. "Come in, come in," he waved after glancing about to ensure they weren't being watched. "I see you've bought Thomas as well," he snickered, "I take it the lad needs to sleep off yet another tainted batch of beer?" he ushered them inside.

"Sod off, ya dodgy codger!" Hickey slurred, "I got a fuckin' knife hurled inta me-

"He's injured," Haytham cut him off as he rolled his eyes in apology to the doctor, "And loosing blood fast."

Ushering them past the front parlor, Dr. Jameson led them down into the basement. Haytham half-carried Hickey while the doctor rushed around and lit various lamps. As they spluttered to life, their soft glow revealed a large, clean, wood paneled room stocked with enough supplies to perform a litany of medical procedures. The two men then maneuvered Hickey onto the operating table. Propping him so that he sat haphazardly leaning up against the wall, Jameson quickly stripped him of his waistcoat and tunic. Inspecting the injury, he began diligently working on it.

Finally getting a chance to take a good look at Hickey, Haytham raised an inquiring brow. The other
man's jaw was freshly swollen. Not to mention the fading, yellowing bruising around his neck, the abrasion to his forehead and his healing split lip. Admittedly, he'd noticed all of the latter when Hickey was released from prison a few days ago. But he'd been too caught up in the events of this sordid tale to take full note of it. Save his shoulder, Hickey's fresher injuries were mostly along his face and neck. Well, as the Doctor stripped him, there was also the revelation that his torso was tightly wrapped in bandages. A tell-tale sign of bruised or broken ribs, if ever there was one. There was also the ugly, old bruising running up his right side and just below his ribs.

"What brought all this about, Thomas?" Haytham nonchalantly asked, briefly pointing at his injuries and the bandages.

Spitting out a glob of blood at his feet, Hickey took a long swig of the rum directly from the bottle the doctor had procured for him. Sloppily wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he cringed. He then rubbed at his throbbing jaw and clenched his teeth, snapping, "That bloody brat back at the gallows, that's wot happened, see!"

"But the bandages indicate additional-"

"Got into a 'lil trouble in the prison yard back 'n Bridewell," Thomas interrupted him, nostrils flaring in irritation. "Ain't nothin' for ya to be worryin' about. Like ya ever got to carin' "before."

Narrowing his eyes, Haytham clucked, "Funny. I'd have thought you easily able to defend yourself against a wet behind the ears woman."

"The poppet packs a mean wallop, that she do," Hickey grimaced. "And this?" he pointed accusingly at his neck and chest, "Oh that bit 'o damage be the result 'o the 'lil savage."

"Language, Hickey," Haytham murmured a warning, shoulders stiffening.

"I don't mean 'cause she be lookin' a bit native," Hickey swatted at the air and rolled his eyes before taking another swig. "Johnson's pretty 'lil widow, Miss Molly, be full native. I ain't never had no problem with 'er, yeah? Charles' bit 'o forest fruit from all those years back was a right lovely lass, rest 'er soul."

"Point taken," Haytham tersely replied before clasping his hands behind his back.

"Anyway's, the 'lil terror decided to go try 'n strangle me in me cell. And she came too bloody close to succeedin', I'd say! Hell, you'd probably be buryin' me corpse if she hadn't been in lock-up for a fortnight afore she tried it." Taking in Haytham's brief expression of surprise, Hickey closed his eyes and let out an annoyed sigh before meeting the grandmaster's gaze. "All I's sayin' is, she be savage, Kenway. Like, pound me arse into the ground with 'er bare hands and nary a lick 'o remorse, fuckin' vicious!"

Glancing away, Haytham's mind reeled at Hickey's revelation. Along with a disturbingly warm sort of satisfaction. Not only did Ziio give him a child, she apparently granted him a finely honed weapon. Yet Hickey revealed a rather glaring hindrance; said weapon was obviously pointed in the wrong direction and at a wrongly perceived enemy.

"Anythin' else?" Hickey's slurred voice interrupted his thoughts. Looking up, Haytham saw the man looked to be a few minutes from passing out. The stitches in his shoulder appeared only halfway complete as well.

"No, that will be all, Thomas," Haytham calmly replied. "Not to worry, you will be greatly rewarded for your services. Chiefly, in keeping your hands to yourself," he wrinkled his nose is distaste.
"Hey now, I like me coin well enough. But I wasn't lookin' to be all sordid and wot not with 'er," Thomas rocked forward and waved a dismissive hand at Haytham. "Frankly, boy-o?" he slowly said, eyes sliding closed for a moment as he took a long pull for his rum bottle, "You need to go have a little sit-down with that bloomin' arsehole, Lee. He's the one that wanted me to do to 'er...whatever 'n the fuck the blighter thought I'd be too dimwitted to do to 'er."

Haytham gave a snort of disbelief at that, shaking his head in disagreement. "I am sure Charles meant no such ill intent-"

"Who in the bloody hell do he think he be foolin'?!" Hickey bellowed, raising his bottle in challenge. "I was there, Kenway! I bloody saw the expectation of what he wanted 'o me with me own two eyes. And God as me witness, that sinister 'lil sonofabitch wanted me to...oi!" his eyes widened at how Haytham abruptly took a handful of silent steps forward.

Well, this shit was quickly spinning way too out of control.

It did no one any sort of good whenever Haytham Kenway found it necessary to invade one's personal space. Especially when that infuriated gaze was combined with that increasingly taciturn expression that was starting to paint the grandmaster's face. A mingling of those two, and you usually ended up dead. Or pretty solidly maimed. Likely for life. Eerie, the wolf bitch wore a similar expression, more often than not. It was bloody uncanny...

"Oi!" Hickey thundered, swatting at Dr. Jameson's arm as he slid the stitching needle into his skin, "Watch yer fuckin' hands, mate!" he hissed. Rolling his eyes, the doctor insisted that he drink himself into more of a stupor. Fucking hell, it as though half his back was on bloody fire. Finishing off the rum in one long gulp, Hickey tossed the bottle behind his uninjured shoulder, not giving a damn as it shattered across the floorboards. All that really mattered was that a fresh one inexplicably appeared in his hand within a few seconds. Good on that, then. Now he remembered why the old Doctor wasn't a complete tosser.

"Thomas," Haytham lightly said, interrupting his thoughts, "I need you to focus and remember exactly what you did with the woman in your cell, yes?"

Letting out a piercing burp, Hickey murmured, "Alrighty 'en, boss, I get ya." Dropping a hand to his lap, he began nervously rubbing it along his thigh as he quickly nodded, "So, uh, how can I go puttin' this in the sort 'o...delicate terms I need to properly convey it? Mostly so that ya don't go end up stabbin' me clean through me precious throat?"

Haytham gave a careless shrug in spite of his quietly vehement, "I would say that for once, you need to think very carefully before you speak, Thomas."

"I see, I see, I'm gettin' it," he mumbled. Pausing for a bit, Hickey swallowed before slowly beginning. "Lee put her in me cell a day 'afore I was released. Now, what crossed his addled brain to go doin' such? We ain't exactly ever been close, so I ain't one to know his motivations." Looking downwards, he saw one of Haytham's hands bunched along his cloak, his knuckle beginning to turn white. "All I did was point out to 'im that 'er being there was a waste 'o me time," Hickey swiftly continued. "Save gettin' outta her clutches when she laid into me, I kept me hands square off 'o her."

"This is all that transpired when she was there?" Haytham slowly replied, enunciating each word.

"I swear it on me mother's grave," Hickey held up a hand of surrender. Worrying his lip with his teeth, he exhaled, "I admit I be a lot 'o unsavory things, Haytham," he shrugged. "But I don't go about takin' to me bed what ain't given to me freely, catch me drift? I ain't all unseemly like that."
Admittedly, it was true. Hickey had zero qualms when it came to thieving, spying and being generally conniving. He whored and drank as though his life depended on it. He never flinched at having to kill for the sake of carrying out a mission. But physical violation and unnecessary savagery had never been a charge leveled against him. Nor was he apt to deceive, at least not when it came to staying in line with the Order. In spite of his coarse demeanor and tendency towards the wanton, he'd proven thoroughly dependable. Well, save getting caught for counterfeiting this time. Then again, his own daughter was more to blame for that muck up. So he had no reason to disbelieve him.

"I will speak to Charles," Haytham replied, "And you shall come to see that it was all a misunderstanding."

"Humph," Hickey sneered, "A likely story," he slurred. A few moments later and he lost consciousness. Dr. Jameson assured Haytham that the boy would recover, assuming a few day's rest and infection didn't set in.

Leaving the doctor to it, Haytham allowed his mind to wander. Salvaging today's ruined plans would prove rather simple. It was the new challenge ahead of him that would require a more nuanced touch. Mostly, how best to make his apparent daughter see the error of her ways. Without a doubt, he'd many regrets in his life so far. But allowing the last of the Kenway line slip through his fingers so easily was most certainly not going to be one them. Not so long as he still drew breath.

Chapter End Notes

"Johnson’s pretty ‘lil widow, Miss Molly, be full native. I ain’t never had no problem with ‘er, yeah? Charles’ bit ‘o forest fruit from all those years back was a right lovely lass, rest ‘er soul."

The first part of Hickey's ramblings refers to William Johnson's common-law wife/consort, Molly Brandt, (c.1736 – April 16, 1796). She was also known as Mary Brant, Konwatsi'tsiaieni ("Someone Lends Her a Flower"), and Degonwadonti. A Mohawk woman, she was born either in the village of Canajoharie or in another village in the Ohio Country. She was also the sister of Joseph Brandt, a famous Mohawk chieftain. Joseph was a loyalist who led Iroquois against the Patriots after July 1777, when the Six Nations council decided to abandon their neutrality and side with the British. Most of Joseph's battles against the Patriots were carried out in New York, during the Northern Campaign.

Starting in September 1759, Molly bore William Johnson nine children. Eight of them survived to adulthood. Accepted by society as his wife, Molly was a legendary figure who ran his household and acted as hostess for various society functions. She also helped him maintain relations with the Mohawk and other members of the Iroquois Confederation, along with her brother. Molly was living with William Johnson at Johnson Hall when he died in July 1774. Upon his death, while his oldest son inherited Johnson Hall, Johnson left land, money and slaves to Molly, who moved back to her village, Canajoharie. There, she and her children prospered as traders and they sided with British during the Revolutionary war.

After the Revolutionary War, Joseph, his sister Molly, her children with William
Johnson, and the majority of the remaining Mohawks and other members of Iroquois Confederation, moved to the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario, Canada. Still in existence to this day, it is the only reserve in North America where the six nations of the Iroquois, the Mohawk, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca and Tuscarora, live together. Molly Brandt was compensated for her losses during the war by the British. At the same time, the United States even offered to pay her to return to the Mohawk Valley in New York, due to her influence over the Iroquois. However, she refused, remaining in Canada.

The second part of Hickey’s ramblings refer to Charles Lee. Historically, sometime after 1755, Lee married a Mohawk woman who was the daughter of a chieftain. While her name has been lost to history, she bore him twin sons. Their names and fates have also been lost to history as well. As in the game, Lee was known to the Mohawks as Ounewaterika, or "Boiling Water."
Late Autumn, 1776: Boston

George McCready screamed as his head slammed into his dining room table. His grunt was swiftly cut off as he was hauled upwards by his attacker and then hurled to floor. A kick to his ribs sent another scream bubbling up from his throat. The sound of bone cracking reverberating in ears, tears sprung to his eyes. Clutching his arms around himself, he curled into a fetal position to protect his newly broken ribs as a shadow fell across his crumbled form.

“No,” the heavily accented, German voice rumbled above him, “I would prefer to not ask you again, Herr McCready. If you would be so kind as to tell me where you keep the funds you have pilfered from the General?”

Letting out a hacking cough, George rocked back and forth along the carpeted floor. Swallowing back his sobs, his hazy gaze snapped to his blood spattering the pale carpet as he struggled to speak. A distant part of his brain dwelled on how annoyed his wife would be at having to scrub out the stains. Assuming he lived through this, of course. Caroline was always exceedingly particular about keeping a clean abode.

Before he could respond, a rough hand snatched him by the shoulders and yanked him to his feet. A leather-clad backhand loosening a couple of his teeth, it sent one of them flying from his mouth. Before he could collect himself or send out a howl of pain, he was dropped into a chair.

Whimpering, he could barely hear the other man murmur, “Come now, you have wasted enough of my time. All I require is that you confess to your crimes, ja?”

Running a shaky, sweaty hand through his thinning, light brown hair, George shivered. His slim frame shook and nearly sent him crashing to the floor. If not for his tormentor dropping a heavy hand to his arm and keeping him in place, he would’ve slid out of his seat. Mouth swimming with blood, he spat it out onto the carpet before whispering, “I-I told you…I barely took b-b-but a few pounds from the G-General’s…convoys! Besides, w-why would he send a soldier to question…me?”

The other man let out a loud sigh as he withdrew his dagger from his boot. George’s eyes went wide as he deftly twirled it about his meaty fingers. Taking in the soldier’s brightly polished, black dragoon boots, tan breeches and dark brown infantry coat with its black embellishment, he appeared every inch the infantryman. It was made all the more so by his glossy, black fusilier cap and exquisitely crafted leather holster. Save the black Templar cross embroidered along the right thigh of his breeches, there was nothing out of the ordinary about him. Features only slightly angular, his face could easily be lost in a crowd.

It made his grim work all the easy. A forgettable visage, a soldier in a time of war within an occupied
land, and few would remember him.

“I shall ask you only one more time, Herr McCready-”

“I said I don’t…have…the funds! FUUUUUCK!” George screeched in agony as the dagger plunged into his thigh. Legs shaking as his hands vainly clutched at the weapon, his eyes rolled back into his head as his wails echoed off the wood-paneled walls.

Snatching a cloth napkin from the table, the soldier efficiently stuffed it into George’s gasping mouth. Muffling his screams, he pulled up a chair and gracefully took a seat. Patiently waiting until George’s cries quieted to hiccupping groans of anguish, he tilted his head to the side contemplatively. “Come now,” he snapped his fingers in front of George’s bleary, red eyes, “Focus my good man. Focus, and I shall be done with you shortly.”

Spitting out the napkin along with his other cracked tooth, George looked up unsteadily. Blood poured from his mouth and dribbled down his dark green waistcoat and white tunic. It only served to make it all the more difficult to form words. “Y-you are a monster!” he bleated.

“I am a grenadier,” the soldier shrugged, “My calling is war, my duties to my master and to the Order. A pity the same cannot be said for you.”

George let out a hysterical laugh, the sound high and manic. “What do you know of order?” he mocked, “Of civilization? You, who torture a man for a mere bit of coin! Your f-fellow Templar, no less!”

Rather than appearing incensed or insulted, the soldier only slowly shook his head in mild disagreement. “I do not steal valuable funds from those who employ me. Yet, you skim profits from General Davenport’s convoys. Meanwhile? You withhold food and supplies from the men who fight for these lands.”

“M-men who have no right to rule,” George struggled to hold up his head. Rapidly blinking back a surge of pain, he wheezed, “Men who use our homes from quarters...a-and kill our boys for sport!”

“My poor, poor, misguided soul,” the soldier lightly patted Edward’s cheek. Dropping down, he picked up the napkin and hastily shoved it back into George’s mouth. As the other man begged for mercy through his make-shift gag, his hands desperately clawing at the soldier who utterly ignored him, the soldier reached down for his dagger. Without hesitation, he slowly began twisting it. The rip of flesh sent George keening, tears spilling down his blotchy face as the blade was turned a quarter of the way.

Waiting again until George’s screams dropped to pitched whines, the soldier pulled the gag from his mouth and asked again, “Where are the funds, Herr, McCready?”

Rocking back and forth for a long while, George moaned, his breath hitching every few seconds. “M-my wife,” he pleaded, “P-please…my child-

“I am a patient man,” the soldier murmured, “But even I have my limits.”

“Go…go to hell!” George hissed.

“I guarantee that you shall arrive first,” the soldier shrugged, thoroughly nonplussed.
Without further ado, he yanked the dagger out of George’s thigh and promptly plunged it into his chest. Gaze widening, George’s lips twisted into a ghastly expression. His body spasmed and shuddered grotesquely once, twice and finally a third time. Within a few moments, the color fell from is freckled cheeks and he exhaled his final breath. Sightless, blue eyes stared fixed on the ceiling as he slumped down in the chair.

“My, what a mess,” the soldier clucked his tongue with reproach as he retrieved his knife. Picking up the napkin, he cleaned his blade and sheathed it before he rose to his feet.

A shot rang out, the bullet suddenly lodging in his shoulder. Letting out surprised grunt, he stumbled forward, wincing at the impact. Gritting his teeth, he closed his eyes to collect himself before pushing up from the table.

A second bullet whizzed past his forehead, nearly clipping him. “Shit!” a woman’s stunned voice said behind him. As the soldier pressed hand to his shoulder in an attempt to still the blood now dripping down his uniform, he could hear the frantic sounds of powder being poured. She’d have to flintlock reloaded soon.

Willing away the pain, he straightened himself and turned to face her. On the tall side, her round form was clad in a simple, dark muslin dress. Her red hair braided back in a bun, her pale cheeks were flushed as she focused on reloading. So much so that she didn’t see him cross the room within a few long strides. By the time she looked up, he was within an arm’s length. Looming over her with his muscled bulk, he stood at least a head taller than her. All terrifying, well-honed, brutal professionalism.

“You must be Frau McCready?” he asked, voice low and bored, “Caroline, I believe?” Save the way his dark eyes were slightly narrowed with admonishment, he appeared wholly impassive.

She hurled the unloaded gun at his face. It connected with his nose, cracking the bone as she fled the dining room.

Caroline was uncommonly fast. And she had the advantage of knowing the layout of her home. But the sight of her dead husband, bloodied and with a gaping hole in his chest, sent her panic clawing at her. As she finally made it to backdoor, her shaking hands yanked at its handle.

It didn’t budge. Jerking at it again, it remained frozen in place. Looking down as the tugged at it a third time, she looked back at the advancing soldier in horror at seeing her marble rolling pin stuck through the handles and solidly barring it closed.

She could only let out a terrified gasp as he abruptly snatched her by the shoulders and spun her around before slamming her back into the wall. Yet she had no time to let out any sort of exclamation as he reached up cleanly snapped her neck. It was a swift kill. Certainly far more efficient than her husband’s. Caroline’s body dropping to the floor, her heavy clothes muffled its lifeless thud.

“Who…who are you?”

The voice startled the soldier, the little boy suddenly standing at bottom of the stairs leading to the second floor. “I ask the same of you little one,” he tilted his head in question. His black eyes were savage and soulless as they swept over the auburn-haired child with distant assessment. He looked to be no older than about seven or so.

Trembling, the boy stammered, “I-I am Whitney…sir. Is that,” his eyes went wide at the sight of his
mother. Her head really shouldn’t have been turned at such a strange angle. She was nearly facing the floor despite lying splayed out upon her back. “Is that my…mama, sir?” he inquired, voice high with worried question.

“Indeed it is,” the soldier rapidly moved to his feet. His sheer size caused the boy to stumble backwards, though he did not run. Biting his lip as shock of pain arched through his injured shoulder, he glowered for a moment before his expression slid back to boredom. “Whitney, you said?” he murmured, glancing about the house and hearing no other sound indicating anyone else about. “That is such a nice name for such a nice young man,” he distractedly added.

Expression falling to relieved, the boy quickly nodded. “Aye, sir. It be me grandfather’s.”

“How interesting,” the other man carelessly shrugged.

“What is your name, if you please, sir?” the boy plaintively asked, nervously playing with his hands in front of him. "And…what happened to your nose? Is it...is it busted?"

Reaching up, the soldier pulled away his gloved hand to find blood trickling down his mouth. "Pardon me," he ordered, snapping out a pristine, starched white handkerchief from the inner pocket of his waistcoat. Staunching the blood flow, he then pressed two fingers to either side of his nasal cavity. A repulsive snap reverberated in the air. While he muttered out a curse, his nose was now realigned.

"Oh!" the boy winced, shirking away a bit, "That looks like it, uh, hurt?"

"Not particularly," the soldier snorted with a derisive curl of his lip. "In the meantime," he continued, "I am called Gerhard Vonstatten. Of the Landgraviate of Hesse-Kassel,” he clicked his heels together formally and saluted. “Though most simply call me the Hessian.”

“His-si-anne?” Whitney stumbled over the word. Expression confused, he muttered, “Hesse-Kassel? Where in heavens is that?”

“Oh, it’s most certainly not heaven, I assure you,” the soldier flatly retorted. “Across the sea, so I am quite far from home. Not that I shall be returning to it anytime soon.”

The lad’s gaze brightening, he pointed to the ship within a bottle that sat on the mantle over the fireplace. “I wish to sail the sea one day! Perhaps be the cap’n of me own ship. With my own crew and whatnot, eh?”

Shaking his head in disagreement, the soldier distantly declared. “Not all of us get our wishes. No matter how hard we try at them. For time is short, especially in your case, boy.” Without warning, he hastily unsheathed his dagger and advanced. “You should not have seen me here,” he casually professed as the child stood frozen in abject terror, “A pity that you are destined to be the last of your line. For now, there shall no one else to carry on such a lovely name, lad.”

That Whitney’s back was now to the wall made it all almost too easy. This time, there would no need for the Hessian to chase down his latest quarry.

Hidden in the long shadows cast by the storefront across the street, Haytham let out a loud exhale of dismay. The roaring fire of the McCready’s home danced in his eyes, painting the night sky vicious streaks of yellow and orange. The smell of charred wood and heated brick invading his nose, he found himself coughing a bit. Combined with the snarled sound of the flames mixing with the
panicked calls of the family’s neighbors as they vainly attempted to form a fire line, the scene proved monstrous. If it wasn’t brought under control, it would soon engulf the block. A dozen stores and townhomes would be lost, some of the buildings nearly a half-century old.

“A bloody damn shame,” Benjamin Church sighed beside him. Dressed in his usual silken finery, he would’ve cut a dashing figure. Well, save the way his powered wig sat askew upon his head, along with his feathered tricorne. He also smelled heavily of gin. Crossing his arms and bracing himself up against the wall, he arched a languid brow, “George was a git and a half, but how unfortunate-”

“Except this was no accident,” Haytham grit. Leaning back against the lamp post, his expression was grim.

“And how would you know that?” Benjamin let out a dubious chuckle.

“Regrettably, as soon as I attempted to call on him, there came screams from the house,” Haytham narrowed his eyes, "Yet when I tried the front door, there was no answer and it was barred solid.”

Gaze snapping back to the blaze, he took in the dozen or so more neighbors who’d come pouring out at the commotion. Well, he could at least give them some credit at being a bit more organized. An older woman in nothing but a nightgown, sleeping cap and robe started bellowing out orders, sending children to fetch buckets and lining people up next to a well to start passing water down the line. He couldn’t hold back a brief grin at the old battle ax’s brusque demeanor. No wonder she’d grown to such an age.

“So why didn’t you break in?” Benjamin sniffed.

“Too many people about and the building was nearly half aflame by then,” Haytham acknowledged with a shrug. “Considering this all occurred roughly ten minutes ago? That fire was deliberately set, it’s the only explanation.”

Casting him a sideways glance, Benjamin cleared his throat. “I take it that you know that McCready was skimming profits from the General Davenport’s captured convoys?”

“Of course,” Haytham shrugged. “I look over the books myself, every month. But it was a minimal amount, nothing to cut off his hand for. Surely, not worth killing him over. Certain loses are to be expected in times of war, especially when a man has a family to feed.”

Tilting his head to the side, Benjamin murmured, “So you didn’t have anything to do with,” he waved his hand in the direction of the flaming building, “That?”

Haytham blinked in surprise, balking, “As though I would murder a man’s wife and child!”

“Just the man, eh?” Benjamin sarcastically countered.

Pushing himself off the lamppost, Haytham’s dropped his hands to the sides and balled one of them into a fist. “Watch yourself, Benjamin-”

“Oh, I am, sir,” Benjamin threw up his hands in surrender. Though it looked to be more out of habit versus actual fear.

Suddenly reaching out to pick a stray piece of lint from Church’s collar, Haytham’s voice dropped. “Do not mistake me for anything but the master of our organization, Benjamin. One who will do
everything in my power to ensure it flourishes within the New World.” Without warning, he suddenly twisted the other man’s collar against his throat rough enough to cause him to gasp for air. “Yet, I find the slaying of women and children utterly distasteful. No matter who they are unlucky enough to marry or be born to. Remember that, Church,” he swiftly unhand him, “And never deign to accuse me of such monstrosities again,” he nodded at the fire. Icy blue eyes narrowing, he didn’t say a word as the other man struggled for breath.

Benjamin let out a hiss of retort, his hand clutching at his throat for a moment. His shaking hands straightening out his collar and readjusting his wig, he gulped, “You have made yourself quite clear.”

“Now,” Haytham cleared his throat, “The first thing we must do is track down General Davenport.”

“W-why him?” Benjamin snorted with derision, still catching his breath.

“Because there is only one sort of man who would kill a man’s wife and child without any sort of remorse,” Haytham worried his bottom lip with his teeth. “We know for a fact George was skimming directly from the General’s convoys.” Brow creasing in thought, he added, “Not to mention, the Commander has been getting bolder as of late with his incursions outside of Fort St. Mathieu. Perhaps it is time I have a little sit down with him. And his Hessian executioner he uses to do his bidding.”

“So you think he’s let his rabid dog off the leash?” Benjamin rolled his eyes in disbelief. By now, he stood a few feet away from the Grandmaster. His back purposefully to the brick wall, he shirked away from Haytham’s every move.

“Between McCready’s ruinous end, the near deadly attack on Padre Perez and Ms. McCarthy’s complaints about three of her informants ending up strangled in their beds since then,” Haytham pondered, drumming his fingers against his cheek in thought, “I’d say that the Hessian has been away from his master’s heels for some time.”

“Regardless, George had other enemies. Not to mention, there are the remerging foes of the Order,” Benjamin wrinkled his nose in distaste. “How do you know it wasn’t that bloody assassin bitch and her minions laying waste?” he sneered.

It took a rather large amount of self-control for Haytham to not throttle the other man. Then again, there was no way he knew of Connor’s parentage. Letting out a long sigh, he waved away Benjamin’s words. “Even at their worst, the Assassins aren’t quite so messy. As much of a nuisance as they are, they stay their blades from innocents.” Or at least I should hope my own daughter doesn’t allow such savagery among her ranks, he mused to himself. “Such is part of their asinine creed. In the meantime,” his looked back at the fire across the street. Somewhat under control, it didn’t appear to be spreading to the homes next door. “Come, we should head back to the inn.”

“Seeing that we are out of other options,” Benjamin sarcastically said, following in Haytham’s wake, “We don’t appear to have much choice.”

Within a few moments, they were gone, melting into the shadows as the fire continued to blaze across the way.

The Yellow Goose Inn was typical of its kind. Small, slightly dingy, with poor lighting and serving mediocre food and ale, it didn’t stand out in the slightest. Which made it perfect for carrying on clandestine conversations. Upstairs were the usual rooms set aside for overnight stays. Downstairs
was the bar and dining area. Behind the counter was an elderly couple and their teenage son. Thankfully, the freckle-faced, blonde-haired youth had recently gone through a growth spurt. Built of solid muscle and quite tall, his mere presence kept more of the drunken customers at bay. Frequent by Patriot soldiers, the inn’s prices were inordinately high due to their tendency to freely spend coin.

Originally, Haytham only planned to stay the night. But with George and his family now dead, he had bigger fish to fry. Finding a dark corner and ordering food, he and Benjamin ensured they were served without further interruption by tipping the innkeep’s son a couple of pounds.

“Weren’t you under house arrest?” Haytham questioned. “Or have you finally come to some agreement about acquiring those supplies for General von Steuben? If so, I’m sure it’ll go a long ways towards getting back into the Congress’ good graces after your little cipher to the British was intercepted,” he pointed out.

Pounding an angry fist on the table that caused their plates to jump, Benjamin growled, “That letter said nothing of any troops or any pertinent information concerning the Patriots! I’ve told you this repeatedly!” he snapped, “And yet you and others insist I am traitor of the highest order!”

Arching a brow, Haytham help up a hand, “Peace, Benjamin. I am not insinuating anything of the sort.” Pouting, Benjamin shook his head in disagreement. Leaning back in his chair, he churlishly waved for Haytham to continue. “I just simply pointed out that your fortunes appear to be reversing, what with the fact that you are now able to apparently move about the city without a guard,” Haytham continued.

“So long as I don’t leave the confines of it,” Benjamin groused. “As for the supplies, as much as I wish to reiterate my innocence to the blasted Congress, they will be wasted on the likes of that lot,” he threw up a hand.

“From what I understand, General von Stueben is Prussian-trained,” Haytham replied with curiosity, “They are some of the most talented troops in Europe.”

“What, and you truly think that even he will prove able to drill a modicum of discipline into the Continentals?” Benjamin sniffed in disdain, “An army of drunks, backwoods farmers, fur traders and shopkeepers?” Leaning over in laughter, he slapped the table in glee. “Oh, Haytham,” he wiped a tear from his eye, ignoring the other man’s scoff, “Whenever did you, of all people, become the perennial optimist?”

“Again, you mistake me, Benjamin,” Haytham pressed his lips together into a thin line of irritation, “Or my motivations,” he slowly added. Quickly finishing off his ale, he pushed away his plate of finished food off to the side. “Now, what to do about General Davenport? Do we have any assets we may call upon within the vicinity of Fort St. Mathieu? Considering it is his base of operations, it should be the first place we consider seeking him.”

Thinking for moment, Benjamin snorted, “I believe that Thomas is stationed in the general area now. Guarding convoys and what not after he was recalled back to the Connecticut militia.”

“The boy is lucky was wasn’t dishonorably discharged,” Haytham sniffed.

“After that disaster with Washington a few months back? And how many pockets did you have to line to ensure he never made it to trial for attempting to kill the general after the assassin miraculously escaped the noose?” Benjamin drunkenly chortled, gesturing for another tankard. Waiting until the
innkeep’s son left again, he added with a snicker, “I hope the drunken little shit was worth it,” he guffawed.

“Well, he’s never had his loyalty to me called into question, now has he?” Haytham rejoined with dangerous glint in his eye.

“Despite that he was nearly ruined by his sloppy actions against Washington?” Benjamin smirked. “Fortune smiles on that one, so it seems.”

“Above all, he is loyal to the Order first,” Haytham warned, “‘Tis all the supposed fortune one requires.”

“No matter that we’ve a murderous Hessian on our payroll that been loosened onto the world?” Benjamin brayed, “Which is how we find ourselves in our current situation, eh?”

“Which is why Thomas will come in handy in getting us out of it,” Haytham rolled his eyes.

Honestly, Church was beginning to get rather tiresome. Between his constant complaints about the direction of the Order, his increasing drunkenness and how poorly his end of the smuggling business had gone since his arrest for treason, he was well on the road towards being far more trouble than he was worth. And that was excluding the more troubling aspects of the accusations against him. His supposed correspondence with British currently had him a practical prisoner of the city. Oh, he claimed it was only to ensure his British contacts would never doubt him, allowing him to keep hauling in his black-market goods with little trouble. But Haytham knew Church always considered himself the smartest person in the room. Alas, such hubris often caused men to make careless mistakes that could cost the Order its continued progress. Between that and his daughter’s constant attempts against them, Haytham knew he had little room for error.

Frankly, should the time come, he would have little regrets about eliminating the former surgeon general. Perhaps he could kill two birds with one stone; remove Church and convince Connor to abandon her vain pursuit, thereby replacing Church within his inner circle. No doubt, once he opened her eyes to the truth, her loyalty would have little need of questioning. How could Connor deny her own father, after all?

“Have you heard a word I’ve said?” Benjamin barked, interrupting his thoughts.

“Forgive me, it has been a long day.” Haytham made his excuses, even as he mentally envisioned the easiest way to drive the spoon next his hand straight through Church’s skull. Blood splattering all over his clothes and sending the inn into a terrified frenzy be damned...

“Clearly,” Church crossed his arms as he leaned back even further in his chair. Haytham couldn’t hold back a huff of retort as he continued, “What exactly can Thomas do from his commission out on the frontier?”

“No matter his predilections towards his baser pursuits, the man has always been rather brilliant at gathering information,” Haytham replied.

“Yet, give Hickey a decent amount coin and he’d sell his own mother into a brothel,” Church disparaged.

“Come now, he’s done nothing of the sort to elicit such an opinion,” Haytham shook his head in disagreement. Leaning forward and dropping his elbows to the table, he steepled his fingers.
“Anyway, we need to find out just how far General Davenport has fallen from our goals. From there, we may decide the next course of action. Perhaps our relationship may be saved, perhaps not. It will all hinge on how best to eliminate the Hessian, of course.”

“For all rabid animals must be put down at some point, right?” Benjamin shrugged, taking another long draught of his ale.

Nodding, Haytham continued plotting with Church. Hopefully, a solution to the current chink in the Templar’s proverbial armor could be repaired. Ideally, the sooner, the better.

While she wore her usual impassive expression, Connor’s heart thundered in her chest. Reflected in her wide, watery gaze, the blood red flames from the McCready’s home tilted and whirled in a macabre display of color. The familiar scent of burnt wood, grey ash and the distant tinge of scorched, human flesh mingled in the air.

It nearly caused her to vomit.

Closing her eyes, she willed herself slow her breathing at the all too familiar sight of fire consuming an entire household. She shivered, though not from the biting gusts of wind licking up from the ocean to the east. Logically, she knew old memories had little to do with the scene in front of her. Yet her vision swam, her fingertips numb with mounting dread as she swallowed back bile. Thankfully, she was perched relatively far from the lip of the roof and a few doors south of the blaze. So there was little danger of falling to the cobblestones, should a fainting spell take her. Still, there were the guards to be aware of…

“Duncan,” she whispered, abruptly recognizing the pattern of footsteps just to her left. Not to mention, the sound of his fingers jangling his rosary beads along his right hand.

“Miss Connor,” his soft, Irish drawl filled her ears. It proved a blessed comfort, replacing the heaving, fatal crackle of the fire licking at the house. Eyes snapping open, she jerked her head in greeting. A few years ago and she would’ve chided him for such formality, as there was no need for him to grant her that strange, colonial title of “Miss.” Now, she’d come to accept to it easily enough. He meant no insult, simply respect. Frankly, it was made all the more extraordinary considering that he now knew she was the daughter of the man who’d murdered his uncle.

Slowly moving to her feet, she held out a hand. Thankfully, it was no longer shaking. “How do you fare?”

“I may ask the same of you, Connor,” he lightly said, returning her handshake. Briefly looking her over, he arched a ginger brow, “I nearly snuck up on ya, lass.”

“Nearly,” she swallowed, “But not quite.”

“Heh,” he chuckled, “Were I a younger man, I may have succeeded.”

“Then let us be glad you are more an old man than I,” she retorted, cracking the faintest of grins.

Glancing between her and the fire beyond at her back, Duncan gave a small, knowing shrug. “Mayhap we should travel by the streets, Connor? The patrolling soldiers are far too occupied with…that,” he pointed to the flames over her shoulder, “Than two supposed civilians.”

“I agree,” she quickly shook her head. Lithely making her way to ground, she immediately turned in the opposite direction of the burning home.
Following in her wake, Duncan remained at her heels. After a few moments of silence, they crossed into the northern section of the city. Slipping into the backdoor of the tavern Duncan frequented, they headed to their usual table in the corner. Within a few moments, Duncan had his usual ale, Connor forgoing such for water. While she was a bit famished, her stomach was still twisted into knots.

“It’s all rather horrifying, God rest their souls” Duncan let out a heavy sigh, “Especially their little one, Whitney.”

Letting out a curse in her native language, Connor shook her head to clear it. To know that a child perished in the flames as well sent her reeling. “How…do we know that none of them escaped?” her voice rose a bit.

“Blending with the crowd out there,” he jerked a thumb over his shoulder, “No one saw them leave when the fire broke out. And judging by how fast the house caught, it was likely set on purpose.”

“We have tracked the McCreadys all autumn.” Biting back a groan, Connor angrily waved a hand, “Considering Mr. McCready’s employer, this is likely the work of General Matthew Davenport, I presume?”

“Aye,” Duncan solemnly frowned, dark eyes flashing with ire. “When you sent us out to scout the mystery of your missing convoys round ‘bout then end of summer, it proved surprisingly easy to discern his involvement. He’s become bolder and bolder in attacking Patriot outposts on the frontier.”

“Clipper mentioned you were both able to infiltrate his stronghold at Fort St. Mathieu?”

“With little issue,” Duncan smiled, absentmindedly running a thumb along a rosary bead. “The gent’s always had a head for simple, effective planning. He’s also got quite a talent for improvising when things go south.”

"'Go south?"' Connor asked with a hint of confusion.

"Forgive me," Duncan briefly laughed, "It's a colloquialism meaning, 'when things go bad.'"

"Hmm," she nodded, mentally adding to her English repertoire. "Anyway, he has undoubtedly flourished under your direction,” she steadily continued. She didn’t fail to notice the color that bloomed to Duncan’s cheeks.

“The boy gives me far too much credit,” Duncan nearly stammered, ducking his head and taking a long draught of ale.

“Somehow, I doubt that,” Connor assured him.

“I see,” Duncan lightly coughed. “In the meantime, you mentioned in your letter before you arrived that another one of your convoys was attacked a few weeks ago?”

"Typical Templar impudence,” Connor groused, barely able to hold back a pout.

Chuckling at her expression, Duncan reached out and gave her hand a comforting pat. Pleased to see she didn’t flinch, he agreed, “No doubt. Combined with the fact that Mrs. McCready was nearly there as far as trusting me with the full details of her husband’s involvement with Templars, I can only assume he caught wind of the family’s possible defection.”

“Surely not from our end?” Connor croaked in alarm, eyebrows shooting upwards.

“Clipper and I were absolutely mum,” Duncan raised a hand of reassurance.
Lips pressed together into a thin line, she closed her eyes for a moment. Hunching down and pulling her hood closer about her head, she crossed her arms in frustration before replying, “I know you both were. You have always been the paragons of silence. As has Stephane.”

Duncan nodded in agreement as he took a sip of his ale, “He was our proverbial ‘in’ to the McCready’s, considering the family frequented the inn where he works in the kitchen. Hence, how I was able to make her acquaintance,” Duncan affirmed.

“Of course,” Connor replied.

“I purposely wandered about the market just down the block from Stephane’s. It took ‘bout a month or so, but she and George eventually had me over for dinner every week or so.” Withdrawing a bit, Duncan pulled a small, red, leather-bound notebook from his robes. Sliding it across the table, he smirked, “Snooping around the house every time I crossed the threshold, I was able to copy roughly three-quarters of his log book from his study.”

Eyes widening, Connor reached out and snatched it. Flipping through the pages, she immediately realized that George McCready certainly valued details. Dating back a couple of years, there were logs of transports and bribes, as well as exactly how much he apparently skimmed. Surprisingly, his embezzlement was minimal. Surely not enough to murder an entire family over.

Bloody Templar brutes.

After a long while, Connor leaned forward and declared, “It looks as though my next journey shall be to the Fort, then.”

“You’ve no wish for Clipper and me to carry this out?” he swiftly asked.

Glancing down at where the rosary was wrapped around Duncan’s wrist, Connor let a grin slip to her face. “How long until he returns from Trenton on his current mission?” she casually asked.

“He’s due in less than week,” Duncan summarily said, twisting the beads through his fingers.

“And so you keep him in your prayers?” Connor nodded in understanding.

Staring at her for a bit, Duncan let out a pent up sigh and shifted in his seat a bit, “It is the least I may do for…a dear friend.

“We all hope for his safe return. He will acquit himself with aplomb, I am sure,” Connor dipped her head in agreement. “However, between his current assignment and Stephane’s present undertaking in the Carolinas to train Jacob Zenger, I need your eyes and ears attuned to the city for any new developments. Thus, I believe it is best if I pursue General Davenport on the Frontier.”

“As you wish,” Duncan waved. “Though as much as you believe you don’t need to hear it, do be careful Connor.”

“You need not worry yourself,” she shyly replied, glancing away for a moment. “But,” she began drumming her fingers along the aged table, “I assure you that I am grateful for your concern.”

Connor’s stomach finally settling, she joined Duncan for dinner. Planning her journey and reviewing their intel, the two talked deep into the night. It was nearly one in the morning by the time they retired to their rented rooms upstairs.

Soon, General Davenport would find that the Assassins were no longer mere myth, but rather, a force to be reckoned with.
General Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, September 17, 1730 – November 28, 1794 – was a Prussian general and ally of the Continental army during the Revolutionary War. One of the father’s of the Continental army, he helped train and drill the Patriot troops the essentials of military drills, tactics, and disciplines. He wrote the Revolutionary War Drill Manual, which became the standard for American troops until the War of 1812.

“…after your little cipher to the British was intercepted?” - In July 1775, Benjamin Church sent an encoded letter to a British Officer in Boston called Major Cane through a former mistress. The letter was intercepted by her lover and then sent to George Washington by September. While the letter didn’t give away much pertinent information about the Continental forces, Church did state his devotion to the Crown and asked for further instructions on where to send further correspondence. By November, the Continental Congress expelled Church, removed him from his position as Surgeon General, and placed him under house arrest in Norwich, Connecticut. By May 1776, he was moved to Boston, where he remained imprisoned until 1778.
The Enemy of My Enemy...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

And you feel like you feelin' now,
And doin' things just to please your crowd.
When I love you like the way I love you,
And I suffer, but I ain't gonna cut you 'cause,

This ain't no place for no hero.

--Short Change Hero, The Heavy

Late Fall, 1776: The Frontier

It was far too fucking cold out.

Sure, it was slightly too warm for the occasional snow flurry to make it to the ground. Yet the biting chill of the wind still sliced through Thomas’ layers of clothes. Forcing him to hunch down on his horse, he was thankful for thick, woolen, navy blue scarf wrapped about his neck. Sent over from London by way of his youngest sister, it proved highly useful. Also, unlike the handful of gormless sods marching beside him, he was mounted. The horse taken from a redcoat officer they’d killed when they stumbled upon a British patrol a couple of days ago, it almost made the engagement worth it. Having first pick of war loot, he immediately went for the black gelding. It was, of course, the better of the two horses that remained. Such privileges were some of the few advantages he retained as the highest ranking officer of the current troop.

After the debacle with Washington, while he never went to trial, the cloud of suspicion tainted him like the stench of a day-old corpse. So Thomas wasn’t surprised he’d been relieved of his duties within the General’s Life Guard. In their supposed show of mercy, they allowed him to return to the Connecticut militia. At least the bloody dipshits hadn’t completely stripped him of his commission. Still, the fall from a Colonel down to a Major proved a solid shit show. Then again, he’d avoided a potential appointment with the hangman. Admittedly, Haytham had always been pretty dependable at patching over these sorts of things.

But now, he was essentially banished to guard duty on the frontier. The majority of his time spent escorting convoys, he swiftly deemed it a thoroughly unpleasant undertaking. His reduced pay barely made up for being able to skim supplies. A pity he couldn’t do it with this batch. Full of bandages, an array of medicines, finely knit blankets, bear and beaver pelts and casks of liquor, it was easily worth over 15,000 pounds. Unfortunately, he’d heard far too many stories about their mysterious owner’s reputation for keeping a persistent eye on every cent of cargo he sent overland.

“Fuckin’ hell,” Thomas hissed as the flurries began turning into falling snow.

Well, at least the trail cutting through this part of the woods offered some protection. Mostly due to the shade of ancient trees overhead. However, that blessing could swiftly turn into a curse. For one, the dense woods that were perfect for an ambush from redcoats. Secondly, the escort patrolled a bit too close to Fort St. Mathieu for his liking. No matter that it remained under command of a Templar. Having received word from Haytham a few days ago, he now knew that the General Davenport was
suspected overstepping his bounds. So Thomas instantly realized that he could not only be dealing with a shit ton of lobsterbacks at his heels, but likely also a turncoat to the Order.

No wonder his fucking senses were set on edge. After all, he hadn’t survived over twenty years in the army to not trust his intuition.

“You look peaked, *mon ami,*” Captain Moreau drawled, riding on his grey mare next to him. His rolling French accent cutting through the frigid air, it contained his usual combination of amusement and condescension.

“Shut ya dirty trap, Cap’n. Unless you be wantin’ me cut ya tongue out?” Thomas sent him a violent sneer of exasperation. Rubbing his hands together and flexing his cold fingers within his leather gloves (also from his sister, bless Caitlyn’s stylishly pragmatic heart), he added, “I’m a thinkin’ on things. Don’t much like how silent it be.”

That was another thing; the litany forest noise that usually accompanied them remained eerily silent. The howl of the wolves, the twittering of the birds, the rolling grunts of moose and deer fighting and fucking. Hell, even the crackling tingle of the snow shifting and clumping together seemed to disappear. The sun beginning to dip below the horizon and painting the sky dusky mauve and azure signaled the nearing twilight as well. As perfect a time as any for the Brits to waylay the lot of them.

The rotund blonde shooting him an initial look of disbelief, Captain Moreau settled for a smirk. Giving Thomas a haphazard salute, he lazily replied, “As you wish, *Major.*” Spurring his horse forward, he rode to the front of the column. That left four men on foot near the rear with Thomas. Two more trotted ahead on their mounts, leaving the last seven soldiers marching at the front. The troop totaled 14.

*That Froggy fuck,* Thomas snapped to himself. Yet for all of Moreau’s constant disdain, he at least drilled discipline into the troop of the infantrymen. It certainly made his own job that much easier…

A volley of shots abruptly rang out, causing him the instinctively duck. Hearing the addled scream of the man marching beside him, he jerked his head downwards just in time to witness the unfortunate bastard drop his kit and clutch at his thigh. Combined with the smell of smoke wrenching at his nose and Captain Moreau’s voice snarling for the men to hold the line, any idiot could tell they were under attack.

“Steady on, hold fast!” Thomas roared, unsheathing his sword and flintlock, “Take no quarter and give none, ya fiends!”

Eyes shifting and taking in the scene with ease, he could make out that the fight began forward of their column and just to left. Which meant the troop still had the solid barricade of the wagons between them and the redcoats. Admittedly, the bastards got the drop on them. But judging by the ear-splitting sound of another cluster of shots being fired, they weren’t quite upon them yet. Spotting a redcoat yards ahead of them and dashing to his right, he sniffed, led his target and squeezed the trigger. The lobcock dropped with a squeal. One of the Patriot infantryman on horseback galloped by and stabbed downwards, presumably finishing him off.

Without warning, Thomas suddenly felt his the haunches of his mount shudder and seize beneath his thighs. The animal let out a blood curdling screech, its eyes and wild and white as it stumbled forward. Careening to the side, it nearly threw him from his saddle. But years of field experience taught him what to expect when one had his horse shot out from under him. Slipping backwards and leaping clear of the animal, he nimbly avoided being crushed as it hit the ground.
He nearly fell over the injured Patriot with a bullet in his thigh. Thankfully, the soldier had collapsed behind his downed horse. At least it gave them a proper barricade. Crouching, Thomas’ hands went to the other man’s sash. Roughly stripping the soldier of it, he looped around his thigh, tightening it and ignoring the soldier’s screams of agony. Swiping his handkerchief from a pocket, he stuffed it into the Patriot’s mouth, effectively muffling his shrieks. “Better than bleedin’ out,” he snorted, “Now, shut yer yap and ya may survive this.” Not that he gave a shit, but their outpost was running thin on men. Fewer casualties meant more able bodies and in turn, less work for him.

His horse still letting out baleful whinnies, it nearly shattered his ankle with its panicked kicks. Jerking and trembling, its massive body heaved as it vainly tried to drag itself away. It was a lost cause, better to put the poor animal out of its misery. Doing so with a single shot from his second flintlock, Thomas reloaded and marched closer to the front of the column.

Jesus Christ, it was plonking freezing. So much so, that when he attempted to draw his sword and run it through the lobsterback grenadier hauling ass towards him while expertly swinging a heavy ax, it jammed, frosted within its sheath.

What a proper bit of shitty luck.

Thankfully, he’d just reloaded, allowing him to aim square. The bullet did its job, tearing through officer’s throat. He dropped like a bag of bricks. Stooping down and stepping on the body to anchor it, Hickey yanked the corpse’s sabre from its gold and leather scabbard. Making a mental note to loot it later, he tested the weapon’s weight. Finding it would do for now, he spun on his heel to engage another British infantryman.

Within roughly ten minutes, it was maddeningly obvious that they were surrounded. Casting his gaze about the snowy pathway and the woods lining either side of it, he let out a curse. There were outnumbered nearly two to one. Down to seven men out of twelve, one of them was hemmed against a tree, another soldier stumbling forward as a redcoat viciously brought down his dagger into his back. Spectacular, now his troop contained but half. The bloody Brits were quickly realizing it too, their commander bellowing orders to rush the wagons again.

Oh, bollocks, he was not in the fucking mood to breathe his last today. Definitely not in this godforsaken, frozen nightmare of a wasteland.

“Christ on a cracker, ya tosser,” Thomas muttered, snatching up a loaded pistol from a Patriot’s corpse. Squinting, he fired a shot at the British soldier who was about to eviscerate the git by tree. It struck him in the lower back, causing him stumble backwards with a howl of agony. Stalking over, he ignored the Patriot boy’s stammer of thanks, dropping to a knee and focusing on pistol whipping the redcoat until he gurgled up blood. A final blow, and the telltale crack of his skull splitting signaled he’d finished the job.

“Major Hickey,” the green boy stammered, shakily wiping his brow and forcing his gaze away from the redcoat’s bludgeoned face, “Ya…ya saved me life-”

“Best be on yer guard from ‘ere on out,” Thomas snarled at the little bastard, “And don’t go makin’ me do it a second time, you fuckin’ dunce. Here,” he tossed him the bloodied pistol, “Reload that and get to the wagons. Assumin’ ya can manage it, ya lobcock,” he derisively snorted. Palming a dagger, a pouch of gunpowder and bag of bullets from the body beneath him, he kicked the dead redcoat away.
The other five surviving members of their party, including Captain Moreau, had planted themselves behind the trio of wagons. At least they contained modicum of sense. They’d managed to retain seven muskets and a few pistols between them. As three fired, the remaining reloaded, speedily passing a succession of weapons back and forth between them.

Shoving the Patriot soldier forward, Thomas again snapped out an order to assist the others at the wagons. Mind reeling for a solution, he raced towards their make-shift barricade. Peeking around a corner only caused him to let out a huff of irritation as a bullet whizzed way too god-damned close to his nose. From what he could gather, the lobsterbacks were down to seven. Better odds, sure. But still too fucking many for his liking.

Backing up and reloading, he raised his flintlock to fire. That was until he abruptly felt the cold, steel point of a bayonet unexpectedly pressed to the base of his skull.

“Bad idea, old chum,” a whiny, irritatingly refined voice sneered behind him. “Lower your weapon, you pillock,” the redcoat continued, “And tell your men to do the same.”

Well, shit on a stick, he’d been outflanked. He despised being out of options. Which was why contingencies were always of the utmost importance.

“Alrighty then, boy-o, don’t get too trigger happy, eh?” Thomas brightly replied. Slowly leaning down, he placed his weapon on the ground and shoved it away. “You be in luck, me good man,” he chortled, “For I ain’t in no mood to die today. I’m fuckin’ sure you ain’t either, yeah? I mean, who wants to find they selves proverbially shittin’ the bed out here in this god-damned wilderness?” His fingers slowly inching upwards as he moved back to his feet, they found their way to the top of his boot. Along with the trusty throwing knife sheathed within. “All I find me self carin’ about nowadays be enough coin to get me by. I be a simple sort, ya see?” he purposely babbled on. “Me needs go ‘n get met, so long as I can go buyin’ a beer ‘n a woman-”

“Shut your bloody mouth, you son of a whore,” the redcoat snapped, clicking back the hammer on his musket.

Sighing, Thomas shook his head in disagreement. Still halfway crouched, he retorted, “See, that be ya soddin’ problem, lobsterback. Ya always too busy insultin’ ‘n bitchin’ at your alleged lessers to see what’s right in front of your eyes.”

“Sod off, you traitorous piece of shi-“

Shoving backwards and elbowing the redcoat off balance, Thomas instantly spun about and stabbed upwards with lethal competence. Regrettably, he punched nothing but air.

*The bloody hell?!!*

The soldier had gone up and disappeared, now nowhere to be found. Hastily looking about, Thomas gaped, genuinely aghast. Spinning around so he couldn’t be ambushed again, he saw the Patriots remained fortified behind the wagons, still firing and holding off their enemies. Evidently, not one of them seemed to notice his previous distress.

“What in the fuckin’-?!”

Without warning, the sounds of someone gagging and squirming above him hit his ears. Hand flying to his filched sabre, he halted, gaze shooting upwards.
Oh.

Holy.

Shit.

The redcoat who evidently had him at the end of the musket but a few seconds ago now dangled in the air, roughly fifteen feet from the ground. The other end of the rope hanging him was looped around a heavy branch. Staked securely into the ground and at an angle to the tree, there was no escape. Hands vainly clawing at the rope garroted about his neck, the redcoat’s legs kicked and spasmed in hideous rhythm. Eyes bulging, blood poured from his mouth. But that wasn’t even the worst part of it. Somehow, a large, barbed, iron dart was shoved clean through him, exiting just above his sternum.

Thomas had witnessed a whole lot of gruesome antics in his time. But he’d certainly never been privy to this sort of brutal efficiency. It was positively…inventive, if a little on the side of sheer overkill.

A blur of white suddenly sailed past him, right along the canopy of trees and just out the corner of his left eye. Before he could react, it dropped to the other side of the wagons the Continentals continued to defend. Within a few seconds, the sound of steel ringing on steel drifted back towards him.

“Fancy that,” he slowly said to himself. Glancing up again, he grit his teeth at the sight of the redcoat reduced to nothing but a swinging, bloodied corpse. “Yup...yeah,” he shakily exhaled, tearing his gaze away from the grisly sight, “Better go ‘n check it all out,” he muttered. Jogging up the road, he arched a curious brow at finding the Patriot soldiers no longer behind the wagons. Nonetheless, the sounds of fighting still carried on.

Scooting from around a wagon, he engaged a redcoat preoccupied with reloading his pistol. Running him through from behind, he kicked him off his sabre with a grunt before twisting about to duck a punch from another redcoat behind him. Smashing his forehead into the other man’s, Thomas parried his enemy’s dagger as he tried to gut him. Using the opening, he sliced upwards only to yank his blade down at a grisly diagonal. It carved clean through, from ribs to navel. Screaming as his guts spilled out, the redcoat’s whimpers died within the matter of seconds to a final gasp.

Swiveling around, Thomas saw the white-clad ghost of the forest finish off another redcoat by drawing his dagger across his jugular. Shoving back a second redcoat’s punch, he sent his foot flying into his stomach, only to brutally knee him in the chin. It sent the redcoat to the ground, a bloody mess of flailing limbs. A running kick to the head finished the job. However, the hooded figure didn’t notice the final lobsterback aiming head-on at his back with his flintlock.

“Shot behind ya, mate!” he bellowed.

His apparent ally fluidly ducked and twirled around. A flash of silver flew from his hand at the same time the shot rang out. Flinching, Thomas narrowed his eyes as the two froze.

The redcoat wheezed, staggered backwards and then promptly collapsed onto the grass. Three throwing knives protruding from his chest indicated his obvious demise. Yet his bullet must have gone wide, for the other man appeared no worse for wear. Rolling his head and cracking his neck for a bit, he strolled over and began collecting his weapons. For the rest of the redcoats were dead.

After ordering Captain Moreau to direct the remaining troops to check for any injured, loot the
bodies of the enemy and get the wagons ready to move, Thomas took in the hooded stranger for the first time. Strange, now that he was closer, despite the height, it was rather obvious that this was no man. Not judging by the natural sway of those hips. Nor, the touch of those tits along her front. Interesting, that.

Swaggering over, his thoughts were already cooking up all sorts of ways to show cunning lass his appreciation. Preferably, with him between her legs and her desperately panting out his name. Ideally, repeatedly. “Good’en,” he chuckled, nodding to the remaining Patriot soldiers as he dropped a heavy hand to her shoulder, “Ya helped saved their arses, darlin’.”

Caught completely off guard as the woman rudely shoved off is hand, he let out a yap of surprise as she twisted about to face him. He’d recognize that mouth and smattering of freckles across her cheeks anywhere. Those devilishly dark eyes were also a dead giveaway. Not to mention, her patented sneer of contempt as she caught him in her stunned gaze.

“Motherfuckin’ Connor?!?”

Yep, judging by how she immediately clocked a punch to his gut that sent him doubling over, the little psychotic knew exactly who he was as well, god-damnit.

Connor appreciated the shouted alert regarding the redcoat about to shoot her in the back. Ducking and spinning about, she sent three throwing knives into him just as he fired the shot. Thankfully, the bullet sailed right over her head. With that, the last of the British were dealt with. Her convoy protected, she had little complaint.

Gathering up her weapons, she heard someone approach just to her right. And like all colonists, the soldier saw fit to immediately touch her with a heavy hand. Why they insisted on such rudeness was beyond her. Instinctively jerking herself away from him, she was about to let out a huff of reproach. That was until she heard the tell-tale, smug accent ringing in her ears.

“Good’en,” he chuckled, “Ya helped saved their asses, darlin’.”

Thomas Hickey?!

He should’ve been dead! Or at the very least, locked up and awaiting trial? Yet, here he was. Smirking with his usual cockiness, his lewd gaze openly raked up and down her figure. But she had far more important concerns besides that. Such as how he was likely attempting to skim supplies from her convoy.

“Motherfuckin’ Connor?!?”

Her fist hit true, connecting with his solar plexus. The air knocked out of him with a sharp grunt and causing him to double over, a sweep of her leg, a boot to his shin and a steady shove to his shoulder sent him splayed to his back. Dropping and effectively straddling him, she trapped his hands beneath her knees on either side of his hips as she swiftly glanced around. They had no audience, the remaining Patriot soldiers preoccupied with the clean-up. It gave her a small window of time. Thankfully, the two of them were on the edge of carnage and decently hidden by a tall grove of grass. Moreover, the setting sun lent additional darkness.

“Aye, the bitch be back, I see,” Hickey wheezed beneath her, eyes squeezed tight for a moment while he gulped down a few ragged breaths. “What, huntin’ men finally bore ya to bits? Ya finally
decide to take yer rightful place, ‘ere in the wild ‘n layin’ with a wolf pack out on the Frontier? *Figures-*

“I should have killed you when I had the chance!” Connor growled.

“Last I checked, it be a criminal offense to strike an officer of the Continentals, sweetheart,” he casually retorted.

“Yet, dead men tell no tales,” she retorted, the snap of her hidden blade reverberating in the air and far too close to his ear.

“Fuck you!” he spat, eyes narrowed to slits, “I ain’t done nothin’ wrong!”

“Except you are a Templar,” she snarled, leaning over him and solidly bracing her forearm against his throat. Her words dancing along his chin, he could feel her hiss, “And likely stealing supplies from *my* supply train!”

“The hell ya getting’ yer knickers in a twist for, girl?!” Hickey sneered despite how she limited his airflow with her arm against his neck. “Besides, that convoy be holdin’ a king’s ransom worth ‘o goods. How in God’s name did ya manage to get yer hands on all that precious loot?!”

“That is none of your concern!” she snorted. “Why are you escorting my goods?!”

“‘Cause I be followin’ orders from me army superiors, princess!” he bellowed, jerking his hips upwards in a vain attempt to dislodge her. Rewarded with a slash of pain ricocheting up his arms as she purposely dug her knees into his wrists again, he stilled, even as he jeered, “I ain’t laid a soddin’ finger on yer blasted supplies! And it ain’t like I picked *your* specific convoy-”

“A likely tale-”

“It be the only tale!” he cut her off, “So ya can get right the fuck ov’er yer self already, ya dodgy bint!”

Curling her lip in derision, she grit her teeth before answering, “Do you truly think me so dense? That it is merely sheer coincidence *your* patrol happens to be but a dozen or so miles from Fort. St. Mathieu?”

“Who said jack shit ‘bout the Fort?” he rejoined, “And so what if I got me a mission there? Them redcoats been killin’ me men left ‘n right all damned summer ‘n through the fall. Me commander be aimin’ to take it right soon-”

“Thereby allowing you to stab him in the back and betray the Patriots to the British?” she archly questioned. While she’d loosened her arm across his throat, her blade now pressed against his chin. “Typical Templar greed and deceit,” she uttered.

He couldn’t hold back a braying laugh at her words. All in spite nearly having his throat slit open by the proximity of her blade. This naïve, little chit…‘Look ‘ere, ya moronic, ‘lil-”

“Major Hickey!” one of the Patriots called out, some yards away from them, “Allo, Major? Jesus, mate, where the hell is he-?”

It proved the distraction he needed, her head whipping towards the direction of noise. Her shifting weight allowed him jerk his shoulder upwards while shoving his knee beneath her bottom. She faltered and slipped forward, dropping flush on top of him. One of her knees shifted as well, freeing his wrist. Wrenching his arm from his side, his large palm shoved her head away while scrambling to
grab at her neck. While she was fast, it was a hair's breath too slow to spring to her feet. Yet she didn’t allow his attempts to choke her. Throwing herself to the side, she snatched out and grabbed him by the shoulders. Since he was already in the process of squirming out from under her, the re-dispersal of their combined mass only caused them to suddenly go careening down the hill.

Exchanging slaps, scratching, punching, legs flailing, and getting in an occasional elbow here and there, they fought for dominance as they rolled. Her skills allowed her to rake her nails along his neck, get in a satisfying jab to his ribs, and repeatedly kick her boot into his calf. Unfortunately, she was forced to sheathe her hidden blade due to the very real danger of potentially stabbing herself as they tumbled. He proved able to smack her along the forehead, twist one of her wrists behind her head and shove a knee in between her thighs. The dagger sheathed next to his sword flew from his belt sometime during their sparring. His other dagger from his boot had gone missing in the earlier clash with the redcoats.

Their trip down the slope came to a painful end when they struck the large, moss covered trunk of a tree with a sharp thud. His larger form took the brunt of the hit. But it'd knocked the wind out of them both. Regrettably, he landed on top. Connor bit back a groan of irritation at finding his bulk nearly smothering her. The burly oaf had to have at least two to three stone of weight on her frame. No matter; she may be a woman and naturally smaller and lighter, but Achilles never allowed such to be perceived as a weakness. He’d drilled into her head that she contained speed, stealth and most importantly, society’s perpetual underestimation to her advantage. As well as the traditions of her village, which held women in far higher esteem than these purportedly “civilized” colonists. Most of the latter expected her to immediately surrender. A pity, as it always led to their deaths whenever they crossed her.

For example? Hickey currently had her wrists locked above her head in his hands and his dead weight limiting her movement. Nevertheless, his head rested nearly on top of hers, his warm breath grazing her cheek. She could tell from his stuttering rasps and the labored heave of his chest that he was tiring of their fisticuffs. Especially so soon after the pressing skirmish with the redcoats. So she willed herself to relax beneath him. As she expected, he was caught off guard by the fight supposedly leaving her. Feeling his grip on her wrists loosen and him shift off of her a bit, she prepared herself.

“Funny that,” he drawled against her ear, “Much as I enjoy havin' a nice handle on me women, I’m a thinkin’ I prefer ya on top, she-wolf.”

“A pity,” she panted, collecting herself, “As I prefer you dead.”

He tiredly snickered and dopped his head a bit. His nose now rested along her hairline as he struggled to catch his breath. “Oh, ya wouldn’t be sayin’ that if you knew me any better, love. I got all sorts ‘o useful skills.”

“Somehow, I highly doubt that.”

Letting out a long sigh, he rolled his eyes and sat back on his haunches. It caused him to slacken his hold even more. “Ya know what, dearie?” his gaze met hers, expression sliding to bizarrely thoughtful for a quick second, “Ya always lookin' for a means to go killin’ folks ‘afore ya know their whole story—”

“As though you are worth saving.” Lifting her chin in defiance, she didn’t bother to drop the disdain from her voice. “Obviously, in spite of your second chance, you have remained with your wretched Order. Your actions speak volumes.”
“All that righteous rage bouncin’ around all up in ya,” he clucked his tongue like a parent scolding a particularly troublesome child, “My, my, it’ gotta be eatin’ away at ya innards—”

Reeling back, she bashed the top of her forehead into his. Sure, it set off an explosion of light behind her eyes at the painful impact with his thick skull. But years of training let her follow it up with an instinctive knee to his groin. It had its desired effect, sending him howling and rolling off of her. Stumbling to her knees, she kicked away his sabre as she shakily unsheathed her sword. Regardless of her vision spotting, she pressed the point of it to his chest. “You have ten seconds to redeem yourself,” she ordered.

Casting her a look of loathing and hands still protecting his crotch, he snapped, “Simple; we both want that pissant, General Davenport, deader than a doornail.”

“I do not believe you—”

“So why inna fuck would I slaughter his men after he attacked your god-damned convoy, ya fussock?!” he demanded. “All ya gotta do is check their gorgets to see that they be part ‘o the General’s troops.”

Rubbing at her throbbing head, she shrugged, “Because you Templars aim to control both sides of the conflict.” Pressing her sword into his chest even harder, she warned, “Do not take me for a fool, Hickey.”

“Ya rotten, murderous ‘lil savage!” he barked, mouth twisted into a dangerous snarl and color staining his pale cheeks. “Seeing as yer such a right barmy arsehole, here then,” he reached into the inner pocket of his overcoat. Hearing the click of a pistol, he looked up to find her aiming one at his head. At least she’d sheathed her sword for the moment. Although her stony expression did absolutely zero to put him at any sort of ease. “It ain’t no weapon, ya mangy git,” he snit, slowly pulling out a heavy, half-folded envelope and tossing it up to her.

Snatching it out of the air, she kept her pistol trained on him as she opened it with one hand. Speechless at finding it from her father, she ignored the locket that fell out of the envelope and landed at her feet. Not only did the missive detail his suspicions about the fire that claimed the McCready’s home over a fortnight ago, he relayed specific orders to Hickey to infiltrate the Fort and scout it out. There was also note of the family’s suspected murderer. One Gerhard Vonstatten, or “The Hessian” as they called him. While it did not explicitly state the General’s life was forfeit, her father seemed to have no qualms should the Templar fall to a blade. Yet the Hessian wasn’t privy to any sort of mercy. Hickey was unequivocally ordered to eliminate him.

As far as Connor was concerned, the world would not miss such a monster. Or his apparent master.

Thomas used her silent astonishment to quickly roll away from her. While he was able to move to his feet, he was still kept at bay as she re-leveled her flintlock at him.

“Well,” she slowly began, stooping down and picking up the locket. Flicking it open revealed an exquisitely detailed miniature of a dark-haired man with a goatee and dressed in the livery of a high-ranking, British officer. Matthew Davenport, likely, she mused, So that Hickey may know his target. “This proves a new…development.”

“No shit, ya bugger!” he heatedly crossed his arms. Kicking over his tricorne to him, Connor gestured for him to pick it up. “So,” he groused, dusting it off, “I take it this means ya ain’t gonna kill me ‘en?”

She slit her eyes at him for an uncomfortably mute moment.“For now…no,” she finally intoned.
"Then how come ya ain’t put away that damned pistol, already?” he waved at her. However, he casually popped his hat back upon his head before adjusting it to the side at a rakish angle.

“No matter that our goals align for now, you have not given me a reason to trust you,” she replied. Regardless, she still tossed him back the locket.

“Point taken,” he sniffed, shoving it into his pocket. “Still, I saved yer life when I warned ya of that redcoat ‘bout to shoot ya back there.”

“You had no idea who I was at the time.”

Cocking his head to the side, he let out a mirthless chuckle, “Ya be a sly one, girl.”

“No more than you, old man,” she shot right back.

“Hey now,” he held up a hand in surrender, “I ain’t exactly Father Time, ya milksop. I got ‘round ’bout 37 years to me.”

“Far more ancient than my twenty or so,” she huffed. Well god-damn to that new bit of information; mostly on account of her humorless disposition and that steady, constantly irked countenance, he assumed she was older. Not to mention, her relentless commitment to her silly little Brotherhood. Though when he really looked at her, her face was clear of any sort of lines of age. Combined with her speed and agility, she likely wasn’t lying.

“So,” he slowly began, “Wot’s the plan then? How abouts the good ‘ole concept that ‘the enemy of my enemy be my friend?’ At least until we kill our mutual enemy, yeah?”

It took far too long for her uncock the hammer of her flintlock. And even as she shoved it back into her holster, she unsheathed her sword again. However, she held it at her side, tapping the glinting, silver blade against her leg rather than pointing it directly at him. Expression pulled in concentration, she muttered to herself in what he could only assume was the language of her people. Finally, she nodded in agreement.

“It seems we find ourselves in alignment. So long as you make no attempt to kill me,” her gaze flashed in warning, “I will not harm you. At least not until we finish tracking the general and his homicidal Hessian.”

Spitting on his hand and holding it out to shake, Hickey settled for a smirk instead of his initial guffaw of laughter at her look of revulsion at his action. “Usually, gents be shakin’ on such an agreement,” he clarified, extending his arm further. She still refused to offer her hand. Her continued silence didn’t help, except to make to the exchange even more wholly unsettling. “Alrighty then,” he withdrew with a huff, “I’ll take into account that ya ain’t no gent, I guess,” he shrugged.

Rocking back on her heels, she sheathed her sword and shoved her hand into one of the deerskin pouches along her belt. He felt rather silly as he braced, only for her to produce a single eagle feather in her hand. Holding it out, she wordlessly nodded for him to take it.

Snatching it from her, he held it up to the dusky sunlight. Its colors sparkled and bounced along its fine grains of plume. “Eh?” he asked in confusion, “Wot’s this ‘en, poppet?”

“Among my people, it is the sign of a binding agreement,” she solemnly said. “When we have completed our mission, I expect its return, signaling an end to our truce. I believe that it is rather more…hygienic than your methods,” her gaze snapped to his hand for a moment. “Hence, we are allies, for you have taken it freely of me.”
“I, uh, see,” he slowly said. For some reason he had no desire to dwell on, he found himself carefully tucking it into the inner pocket of his waistcoat. No matter how silly he inexplicably felt as she watched his every move.

Gesturing for her to follow, she silently fell in line behind him back to the other men. Considering who she dealt with, she wasn’t exactly surprised at his lie to Captain Moreau as to why he would be leaving the remaining soldiers in his hands. “Ya ain’t dead, ‘n the lady requests an escort back to her family,” Hickey mounted one of the dead redcoat’s horses. More spoils of war, of course. Ignoring the Captain’s dazed expression that their ally turned out to be a woman, Hickey drawled, “It be takin’ us ‘bout a week to cross the Frontier at this time ‘o the season. I’ll meet ya back at the outpost at me return. Dismissed,” he lazily saluted. None the wiser, Captain Moreau did as told.

Astounded to see Connor looting the dead for supplies before she mounted her white mare, Hickey let out a low chortle. Seemed the little prat wasn’t so high and mighty after all. Hopefully, it’d be enough to keep them from killing each other over the next few days.

Chapter End Notes

**Gorget** – The crescent-shaped, metal neck chain that was part of most European officers’ uniforms, up until around the mid-19th century. Some Revolutionary War examples.

”*The burly oaf had to have at least two to three stone of weight on her frame.*” – A stone is a British form of measurement that equals around 14 pounds.

As canon Connor is a lot taller and heavier than most men in-game, Fem!Connor is taller and heavier than most women of the era, around 5’6” or so. She has the competent body of an athlete, slightly curvy but mostly muscular and with an average bust line. Basically, light enough to free-run without a problem, but strong enough to stab a man clean through with a sword. Or stop him dead with a few hits from her heavy weapon. Meanwhile, Thomas Hickey looks pretty burly. Not to mention, he’s been a soldier since 1752, so he’d know to handle himself in combat. I’d put him around 6’0” and about 170 - 180 pounds. So weighing about two to three stone more than Connor means he’s around 28 to 42 pounds heavier than her.

Some inspiration concerning Fem!Connor. Disclaimer; none of these are my drawings at all, and all credit goes to the artist, milkdoggie at tumblr: Fem!Connor on the attack and pissed off Fem!Connor, which cracks me up.
By Connor’s count, it was a few days after the First of November. Meaning the air was appropriately chilly, the sky above deep grey and constantly overcast. While it was still too warm to snow during the day, the flurries drifted down beginning at dusk and continued into evening. Occasionally, it would even sleet. Thankfully, the cold snap always broke by around the 10th hour of the morning or so. Thoroughly used to the brisk elements, she waved off the dampness that seemed to cling to her clothes and mare. Purchased over the last month or so in New York, her livery was mostly new and fitted for the colder season. She’d also newly skinned the soft, leather wrappings about her legs. In her element out here in the untamed wild, she welcomed the change of pace from working in town.

However, Hickey was a city man through and through. Bound his navy blue, uniform frock coat, he kept the ends of his sister’s scarf wrapped about his chest beneath it. His long johns beneath his woolen stockings and breeches, which were securely tucked into his boots, added an extra layer of warmth. He also wore an additional tunic beneath his ruffled shirt, his cravat wrapped tightly about his neck and beneath his scarf. Yet he rarely complained, save a few choice, expletive-ladden remarks upon waking up to the freezing air in the mornings and bundling down at night. The contents of his flask proved enough to keep him company. It wasn't like the Native girl exchanged any words with him except when absolutely necessary.

They arrived to Fort St. Mathieu within four days. Thankfully, the snowfall from last night created plenty of cover, the icy white drifts piled high around the ramparts. Combined with the heavily forested perimeter, they were able to leave their mounts behind and hike about a quarter mile to the outer walls without being spotted. The stronghold covered some acres, one of the largest along the northwestern frontier. Nonetheless, parts of it were blackened and slightly crumbling. Per Thomas, owning to the Continentals’ numerous attempts to lay siege to it the past Spring. While that would work their advantage, the British were on high alert. Carefully skirting the edges of the citadel to visually gauge the number of redcoats within, they found far more men stationed there than either of them expected.

Hickey rolled his eyes as Connor pressed a finger to her lips, signaling for his silence as they crept into a tall grove of trees on the eastern border of the fort. Crouching, Connor was then surprised to see Thomas swiftly and silently point to two guards patrolling with a black dog, approximately fifty yards to their left. Though she easily saw them, she didn’t realize he’d done so as well. Her face must have made it rather obvious, considering the smug, toothy grin he shot her.

Relaying her plan to go in alone and capture their target, Connor shook her head as he derisively whispered back various disagreements. Not that she was shocked at his immediate rebuttal of her plan. “You be outta ya bloody mind, girl!” he jeered, leaning back on his haunches and dropping a hand to her forearm.

“I suggest you remove your touch from my person, Hickey.”

“For the fuckin’ love of Christ, I ain’t tryin’ to molest your bloody arm!” he snorted, withdrawing from her. “So ya best be sheathin’ that dagger back on ya belt. I’m just tryin’ to, I don’t know, keepin’ ya from committin’ suicide? I mean, I know it must be absolute bollocks bein’ an Assassin ‘n wot not-”
“Watch yourself,” her mouth twisted with reproach.

“Just takin’ the piss—”

“What…what does that even mean?” her nose scrunched in confusion, “I would think you contain the sense enough to relieve yourself before we arrived at the Fort!”

Hickey slapped a hand over his mouth to smother his guffaw. Mostly on account of keeping as quiet as possible to avoid alerting the patrol. Then again her bewildered expression at his turn of phrase was nearly worth it. Anything to see that constant look of annoyance or weariness drop from her face. “It means I just be makin’ a jest, sweetheart,” he reassured her. A doubtful arch of her brow and she muttered it a couple of times, as though committing it to memory. Distractedly waving for him to continue, she heard him say, “Still, there be no way in hell ya can destroy an entire fort all by ya lonesome.”

“Fort Hill in Boston and Fort Wolcott on Goat Island proved little trouble,” she shrugged, looking upwards and already beginning to calculate the shortest distance from the fortification’s outer wall via the tree line. Hand moving to her back, her fingertips brushed the feathers of her arrows. Excellent, her quiver was full. Her bag of rope darts also weighed solidly comfortable on her hip as well.

Mouth dropping open at her casual revelation, he almost stammered, “Wait one god-damned minute…that was YOU?!” When she gave him a curt nod of affirmation, Thomas didn’t know whether to prepare himself for a knife in the chest or to let out a cackle of bizarre amusement at the first real smile she flashed him upon his disbelief. Well fancy that, she appeared a right lovely lass when she bothered to wipe that near-perpetual scowl from her face.

Huh, who knew?

He’d heard rumors of the two forts’ infiltration by a single man. Well, Fort Hill supposedly fell into the hands of the Continentals due to some madman who blew up the powder stores, killed a shit-ton of redcoats and then promptly executed its ranking officer. Fort Wolcott was attacked by a random volley of fire from some alleged ghost ship. By the time the Continentals arrived to claim it, the majority of the redcoats were dead. The couple of dozen terrified survivors kept babbling on and on about some devil spirit that also boldly slaughtered their commander. Whatever occurred, half the citadel was blown to smithereens. Of course, no one believed the Brits and their absurd tales.

So evidently, the poppet delivered not one, but two forts over to the Continentals. Anyone else, and he’d call them a bald-faced liar. But the ‘lil she-wolf was far too guileless spin such a tale. He’d already witnessed her escape her own execution. She’d also mowed down a handful of men attacking her convoy a few days ago, without so much as flinching or breaking a sweat. Haytham also suspected her Brotherhood of orchestrating the deaths of Pitcarn and Johnson.

William Johnson. One of a few men who’d ever bothered to give two shits about him.

Stealing a look at where she remained crouched next to him in the snowy bushes providing cover, Thomas narrowed his eyes. No, it had to be impossible; a couple of years ago, she had but 18 years to her. Not to mention, they hadn’t smelled an official whiff of the Assassins until she popped up in New York and ruined his counterfeiting operation. And that disaster occurred only around five months ago. Besides, William sought to protect her tribes. Mostly on account on his consort, the lovely Miss Molly Brandt. A couple of days ago, when he drunkenly commented out loud that Connor’s looks proved darker than most colonists’, she warily explained to him she was of the
Mohawks. Apparently, the same as Molly (admittedly, the girl only revealed such when he repeatedly exclaimed he didn’t give a flying fuck about what be in her bloodline. So long as she didn’t knife him in the face or anything of that sort). So why in the hell would she go killing her best hope to keep her people’s land away from the colonists?

“Hickey?” she repeated a third time, waving her hand in front of his face. A few inches closer, and it’d be considered a slap.

“Wot?!” he snapped, roughly shoving her away and mind reeling back to the present.

“Stay here and wait for my return,” she ordered, beginning to rise from the ground.

She nearly broke his wrist when she instinctively twisted away from where he grabbed her by the arm. “Ain’t no need for ya to do this by yourself.”

“Somehow, I highly doubt you particularly care if I should survive or perish,” she drawled.

“You be right; I don’t generally give a flyin’ fuck ’bout how ya go livin’ out your days,” he shrugged. Ignoring her snort of aggravation, he continued, “But if it means that I up me chances of survivin’ this? Yeah, it be best for me if ya don’t go endin’ up a corpse.”

“How kind of you,” she sarcastically replied, firmly shaking off his grip.

“Look ‘ere, I ain’t so full ‘o it to realize that two heads be better ‘n one in this endeavor,” he shot back. “So yeah, I prefer ya alive. At least while I still got that feather ‘o yours that be signalin’ our ‘lil truce,” he patted his breast pocket.

“Was I not clear when I relayed that I have done thing such as this before?” she frowned, jerking her head in the direction of the stronghold.

“That was just layin’ siege ‘n kilin’ whoever was fuckin’ stupid ‘nough to go gettin’ in ya way,” he retorted with derision. “This time, we be needin’ information. Directly from the General’s quarters, no less.”

“Or, I drive him out by sabotaging the fort,” she reiterated, leaning back on her knees and drumming her fingers along her thigh. “We capture him, question him concerning the Hessian’s whereabouts and then his life is forfeit.”

Rolling his eyes, he let out a huff of disagreement. “Why ya always gotta be so damned uncompromisin’, woman?”

“It proves the best means to obtain what is required,” she instantly replied, dark eyes flashing in challenge. Counting off on her fingers, she continued, “The General is no longer a threat, we are now on the trail of the Hessian and the Fort will now be in the hands of the Patriots. Three goals achieved-”

“By the messiest means possible, poppet,” Thomas chortled.

“Thus far, I have heard no hint of an alternate suggestion from you,” she hummed.

“’Cause ya refuse to let me get in a word edge-”
“I most certainly have not!”

“…wise,” he finished. “Aaaaand ya go cuttin’ me off again, love,” he chuckled.

Opening her mouth to disagree, she snapped it shut at realizing, much to her chagrin, he was correct. Dropping her head and gritting her teeth, it took her a few moments to collect herself. “Fine,” she sniffed, looking up at him again, “What do you propose then, Hickey?”

“Simple,” he shrugged. “Ya go ‘n kill a soldier ‘bout me size on patrol. I swipe his uniform and escort ya in as a supposed prisoner of war. Presto-bingo, we be in beyond the walls, and without no one none the wiser. Considerin’ I was stationed here before the rebellion for a couple ‘o years or so, I know the layout pretty damn well. Includin’ where the general’s quarters be. So we ain’t gotta rush in all blind and wot not.”

Furrowing her brow, her eyes darted to the side for a moment. “That is,” she slowly replied, “That is…surprisingly straightforward. So much so, that I believe it may work without much interruption.”

“Aye!” he smirked. “Once we get what we need, ya can go blowin’ up whatever ya want. Hell, set the whole place afire ‘n slaughter as many redcoats as ya need to get all that creepy-ass bloodlust outta ya veins. Frankly, I don’t give a shit. So long as we both get outta here alive, with our limbs intact and ‘nough info to go killin’ the General and his ‘lil demon lapdog.”

She was admittedly glad he didn’t spit on his hand as they shook in agreement with his plan.

Connor silently strangled a redcoat with one of her snares to ensure no blood would sully his uniform. Hence, Thomas quickly changed into it, allowing them to pass beyond the gates of the citadel unhindered. The redcoats barely spared them a glance, save to jeer at the supposed prisoner.

She had to admit she appeared very much the part of the perturbed captive. She’d rubbed dirt along her face and bared her teeth at any redcoat who dared attempt looking too closely beneath her hood. Her hands were also supposedly bound behind her back. While Hickey’s musket wasn’t loaded, the bayonet was fixed and he prodded her forward along her back. A couple of times, so roughly that it caused her to stumble. He also contained a plethora of colorful insults, which he liberally used whenever a redcoat came within range. It helped with the pretense that he absolutely couldn’t wait to get her down to the dungeons to do with her as he pleased. A disturbing thought, undoubtedly. But they had a mission to compete.

Unfortunately, as he marched her in the direction of the prison, Hickey promptly learned through the chatter of the fort that General Davenport was out on the frontier. At least it made their mission potentially easier. Especially as they wandered towards the center of the stronghold. A large, two-story, white bricked building with blue shutters and a red shingled roof housed the officer’s quarters. Pressed up against the parapets, it granted the ranking troops a 360 degree view of the entire citadel. It also allowed them to immediately jump to the ramparts where the cannons pointed out and across the forest, in case of an incursion by the Patriots.

Untying Connor, Thomas haphazardly shoved her into a hay chart sitting along the wall of the officer’s quarters. Ignoring her murderously exasperated look over her shoulder when his hand “accidently” smacked her behind as he cheekily wished her luck, he sauntered off. Of course, he promptly started up a game of dice with a group of soldiers some feet from the cart. They all loitered closest to the back entrance of the building.
Peeking out from the hay, Connor took in the group of gambling redcoats. Hickey certainly threw himself into keeping up the momentum of the game. Hooting, hollering and tossing out insults to get the men to make larger bets, within minutes he had their attention fully directed away from catching her in their line of sight. Well, that certainly lent a solid bit of assistance. Lithely jumping out of the cart, she snuck over to the door. Using her lock pick, she jimmied it open in a matter of seconds and ducked inside. Second floor, last door on the right, she mused on Hickey’s instructions. Arriving at her destination, she listened for anyone inside. Hearing nothing, she picked the lock and darted inside.

The General’s lodgings included two large rooms, one set aside for his study, the other for sleeping. The vaulted, sloped ceiling was mostly unfinished, its thick, wooden beams clearly visible. Braced against the window sat his bulky, cherry wood desk. Outside of a few scattered pieces of parchment, a quill sitting next to them and a couple of glass jars of ink, it was bare. In fact the entire room was absent of any personal effects. Connor found it rather eerie.

She wasn’t surprised that the desk was locked. No matter, for she had her lock picks. Breaking into first two drawers revealed nothing, save the personal files of the fort’s personnel. In fact, none of the drawers held anything of importance. Spinning around and examining the bookshelf didn’t do much better. Not even shaking out the books yielded anything in between their pages.

Biting her lip, she retreated to the bedroom. The walls painted a soft, light green, their crown molding was brilliant white, the floor of dark hardwood. The far corner of the room contained a vanity and changing screen. Next to it sat a four-poster bed. Large, solid and comfortable, it was piled with a handful of feather-stuffed pillows. The dark blue curtains strung between the bed posts matched the light blue sheets. Thankfully, the curtains were flung open, revealing no one within. At its foot and above the fireplace was mounted a large oil painting of the General himself. Dressed in full military regalia, he clutched a rod of rule in one hand and a golden globe in the other. His dark eyes stared out at her, proud and vain. Save the window, covering the rest of the wall were framed maps from various parts of the world. She recognized a few of them from her own travels aboard the Aquila. Next to where she stood was a tall bookshelf that reached the ceiling. Filled with books and scrolls, its bookends were an array of knickknacks: large, pale colored seashells, an archaic looking pistol, a small clock, a heavy mug upon a saucer and a model ship within a bottle.

Frowning at all she would have to search, Connor began her deed in earnest. Ten minutes later, all she’d stumbled upon was footlocker under the bed.

Without warning, the door in the other room unexpectedly creaked open. Not a good sign, she furiously mused, slamming the footlocker closed and kicking it back under the bed. Great, now she had to find a good hiding spot...

Thomas frowned as he silently stepped into the general’s quarters. The place looked as though a hurricane hit it. The desk drawers were yanked out, a handful of quills lay broken on the floor, the books in the shelves haphazardly tossed everywhere and opened. “Bloomin’ moron,” he closed his eyes and rubbed the bridge of his nose. He thought the daft chit would at least have the wherewithal to know how to properly search a room. The first rule? Always leave everything looking exactly as it was before. Otherwise, why alert the target that you knew precisely what he’s up to?

Crossing the threshold into the bedroom, he let out a litany of curses. This area looked even worse. The blankets and sheets were yanked from the bed, the bookshelf in utter disarray. The general’s portrait mounted backwards and crooked on the wall, its was back slashed through. The wardrobe next to the bed was open, the clothes tossed to the floor and bottom drawers completely removed. He
could even make out the scrape marks in the dust along the floor where something had obviously been quickly dragged from under the bed.

“Connor, ya daft bugger!” he muttered to himself.

“Yes?” she murmured behind him, noiselessly dropping down to the floorboards.

Completely caught off guard, he swung his musket around and cocked back the hammer, only to have her lash out and smack him across the face hard enough for his grip to loosen on his weapon. While he effortlessly blocked her foot to his stomach with his forearm, he didn’t expect her to duck to the floor and send a spin kick to his thigh. Lurching, he dropped the musket with holler of reproach. Yet it never hit the ground, for she snatched it out of the air and spun it about in her hands in order to use its stock as a modified club.

“Oh!” she exclaimed mid-strike, purposely adjusting her swing so it went wide and didn’t connect, “It is you! I-”

“Do ya EVER fuckin’ THINK ‘AFORE YA BE FUCKIN’ HITTIN’?!?” he bellowed, slapping away her hand of assistance as he clutched at his thigh. “Ya balmy bitch!”

“I did not realize it was you!” she huffed, dropping the musket and sending it clattering to the floor.

“Yeah?! ‘Cause all the other mangy gits up in this ‘ere fort know yer name?!”

“That…is a valid point-”

“No shit!” he hissed. “Christ!” he brought a hand to his face, “Ya almost broke me fuckin’ nose…again!”

Cocking her head to the side, she quickly declared, “Forgive me. I never meant any harm-”

“Which be why ya was ‘bout to go knockin’ me block off, ya blighter?!” he straightened up, furiously pointing at the musket. “Mother-fuckin’ Connor be strikin’ again!” her sarcastically threw up his hands in surrender.

She shrugged, “You should have identified yourself-”

“How could I if you were nowhere to be fuckin’ found?!?” he barked. Straightening out his crimson coat, he gingerly poked at his cheek. Thankfully, it was only blooming into a bruise rather than a fractured bone. The little wretch hit nearly as hard as a man, after all. “And where in the bloody hell was ya hidin’ anyways?” he snapped. He looked above him as she mutely pointed upwards. Apparently, she had plenty of time to scramble up the walls and conceal herself in the rafters before he came in.

“For the love ‘o fuckin’ God!” he balled his fists together at his sides, “Just…ugh. Just learn to think ‘ afore ya strike, woman!”

“I will take your concerns into account,” she sniffed.

Turning her back to him as he rolled his eyes and slurred more curses, she dropped to her knees and pulled out the footlocker again. Crossing his arms and leaning against a bedpost, he watched with increasing annoyance as she scanned the various letters and scrolls only to throw them over her
shoulder. “Ya know,” he sneered, snatching up his musket from the floor, “Ya could at a bare fuckin’ minimum go attemptin’ to make it look like ya ain’t tossin’ a room.”

“Tossing?” she questioned, barely paying attention to him as she continued.

“Burglarin’. Stealin’. Combin’ through someone else’s shit,” his mouth twisted in derision. “I mean, god-damn, could you be any more obvious that this blimey git’s quarters just got searched? I thought the whole point of ya silly-arse Assassins be to go workin’ in the shadows ‘n whatnot. You be as bloody obvious as a dolled up whore in the middle ‘o a cockfight!”

Letting out a long sigh of impatience, Connor paused and looked over her shoulder. “What exactly should I have done better, considering your supposed expertise?” she flippantly asked.

“How ‘bout bein’ a bit more meticulous?” he waved about. “Mayhaps, I don’t know, not fuckin’ wreckin’ the place?”

“There is no time,” she retorted, tossing another letter away.

“It be better than leavin’ traces of ya stench all ov’er-”

“I would prefer not to get caught,” she interrupted, “Especially since we do not have any idea when Davenport will return…and what is this?” Finishing her scan of a letter bound together in a packet with a red ribbon, she grinned. Quickly reading the remaining ones, she jumped to her feet and stuffed them in the inner pocket of her coat.

“Hey now, wot’s this then?” Thomas’ eyebrows shot up. Shoving himself off the bedpost, he said, “We be partners for now, so ya better get to tellin’ me wot’s goin’ on.”

“Are you familiar with an Eleanor Mallow?” Connor questioned, kicking the footlocker back under the bed. Wiping her gloved hands on her pants to clear the dust, she began heading towards the door.

Smirking, Thomas drawled, “Fuck yeah, I be. She be a Templar. And the General’s notoriously pretty-ass daughter. Got quite the mouth on ‘er too-”

“Different surname?”

“It be confusin’ folks so they don’t be knowing she ‘n her daddy’s ties to each other,” he sniffed, “Wot of it?”

“Per a letter received from her roughly a month ago, she is the one who passed on the General’s orders to the Hessian,” Connor solemnly replied.

“Really now?” Thomas doubtfully replied. “That be a real fuckin’ laugh, considerin’ that she never be actin’ as a mere courier no more. Not since she be a kid.”

Connor curled her lip, snorting, “You people use children as couriers?”

“Hey now, not me,” Thomas waved away her disdain, “Just ‘ole Davenport. He be…a strict sort with the girl. Me understandin’ be she be quite the ‘lil brat growin’ up. With ‘ole pop being all military ‘n wot not, he decided to go teachin’ her some discipline.”
“Typical,” Connor spat with a scowl.

“Anyways, Ellie’s daddy be trustin’ ‘er ‘nough to go givin’ her missions to complete on her own. For years now.”

“Hmm,” Connor pondered. “It seems, judging by their correspondence,” she patted her jacket where she’d put the letters, “Their last communication was a fortnight ago. He speaks of a new target, in Boston.”

“Who?”

“That is the problem,” Connor worried her lower lip with her teeth, “He does not explicitly state it. We should go,” she quickly said, ears perking up at the sound of soldiers patrolling about outside.

“Gimme a second,” he demanded. He wanted to get one last look at the room. Mostly to steal anything worth a few pounds.

“Make it swift,” she ordered, already at the front door.

Wandering towards the fireplace, Thomas suddenly stopped in front of the metal grate intended to shield the hottest part of the flames from the room. The bloody hell? he thought to himself.

“What?” Connor asked, poking her head back into the doorway, “Why are you just standing there? It is imperative that we leave-”

“Shut-up,” he rejoined, waving a dismissive hand at her. Ignoring her expression of censure and backtracking, he couldn’t help the satisfied grin that came to his face. For one of the long floorboards sprung back a bit too easily.

Dropping to his knees, he didn’t bother hold back a smirk at the General’s rather ingenious ploy. For most, the loose plank would be undetectable to a casual observer. And even then, that was assuming that they’d ever see it, a near impossibility since the bucket holding the fire poker and other tools sat over it. Forced to use his dagger, it took some time to pry the loose wooden plank from the hardwood floor. Removing it revealed a small space, only about six by six inches and four inches deep.

“Jackpot!” he crowed, pulling out a stack of folded letters.

Not only did they contain a list of crossed out names, it also included the McCreadys’ name and address. Two more names below theirs were crossed out as well. The next one on the list had a circle drawn around it. Beneath those were a couple of letters containing additional names and locations. Within the margins were dates extending back roughly a year or so. Thomas found he recognized none of them, which was a feat and of itself considering his extensive network of smugglers throughout the colonies.

Shoving it into Connor’s face with smug aplomb, he watched with mild interest as her eyes widened at one of the names that shared the list with the McCreadys. “This…this is William de Saint-Prix,” she cried. Well, for her, it was the equivalent of an exclamation. To anyone else, it sounded more akin to distant aggravation combined with a healthy dose of indifference.

“Wot the hell do that mean?” Thomas enquired.
“I know him,” Connor swallowed.

“One of ya precious Brotherhood’s?” he cleared his throat.

“This is highy useful information,” she declared, completely ignoring his question and rapidly changing the subject. Squaring her shoulders, she handed him back the notes, adding, “You appear to have some use after all.”

“A flippin’ thank ya Tommy, ’ is too bloody much to ask for now?” he snit.

She didn’t hear him, already out the front door and sneaking her way down the corridor.

Hauling ass after her, he intentionally made plenty of noise on his feet and whispered behind her, “Now can we go get the fuck out of here?”

“Of course,” she distractedly said.

He was undeniably stunned when she slumped back against him. He remained stock still as she closed her eyes, seeming to gather her thoughts. But just as soon as it began, it was over. Rolling forward to the balls of her feet, she flicked out her left hidden blade. Nimbly spinning it about on its hinge to use as a dagger, she unsheathed her tomahawk at the same time. Neither action made a sound.

“Good ‘en,” he flashed a cocky smile, “Now, ya can go do your murderin’ and whatever the hell else ya do when ya take over one of these outposts for the Continentals.”

He had to admit that her brief grin at such a prospect (despite lasting all of roughly two seconds or so) made him a bit uneasy. Probably because her grisly business resulted in her looking the cheeriest he’d seen her in well, ever.

What a homicidal little fiend.

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Christ on a cracker, her sheer brutality was a sight to behold. From his position along the ramparts above her, it dawned on Thomas that he’d never witnessed her in true one-on-one combat. Back at the convoy, he was distracted with keeping himself alive. In New York, his primary objective was escaping her pursuit when she fled the gallows. In prison, she wasn’t particularly healthy and clearly operating out of desperation when she attacked him in his cell. But now? He had a superior view of Connor going to work on a half-dozen redcoats vainly making an effort to capture the person responsible for blowing up their powder stores and munitions.

As soon as the explosion rocked the stronghold, the bells sent up the alarm. At first, he thought her absolutely daft in the head for not attempting any sort of escape. However, it simply allowed her ample time to prepare herself for the coming skirmish. And boy howdy, was it a fucking bloody one.

Savagely kicking the first soldier in the groin, she sent him doubling over. It allowed her to easily follow up with a swing of her tomahawk to the back of his neck. Sidestepping his falling corpse, she lashed out with her blade and caught the soldier standing dumbfounded behind him in the stomach. Slicing upwards with a flurry of thrusts left him essentially eviscerated and gurgling on his own blood as he died. Thinking her distracted, a third redcoat vainly tried grabbing her from behind. His mistake, for she reeled back an elbow into his ribs. As he cursed her, she twirled around and gouged the point of her tomahawk up into his chin while at the same time kicking out at his knee. Judging by the sickening crunch, she broke the bone. Ignoring his ragged screech of horror, she yanked out her
weapon only to slit his throat with her left blade.

As he fell into the crimson tinted snow, a fourth redcoat tripped over his body. Landing with a heavy thud on his back allowed Connor to leap onto his chest. Pressing her knee into his sternum, she hacked him to death without a second thought. Back on her feet within a blink of an eye, she shook off a fifth soldier’s punch to her side while ducking his cohort’s bayonet to her chest. It seemed to trigger her rage, for she took on both of them at once.

Ducking under the first man’s second swing at her, she dropped to a knee, spun about and sent her tomahawk into his stomach. Whipping him in front her, he caught a bullet to his chest intended for her and shot by the soldier who tried to initially bayonet her. Yanking her tomahawk out of the first lobsterback sent his blood spraying all over her coat. Popping back up to her feet, she stabbed out with her hidden blade. It finished off the second man with a knife through his eye. Her malicious snarl echoing in the frigid air, she thrust him off her blade.

The sixth soldier had the sense to flee and return with reinforcements as soon as the skirmish began. So as Connor recovered, she was abruptly faced with a line of redcoats loading their muskets and preparing to fire. Thomas swore he could hear her let out a demented cackle, but he couldn’t be sure. About to shout a warning at the firing of line of redcoats, it was immediately apparent there was no need. Somehow hearing the sound of a redcoat attempting to outflank her from behind, Connor’s hand snaked out and yanked him in front of her. It all happened in the few seconds it took for the redcoats to shoot.

Tough luck for the soldier, who was now turned into a dead, human shield. Callously shoving him away and using the remaining soldiers’ panic at killing one of their own, she snatched up a spare musket and leapt into the fray. She finished them off in the matter of a few minutes. It mostly consisted of her being viciously pragmatic. Running through one man with a bayonet, at the same time, she pulled the trigger and shot through a second one behind him. Then, she utilized the musket stock as a club. Swinging it in wide but accurate arcs, she deliberately caused the remaining enemies to fire on each other in a chaotic attempt to shoot her. Anyone reckless enough to get within arm’s length met the gruesome end of her hidden blade and tomahawk. Evidently, her favorite tools of death.

Upon completion of her macabre task, there were roughly fifteen or so dead bodies lying crumpled in a heap. About a third of them were ranking officers. The alarms bells mysteriously quieted, it proved eerily still.

“Connor?” Thomas muttered after a long while.

Spinning about on her heel, she instantly relaxed at seeing who addressed her. Letting her bow go slack, she returned her arrow to her quiver. “Why are you still about?” she asked, chest heaving as she caught her breath. Her coat splattered with blood, its crimson waves dripped down her face and neck. Pools of it gathered at her feet, stark and livid against the blinding white snow. Scattered around her, redcoats lay twisted at grotesque angles. Their necks snapped and slit, limbs bent back at odd angles, their eyes stared up at the sky, sightless and clear.

A vague memory flared to Thomas’ mind. Primarily of his mother’s tales of the old Gaelic gods and goddesses, spoken to him in the forbidden language of na hÉireannaigh. The deities the people of his homeland worshiped before the Christians came from over the sea, a thousand years ago. Of the Morrígna, the three witch sisters of war. Of Nemain, she who revealed in frenzied bloodlust of combat. Of Macha, the stern, unyielding queen of war and sovereignty. Of Badb, the shape shifting crow, she who foretold the omens of death in battle. Fairytales, that was all they were. The fantastical musings of a harried woman with too many mouths to feed and too little means to ensure their hands
remained occupied long enough to keep the lot of them out of trouble.

Yet, as he watched Connor calmly clean her weapons of the men’s blood and completely ignore the carnage, his senses twitched. The abrupt caw and squawking of a nest of ravens perched in the tree above them only added to it.

“Hickey?” she repeated a second time.

“Yeah, wot?” he sharply retorted, eyes snapping to her. At least she’d managed to wipe most of the blood from her face.

“You are wasting time-”

“I be waitin’ for ya,” he casually replied, forcing himself to sound utterly blasé.

“You should not have-” she challenged, only to pause and rephrase her words. “You should head back to our mounts. I will catch up with you shortly, for I must find the commander.”

*And kill ‘im*, Thomas mused. “Agreed,” he shrugged. Heading out, he missed Connor’s puzzled expression at his silence. No matter, she had other things to attend to. Namely, ridding the rest of the stronghold of any remaining redcoats.

There were on the road for roughly a day or so before Thomas broached the subject.

“So uh, how exactly do ya be gettin’ word to the Continentals that the fort now be theirs now?” he spurred his horse a bit to catch up with her.

“After everyone is eliminated, I always search the prison first. As per usual, there were roughly twenty or so Patriot prisoners of war,” she steadily said. “They are always all too pleased to ride out on freshly acquired, British horses to let the nearest Continental troops know that they may occupy the citadel.”

“That be makin’ sense. Anyway, sweetheart,” Hickey called out before taking a long gulp from his flask. How he managed to do so without looking at the road where his mount was trotting admittedly baffled her. “It be but only a day’s trek or so from a tavern where we can go fillin’ up our supplies. Lucky for ya, it also be the same place that Eleanor usually be stoppin’ at ‘afore she heads to the cities for her missions.”

“How exactly are you aware of all this?” Connor asked with dubious inquiry.

“’Cause me contacts be leavin’ her and others of our lot the necessary supplies. Out ‘ere in the wild, that tavern be a safe ‘lil stopover. And *I,*” he waved at himself with a flourish, “Just happen to be knowin’ the barkeep on a personal basis. I say we try our luck their first ‘afore we head to Boston.”

Shaking her head in disagreement, Connor shot him a pointed look as she lightly reined in her grey mare. “So you,” she accusingly pointed at him, “Expect *me* to wander into a tavern full of Templar agents. Not only that, but also to stay my blade and exit it completely unscathed?”

“Ya acquitted yerself pretty fuckin’ well back at the fort,” Hickey jerked a thumb over his shoulder.

“They were not my forsworn enemies, out for my life no matter the cost,” she retorted.

“I got yer back, hon-”

“A likely story, considering the tavern is most certainly *not* neutral territory.”
“It ain’t like no one be aware of ya affiliations on sight,” he shrugged. “Hell, I didn’t give a shit about ya until ’bout five months ago, back in New York. So quit bein’ so bloody paranoid, love.”

"This had better not be a trap," she warned, expression harsh and drawn against the desolate tundra they rode through. Lifting her chin for emphasis, she forcefully added, "For I am sure there is no need for me to explicitly relay what shall happen to you should such come to pass."

"Got ya loud ’n clear, dearie," he smirked before taking another swig from his flask.

Connor found herself without much of anything else in the way of options. For now, all she could do was trust a Templar to lead her on the path to warning William de Saint-Prix that his life was in imminent danger.

Chapter End Notes

...the forbidden language of na hÉireannaigh - na hÉireannaigh translates to "the Irish people" in Irish Gaelic. Despite his Cockney accent, Thomas Hickey is listed as originally from Ireland. So I assume he would be familiar with his native language, as well as old tales of ancient Irish/Celtic gods.

While use of Gaelic wasn't explicitly forbidden in Ireland, the Tudor Conquest of the country beginning with Henry VIII in the 16th century started the decline of the language. Officials from England generally suppressed its use and considered it a threat. The Great Famine of Ireland from 1845–1852 resulted in further decline, mostly due to Ireland’s significant decrease in population. During this time period, Ireland lost 20–25% of its people, due to a combination of starvation and immigration. Only recently has there been a resurgence of Irish Gaelic.
One False Move

Unlike the taverns in the city, this one was barely more than a large, two-story log-cabin. Lacking a name written on the blank wooden board hanging from an uneven beam on the second floor, it appeared relatively innocuous. Almost blending into the woodland surrounding it, only the forested, slate grey cliffs at its back made it stand out. Its logs covered in moss, while the windows weren’t of real glass, they were comprised of thinly sliced vellum. The bright, yellow light spilling from them cast the air in a pale, luminous glow. Despite being multiple days’ trip from any major city, it was absolutely packed. Likely because it was one of the few specks of civilization out on the frontier, save a few scattered homes and barns surrounding it. Men and women gaily congregated around the front door. Their laughter and loud voices echoing into the night, the smell of alcohol and pipe smoke tickled Connor’s nose.

“It be better if I be goin’ in first,” Thomas casually declared. After stabling their horses next door, they cautiously made their way up the stone path. “That way, ain’t no way anyone can go linkin’ us together.”

“Fine,” Connor vaguely shrugged. Scanning the scene, she focused on taking in the number of people milling about, as well as all visible entrances and exits of the tavern.

Obviously expecting her to argue his point as per usual, Thomas plunged on, “See, there ya be go again, always questionin’ me-”

“I said fine,” she reiterated. “Surely you are not deaf?”

“No need to gettin’ all smart ‘n shit,” he sneered, shooting her an annoyed glance over his shoulder.

Rolling her eyes, she gave a dismissive wave as she jogged to catch up with his longer strides. “Then perhaps you should listen to what I say.”

“Why in the bloody hell do ya have to go be so flippin’ mouthy?”

“I only follow your own example,” she shot right back.

Running a hand over his face in frustration, he snapped, “Whatever. Let’s just go’n get this fuckin’ over with, yeah?” With that, he stomped up the path and slipped in through the front door.

Waiting for roughly ten minutes while Hickey got settled, Connor eventually made her way inside as well. Surprisingly, it wasn’t easy to separate him out of the crowd. Letting her vision slip into her instinctive perception, she noticed a few soldiers shining in red. While no one glimmered in blue, the rest of the room gleamed in neutral grey. In the matter of a few seconds, her internal senses allowed her to locate Hickey sitting at a table in a dark corner, outlined in gold. Of course, he chose one only a few feet from the back door. With a fanorona board in front of him and a pint of ale in his hand, he easily blended in with the other patrons. Dropping down in the seat opposite, she appeared a mere stranger challenging him to a game. Especially as she slid a few pounds across the table to him. Ordering an ale from the elderly barkeep completed the illusion.

The liquor seemed to cool their tempers, the two back to distant civility as Hickey arched a surprised brow and asked, “Ya partake, love?” Glancing down, he moved a black fanorona piece into her

“Point taken,” Hickey retorted, finishing off his second pint.

Jumping her white piece over his black one and capturing it, Connor took a sip of her ale. “Ugh,” she recoiled, wrinkling her nose. Gingerly moving it to the side, she pouted, “It seems this is not quite as good as other brews. It cost almost twice as much as well.” Taking a long drink of water, she washed down its tainted flavor.

Thomas’ gaze fixed on her mouth, entranced as her tongue darted out to lick away a final drop.

“Hickey?” she repeated for a third time, narrowing her eyes.

Shaking his head to clear his thoughts, his grip on table tightened as he exclaimed, “Was’sup?”

“I asked if you wanted anything from the bar?” she nodded at it.

“I…no. I ain’t in no need ‘o nothin’ seein’ all I gotta do is take yours.” He did just that, dragging her tankard to his side of the table and taking a long drink of it. Letting out a burp and tapping his temple, he smirked, “Sides, gotta keep me head clear for ‘ole Eleanor, yeah? The barkeep said she be rentin’ a room last night. Still here, apparently.”

“Suit yourself,” she lightly jumped up from her seat.

Hearing the door of the tavern open, Thomas craned his head around. Letting out a low chuckle, he cracked Connor a devious grin. “Well would ya look at that? It seems the pretty ‘lil poppet has gone ‘n made ‘er appearance.”

She appeared but a few years older than Connor. Slightly shorter than the assassin, Eleanor Mallow’s lithe figure certainly made heads turns as soon as she crossed the threshold. Clad in black boots, finely spun, white silk stockings and dark breeches, the gold buttons twining up their sides sparkled in the dim light. Over that, she sported a long, captain’s redcoat. Trimmed in black about the sleeves and down the front, its gold buttons matched those along her trousers. Beneath it, she wore a pristine white waistcoat. Also trimmed in gold, it lay over her white silk tunic and cravat. Tossed about her shoulders was a light blue cloak trimmed in yellow stripe. The left shoulder of it bore three white feathers tipped in black. Tilted on her head at a jaunty angle, her black, beaver fur tricorne made her appear that much more alluringly rakish. Bordered in white silk, pinned to its left side was a black cockade.

Her dark locks loose and curling about her shoulders, they framed her patrician face. Her wide, dark and heavily lashed eyes, dark brows, high cheekbones and full mouth reminded Connor of gilded portraits she’d seen in the some of her richer contacts’ homes. But most importantly, her attention focused on the Templar’s weapons. Eleanor bore a gleaming silver spadroon, a parrying dagger and a flintlock on her sword belt. The assassin could only assume that she knew how to use them.

“Miss Mallow, I presume?” Connor asked, gaze sweeping over the other woman in predatory appraisal.

“Yes,” Thomas nodded in simpering agreement. Grin widening to a rapacious smile, he drawled, “They be callin’ ‘er ‘The Red Coat.’”

“It is no matter,” Connor waved in dismissal. “In the meantime, that is your cue. I shall remain at the
"Ain’t got no qualms 'bout that,” he lazily saluted. Watching as Connor pushed her way through the crowd, Thomas glanced down at the half-played game of fanorona on the table. While Connor captured more his black pieces, she made two mistakes that he would be able to use to his advantage within roughly three moves. Likely, it would result in beating her in the game.

He could only hope the same would prove true upon questioning Mallow.

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Thomas’ head jerked up at the unexpected sound of a commotion. A man’s lecherous chuckle was quickly followed by the loud noise of a slap. “How dare you lay your filthy hands on me, sir?!” Connor’s voice lashed out against her apparent harasser.

“Ya high and mighty bitch!”

Her curse in her native language hit Thomas’ ears, causing him to spin around in his chair.

“Someone you know?” Eleanor leered from her seat at the table across from him. Languidly tracing the tip of her finger around the rim of her tankard, she shook her head in incredulity as the hubbub seemed to rise.

“Nope,” Hickey briefly smirked. Connor could handle herself just fine. Not to mention, getting Mallow’s information fit into his personal endgame versus some silly-arsed fisticuffs. At least for the moment. “So…good ‘ole Gerard be headin’ to Boston?” he blithely continued.

“Perhaps,” she idly shrugged, “Perhaps not. What’s it to you, dearest?” she slid forward in her chair and unceremoniously dropped her elbows to the table. Clasping her hands together, she rested her chin on them, arching a brow of promise.

“Eh, Haytham needs a bit ‘o clean-up to go gettin’ done. Word be, ya pop’s been enjoyin’ Gerard’s services. A hell of lot, in fact, wouldn’t ya know?”

“That so?” she questioned, pulling back her lips a bit to flash him a playful frown.

“Seems to be the case, dearie,” he downed another tankard. Slamming it on the table, he thumbed back his tricorne a bit further on his head. Rocking back in his seat and haphazardly throwing his legs up on the table, he let out an exaggerated yawn and stretched his arms above his head before clasping his hands behind his neck. “So, seein’ as I need to be findin’ our murderin’ ‘lil pal, where do he be, hon?”

Roughly an hour ago, he sidled up to her at the bar without a lick of trouble. Flirting with the comely little thing was easy enough. They’d dealt with each other in the past, Thomas her usual purveyor of weapons and cash she needed for her missions. So it appeared nothing was amiss as he pretended to randomly recognize her. Flawlessly lying about being on his way to Fort St. Mathieu to speak with her father concerning Haytham’s supposed need to hire the Hessian, he lured her back his table. Her first drink eventually turned into another. Combined with a hell of a lot of come-ons and charm on his end, she finally revealing enough for him to know that she was on her way to Boston. However, despite probing deeper, she refused to reveal where specifically in the city the Hessian preferred to hole up.

“Oh, ya done pissed us off now, wench!” another voice from the bar rang over the crowd, interrupting their conversation.

“Remove yourself from me at once!”
Connor’s words were hastily followed by another smack, a flurry of her native curses and then a grunt of pain. Slightly high pitched, Thomas could only assume it was hers. Gritting his teeth, he steeled a flirtatious smile to his face and continued chatting with Mallow. He had an objective to complete, after all.

While there was no real danger, Connor was plenty irritated.

She’d dealt with far worse than these four rough looking sorts. Their attention focused on the bartender currently cursing at them to get fuck off his property, they weren’t paying her much heed at the moment. While they were only a bit taller than her, they all had a solid look about them. Dressed in the tell-tale mismatched, striped clothes of sailors, no doubt they’d been in their share of bar fights. That much she could surmise from tales of the Aquila’s crew. The fourth and youngest of them supposedly held Connor trapped against the bar, her back pressed to his chest. Fingers cruelly digging into her upper arms, he cursed as she lurched back and shifted her weight away from him. His mouth stretching into a devilish smile, his yellowing teeth were crooked and foul. A dirty, dark blue stocking cap barely covered his dark blond locks.

“I believe I told you to unhand me,” Connor ordered, voice cold and stony as her eyes darkened with rising fury. “If you leave me be, I will not be forced to engage you,” she shoved back against him again. It didn't do much, save knocking his balance off kilter enough to allow her to get her arms free from her sides. Then again, that was all she needed.

“Shut ya yap, ya bloomin’ moppet!” he young sailor scowled at her. His features lean and sharp, they were made all the more menacing by the sneer on his face as he snapped his attention back to the barkeep, who chided him to lay off of it.

“I ain’t wanting no trouble up in ‘ere!” the barkeep warned with a shake of his meaty hand.

Looking the balding old man up and down with derision, the sailor let out of a snort of obvious disgust. Meanwhile, the corner of Connor’s mouth twitched with a repressed snarl at the feel of a bruise beginning to bloom along her cheek from where he’d struck her roughly a minute ago, before he had her up against the counter. Normally, she would’ve kicked him in the shin, clocked him in the nose and then caught him by arm to heave him away. Either she’d wrench it far enough behind his back to break it in at least two places. Or perhaps, punch him dead-on in the chin and knock out handful teeth for his troubles. But glancing back at Hickey and Mallow deep in conversation, she knew her mission came first. Even if her patience was quickly wearing thin.

“For the love ‘o God, get yer bloody hands off the woman!” the barkeep he insisted in front of her, thumping an empty tankard along the hardwood of the counter for emphasis.

“Go fuck yourself, ya bastard!” another sailor of the group hissed.

“You have no right to speak to him in such a way,” Connor commanded, voice dropping to dangerous menace.

“What’s it to ya, half-breed?” the man holding her crowed. Her blood boiled at his insult as a glob of tobacco-laced spit landed nearly on top of her hands on the bar. “That it, precious?” he hissed in her ear, his alcohol-soaked breath causing her to swallow back a gag. “Are ya fuckin’ this old geezer, then love?” he jerked his head in the direction of the barkeep. “He got ya all wet betwixt yer legs every night? He like the feel of yer mouth up on his cock, suckin’ away for all yer worth? No wonder I don’t want ya now, ya Injun whore-”

The sound of his scream reverberated throughout the tavern as the bottle she seized up off the
counter collided with the side of his face. The sheer force of it caused it to shatter into pieces while sending his head jerking away at an awkward angle. A collective gasp rang up from the crowd at the sight of blood streaming from his nose as he staggered back. Bringing a shaking hand to his bloodied, shard-filled cheek, his icy blue eyes narrowed in hatred and disbelief.

“Y-y-you hit me!” he pathetically screeched, his hand seizing out to grab her, “Oi! The triflin’, wanton…chit…HIT ME!”

“It is no less than you deserve,” Connor barked, her heartbeat roaring in her ears as she smoothly sidestepped his attempted grasp at her. *FUCK ‘im ‘n his bullshit,* Hickey’s voice randomly echoed in her head, *I’d of shanked two bottles all up into ‘is mangy fuckin’ mug, the pikey git.*

Spinning on her heel and brandishing the broken bottle, she easily jumped out of his reach at his lame efforts to punch her. To her chagrin, she also was met by the solid expanse of one of his cronies at her side. Snatching her by the hair, he wretched her head back. She responded by elbowing him in the ribs, forcing him to release her in surprised pain. The shock of her follow-up kick into the inner arch of his foot then sent him crashing to the floor. Stomping on his family jewels for good measure, she snarled in warning at his remaining cohorts.

Now, the entire place was as still as a tomb, everyone’s eyes glued to the escalating scene playing out before them. Save the first man’s whimpers of pain and the litany of curses flying from his friend’s lips as he rolled about on the ground and clutched at his crotch, no one said a word.

“Hey-o, sweetheart?” Hickey’s voice inexplicably cut through the anxious silence somewhere from behind and to her left.

“‘Yes?’ she snorted, grip still firmly on the broke bottle in spite of her rush of adrenaline. It wasn’t as though she was going to risk taking her eyes off of the remaining two sailors to directly address him.

“Ya mind if ya duck a bit? ‘T’d be real fuckin’ helpful right ‘bout now.”

Without hesitation, she did as asked, only to see the flash of the first man’s fist barely miss her head. Out the corner of her eye, a heavy wooden fanorona board swiftly snapped into view. A blur of speed saw Thomas wielding it with ruthless calculation. Creating a breathtaking display of brutality, he first whipped its edge into the first man’s throat, only to spin it about in his hands and then smash it completely into the other side of his face. Her attacker hit the floor like a ton of bricks. Grappling at his throat, he gurgled for a few nauseating moments before falling unconscious.

“Well, that seems to have solved the issue at hand-”

She had no time to finish her astonished exclamation before all hell broke loose.

The crowd roared for blood as the remaining two sailors charged Connor from either side. For a normal person, the two thugs going up against a lone, quiet spoken, 20 year-old woman would end up a disaster. Little did they realize Connor was no stranger to standing her ground. Admittedly, the encounter lasted less than a couple of minutes or so. But as Thomas witnessed it, it seemed to play out in spectacular slow motion. It was made all the more absurd by the fact that the musicians in the corner of the tavern abruptly struck up a frenzied tune that seemed to match the ferocious action of the fight.

Easily ducking the first sailor’s punch, Connor shoved him away by the shoulder while fluidly sidestepping the second one’s bid drop kick her in the shins. A flash, and her fist connected with the first sailor’s chin. Dazed, her opponent wildly lashed out, which only resulted in Connor catching his fist in mid-air. Fluidly bending back his wrist at a sharp angle resulted in a sickening snap that seemed to
rueverberate off the walls around them. A moan of horror from the crowd filled the room, mingling in bizarre harmony with the sailor’s howl of agony. Tears streaming from his eyes, he doubled over. It proved an unfortunate reaction for him, as it easily allowed Connor to knee him in the head. Effectively breaking his nose and sending him toppling over, Connor then grabbed him by the back of his neck, only to slam him down into the table next to her. The force of the collision resulted in both the table and sailor collapsing to the floor, the latter into a bloody, screaming heap.

Assaulting her from behind, the second sailor landed a lucky punch to Connor’s left side. “That’ll teach ya, ya red sonofabitch!” he crowed in triumph as the Native stumbled backwards. A follow-up punch then caught her on the side of the jaw.

Yet the assassin regained her footing in less than a blink of eye. Gracefully throwing her weight to her other foot, she spun about and nabbed the sailor by the shirt. His eyes widening in horrified astonishment, he vainly tried to dance out of range. Regrettably for him, his luck had run dry. Connor’s speed allowed her reach easily overmatch his own. Bobbing another punch, Connor viciously twisted his collar hard enough to cut off his supply of air and leave him clawing at his throat. Without further ado, she flung him into a support beam behind her. He hit the solid wood with horrifying precision, a loud snap of something on his body breaking (his back?! Thomas’ mind raced). A pathetic wheeze and the sailor crumpled to the floor like a ragdoll.

Thomas couldn’t deny a rather large, primal part of him found this wanton play of destruction violently beautiful. Well, except when the sailor that Connor kicked in the crotch apparently recovered enough land a punch to his face and then make a running leap onto his back.

Barely flinching and shrugging it off easily enough, Thomas let out a venomous growl and threw himself backwards to propel the sailor into the wall next to Connor. Halfway toppling over on her, the battered man stumbled to his feet. He only had time to let out a single, rattling gulp before he was knocked to the ground by a chair Thomas hurled right into him. Striking with him so hard that it split into pieces, the bar stool was rendered utterly useless. Well, except for the large piece that lodged itself straight through the man’s forearm. Never one leave anything unfinished, Thomas stalked across the room and ended his hysterical shrieks of terror with one final backhand to the face, completely knocking him out.

Scrambling forward to avoid stepping on the four bloodied sailors, Connor was left speechless by the unexpected chair acrobatics. Particularly as Thomas swiftly yanked her up against his side and dragged her behind him by his firm grip on her upper arm. “Alrighty, so I be thinkin’ it be best if we get the fuck up outta ‘ere,” he hummed.

“What about Mallow-?”

“I gots wot we be needin’,” he cut her off.

Glancing around at the destroyed table, wrecked chair, a few shattered liquor bottles and the blood-spattered floor, Connor nodded, “It seems best that we, uh, leave.”

The angry silence of the patrons didn’t help either. Not when they were quickly making their way to the front door in what she could only assume was an attempt to block their exit. Fortunately, Thomas’ sheer size and her own air of menace managed to stop them from completing the task. Regardless, she grimaced as a couple of them yelled out various foul racial slurs against her. Luckily, they cleared the door and made it outside before anything escalated into another fight.

“So,” Thomas chuckled, clapping her on the back, “Ya just beat the ever-livin’ shit out of that lot.”

“Yes,” she stiffened at his touch.
“Three men-”

“Only two,” she retorted, “You stopped the first one when you smashed the fanorona board into his face. The fourth one made the grave mistake of leaping onto your back.”

“Huh?” he shrugged, “I believe ya be right. Still, ya probably up ‘n killed one of ‘em. The one ya threw into one of them beams.”

“Hardly. Though they will all likely suffer some permanent injury,” she replied, sounding downright nonplussed. He let out a loud guffaw at her apparent apathy.

Stopping in his tracks so rapidly that she collided right into his back, Thomas suddenly spun about to face her. By now, they were a good distance away from the tavern. But one could never be too cautious. Especially as he spotted a group of soldiers marching towards them.

“Aw, shit on a stick,” he declared in irritation. Grabbing Connor by the forearm, he whipped her around and thrust her into the alley on their left. Her back sharply hit the brick wall, causing her to wince at the impact. Even as she instinctively went into a defensive stance and her fingers flew to her belt for her nearest weapon. “Sorry ‘bout that ‘en,” he murmured as he hurriedly shielded her with his body with his own. Bracing his hands against the bricks on either side of her head, they appeared as though lovers taking a private moment to a casual passerby.

Connor certainly found herself fully aware of the solid expanse of his chest against hers. It was made all the more evident as he unexpectedly let his head fall to rest on her shoulder. Not to mention the heat radiating from him in the frigid night. His breathing slightly hitched and white in the icy air, it tickled the side of her neck. Yet the acrid smell of sweat, ale and blood littering his overcoat from the earlier fisticuffs wafted beneath her nose as well.

Worrying her bottom lip with her teeth, Connor hissed, “What are you doing-?”

“Shut it,” he hushed her, causing her to let out a snort of disagreement. “And stay.” Placing a placating hand to her arm, he turned her so that she see could the soldiers marching by. Thankfully, they paid no mind to the two, continuing onward.

“Well then,” she breathed, “That makes sense.” Thomas said nothing, outside of giving her a hasty nod.

By now, the adrenaline had run its course through both of them. Connor found herself tiredly slumping against him, her hands limply hanging at her sides. His head still upon her shoulder, Thomas closed his eyes for a few seconds and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Are you badly injured?” Connor murmured, feeling him take a deep sigh against her ear.

“I should be the one askin’ if they fucked ya up any,” he replied. Leaning out from the alley and checking one last time for any soldiers, he pushed himself up off the wall. His gaze slid to her face and stopped on the mottled bruise on her right cheek, just to the side of her nose. Eyes narrowing, he reached out to take her by the chin. However, he stopped short and abruptly dropped his hand.

“Considerin’ your face-?”

“I have tangled with far, far worse,” she huffed in interruption. Her fingers gingerly touched her bruise as she pointedly looked at him, "As you well know."

“Yeah,” he sniffed. Bridewell he mused as Connor silently shook her head in agreement. “Still,” his eyes flashed with mischief, “Ya didn’t fuck up too bad. Fightin’ that bunch and ya not murderin’ ‘em counts for somethin’.”
“They were but drunken troublemakers,” she adamantly replied, “Certainly nothing worth ending their lives over. Teaching them a lesson will suffice.”

“Still,” he rejoined, “Ya came out with a couple ‘o punches and a bit ‘o bruisin’.”

“No worse than you,” she steadily replied. Without thinking, she reached up to inspect his injuries. Her fingertips carefully breezed across the bruise on the underside of his jaw before she lightly brushed his split lip. He immediately held his breath at the unexpected contact freely given. “That should not have happened,” she exhaled at seeing him wince and assuming it was on account of potential pain. Rocking back on her heels, she shook her head in dismay and frowned, “I should not have involved you in that group back there. Not while you were gathering information. It could have put everything at risk.”

“Hell, it was a bit ‘o mad fun,” he insisted with a crooked smile. Testing a theory, he slightly turned his head into her touch. Funnily enough, she didn't retreat. “‘Sides, I haven’t had the pleasure of a right proper bar fight in a bit. Gets the blood all riled up and goin’, wouldn’t ya know?” he suggestively waggled his brows.

“Oh, come now,” she finally dropped her hand from him.

“Ya never know, sweetheart,” he cut her off, moving to exit the alley, “Ya should go mixin’ it up like that more ‘n more. Maybe it'll go coolin’ ya bloodlust down a bit-”

“You two ‘lil heathens! On them!”

Letting out an annoyed groan, Connor spun around and slit her eyes at the earlier patrol they avoided now doubling back. This time, tearing along the dirt road and screaming bloody murder at them. Somehow, she could only assume word of the bar fight had spread.

Without hesitation, she scrambled up a barn and out of sight.

“Wot in the bloody-?!”

“Flee, you fool!” he heard her hiss above him.

A shadow along the skyline and she was gone.

Chapter End Notes

In my head, the music playing at the bar fisticuffs is Fight Club from the AC3 soundtrack.
"Well ain't that fuckin' rude!" Thomas groused, splitting off in the opposite direction. Regrettably, there were only just over a dozen or so homes and barns to use for concealment here along the outskirts of town. Also, the moon was three-quarters full above. So sticking to the darkness was that much more difficult. Luckily, this was far from his first brush with the authorities.

Retracing his way back to the inn, he elbowed his way through a cadre of couples lounging, drinking and getting handsy with each other along one of its walls. Bordered by the stables on the other side, it formed a confined alleyway. Catching his breath, he slumped back against a stack of crates about midway through the alley.

His fingers snaked to the dagger sheathed next to his sword as a hand hitched him to the ground by his coat sleeve. Naturally, she slapped away his strike. Hard enough for him to lose his grip and allow her to pluck his own weapon from him. Mercifully, Connor only handed it back to him without a word.

"Jesus bloody Christ!" he sniped as she wrenched him down into a crouch beside her, "How in the hell did ya be findin' me?!

"Practice," she flatly replied, swiping a finger in front of her mouth and signaling for him to remain quiet. Holding their breaths, they waited for a couple of minutes. Finally popping her head up over the crates, she saw no soldiers in the vicinity.

"Look 'ere, love," Thomas muttered.

"You were saying?" she asked, cautiously moving from their hiding spot. Dusting herself off, she slightly rocked back on her heels as he hauled himself to his feet.

"I know how much ya hate bein' touched."

"By strangers," she corrected, adamantly pointing at him as he turned to face her, "Because it is rude."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," he waved, frantically looking around before closing the space between them.

She took a step backwards, only to find her back hemmed in by the wall. In spite of it, no sense of threat itched along her spine. Nor did she feel specifically trapped. "You are not exactly a friend," she deliberately replied, "Far from it, in fact."

"Still, ya ain't gonna stab me then?" he flashed her a distantly vexed grin.

Opening her mouth to reply only to shut it again, she cocked her head to the side, gaze flashing a bit.

"That depends on your next actions-"

Both their heads whipped around at the dreaded noise of redcoats cursing and bellowing out to search the alleyway. Most of the drunks cursed them as they were shoved to the ground and into the
wall. The sounds of muskets being loaded and boots tramping along the road promptly followed. Summarily taking in that the end of the alley was too far away to flee to without arousing suspicion, Connor let out a rumble of aggravation before craning her head upwards.

"Up!" she gestured, "We go over the rooftops-

"'Cept I can't fuckin' climb, sweetheart!" Thomas whispered in exasperation, already slipping down the alleyway, "Well, not half as suicidal 'n bedlam-y as ya always be want to do, ya nutter!"

Head twitching in disagreement, she began pulling herself upwards and setting her feet along the crevices of the bricks. "So," she sniffed, glancing down at him, "What do you propose, Hickey?"

"That we be-

"Over there!" a redcoat thundered.

"Oh, for the bloody love of Christ!" Thomas rolled his eyes. Snatching out, he yanked her down from the bricks by the waist of her trousers. Not expecting resistance, she flailed for a second. It allowed him the drop her on her feet, grab her by the shoulders and spin her about to face him. As he manhandled her scrambling form up against the wall, he barely ducked her instinctive punch to his chin while jerking his hips away from her knee to his crotch. "It don't be makin' no sense if we split up!" he hissed, "So stop movin' 'bout so bloody much!

Growling, she bared her teeth until the sound of trashcans getting knocked over and a stray cat yowling in protest hit their ears. As the patrol closed in, he dropped his hands to her upper arms. "Don't ya fuckin' go shankin' the shit outta me for what I'm 'bout to do, poppet!" he ordered.

Her eyes widened at the feel of him suddenly pressed up to her. His calloused thumb dropping to her chin, she argued, "What are you…

Oh.

So that was why he insisted on telling her not to kill him.

His mouth claimed hers, though not nearly as rough, sloppy or frankly as utterly dreadful as she assumed he would be. If anything, he simply pressed his lips to hers. It was also rather difficult to ignore how his other hand languidly trailed down her back. Instinctively leaning up into him, she strived to match his cues. For like in all things, she absolutely refused to let the challenge go unanswered. He apparently approved as she parted her lips and opened to him. Pulling her closer, his other hand tangled in her hair. Her own hands limply hanging at her sides, she didn't know whether to feel gratified or dismayed at how his startling moan sent a strangely responsive quiver tingling along her skin.

She'd been kissed before, back in her village. When she and Kanen'tó:kon were but silly youths, pawing and groping at each other in the usual, teenage explorations that came with the confusion of maturity. Thankfully, they promptly realized they preferred their deep and abiding friendship to all else. Besides, he viewed her more as a brother than a potential marriage prospect. She thought the same of him, thoroughly content in their enduring bond.

But this? This was miles different from whatever she'd done before.

Feeling herself start to slide along the wall, she reached out and fisted her hands into the collar of his coat. He responded by firmly bracing his legs on either side of hers and lightly pushing his hips forward. His fingers moving from the small of her back, he dipped beneath her long coat and lightly stroked up her side. Thumb coming to rest along her ribcage, he began drawing random little circles
along her waistcoat. Her breath hitched at the unexpected spasm of ticklish pleasure, allowing his
tongue leisurely slip against hers. He tasted of the iron tang of blood from his split lip. Along with
gin and apples. It all proved heady and wholly singular.

Withdrawing for a tick only to lean back in and lightly nip along her bottom lip, he let out low
chuckle, deep in his throat.

"Connor?" he repeated again.

"W-what?" her dark eyes snapped open, pupils dilated. Freckled cheeks practically crimson, her
hands somehow found their way up to his neck. Not to strangle him this time. Far from it, in fact.

"They be gone," his voice danced along her cheek, thumb still trailing along her side. "We should go
'n get the fuck outta here, yeah?" His other hand tucking a loose strand of hair behind her ear and
beneath her hood, he lingered.

Snapping out of her trance, she twitched away from him with a jerk of her chin. A solid bump of her
shoulder into one of his sent him pushing himself off the wall. At the same time, she narrowed her
eyes and swallowed, "That...would be best."

"Um-hmm," he gave an exaggerated bow. Gesturing with a flourish of his hand, he motioned for her
to lead the way. Inwardly cursing at how wobbly her legs felt, she was thankful for the darkness. It
allowed her to use the excuse of feeling along the wall to explain away why she moved so slowly. Then
again, the handful of redcoats that abruptly appeared behind them at the opposite end of the
alleyway created an excellent distraction as dwell.

Too bad they had their muskets pointed straight at them as they ignored everyone else milling about..

"Duck and run!" she hissed.

"Don't 'ave to go a tellin' me twice!" he grunted.

Bobbing and eluding the gunfire, they sped out of the passageway and into the dirt streets. Swiftly
scaling a barn, Connor lost the patrol's line of sight within a few moments. Tailing Hickey from the
rooftops as he ducked in and out of the faint moonlight, she had to admit her approval at finding him
able to lose his pursuers almost just as quickly. It created less trouble to deal with on her end.
Doubling back on his path, he ducked into some stables. Waiting for a bit, he popped back out into
the open again. At the same time, Connor deliberately let herself drop into view from the roof of a
home right in front of him. This time, he didn't startle at her unexpected appearance.

Instead, he cocked his head to the side and smirked, "So ya all in one piece?"

"Decidedly so," she nodded in agreement. Ignoring her primary need to shrilly ask what in
the hell he thought he was pulling back there in the alley, she forced thoughts back to the task at
hand. "So," she cleared her throat, willing her voice to sound thoroughly neutral, "What did Miss
Mallow have to say for herself?"

"Perhaps that I have learned to hate all traitors, and there is no disease that I spit on more than
treachery,' should suffice?" a vicious, familiar snarl hit Hickey's ear out of the shadows to his left.

Anyone else, and he would've found a couple of his teeth knocked out by her strike to his jaw.
Thankfully, he evaded the hit, dashing backwards into the alley and reeling back for an assault. But
without warning, a flurry of white zipped in front him, causing him to stop short. For Connor hurled
herself right into the Red Coat's midsection. The force of it sent both of them to ground in a painful
flurry of kicking, scratching and punching.
Neither of them seemed to land a solid hit, rolling and scrabbling around in the dirt. Suddenly, Eleanor sent up an infuriated howl. Jumping back off of her, Connor rapidly unsheathed her French cutlass. Strangely, rather than attacking, she waited. Patiently tapping the glinting, silver blade against her thigh, she also unsheathed her dirk. Their finely honed metal sparkling in the moonlight, it was evident both weapons cost a pretty penny.

Clambering to her feet, Eleanor's hand went to the back of her head. Eyes slitting to dark threat, she hissed, "Your 'lil minion ripped out my hair, Tommy!"

"Your failed attempt to do so with me first is all you have to blame," Connor nonchalantly replied, in spite of her glower.

"And since when did you start getting your lurid jollies from fucking the forest fruit, my dear Tom?" Eleanor sharply replied, ignoring Connor.

"I firmly suggest that you shut your-"

"Come'en now, ladies," Thomas shot the General's daughter an enticing grin as he passed a hand in front of Connor, cutting her off. "Ain't no reason for things to go and gettin' all ugly up in 'ere."

"I do not require you to defend me," Connor grit her teeth, advancing on the Templar.

Eleanor snickered with a dismissive wave of her hand. "Ah, I see, she's quite the insolent one." Eyes flicking over the Connor in apathetic evaluation, she shrugged and unsheathed her spadroon and parrying dagger as well. "Hmph," she curled her lip with derision, "You've always had a particular appreciation for the impertinent, presumptuous types that never seem to know their place. A pity," she whirled her weapons in her hands before testily cutting her sword through the air, "I always thought you considerably loyal to old Kenway. Then again, here you are, prancing about town with an actual assassin."

"Ya don't know the half 'o it," he sneered, baring his teeth in warning.

"Don't I?" Eleanor raised an elegant brow of question. "No matter how tight the quim, nor how much she enjoys being on her knees in front of you, I doubt your betrayal to the Order will be worth it."

Connor's malicious grimace of rebuke making his eyes going wide, Thomas cracked his knuckles and barked, "Now, ya just wait one fuckin' minute, 'ere-!"

"Stand and deliver, Miss Mallow," Connor boldly commanded, going into an offensive stance and shoving Thomas out of the way.

"Oh my, the Indian mongrel knows the rules of a duel?" Eleanor exclaimed with false surprise. "Too bad that I shall have to kill her, Tommy-boy. A supposedly civilized savage could be worth its weight in gold. Particularly back in the cities."

Connor lashed out first, diving forward with flawless balance and arching her blade upwards. Yet Eleanor effortlessly met her strokes, winding back and crossing her blade with Connor's. A handful of flicks of her wrist and she pressed the assassin backwards. Connor slamming into the brick wall of the alley, it allowed the Red Coat to slice off one of the buttons of her long coat.

Looking down in exasperation, the assassin clenched her jaw. Letting out a loud exhalation of boredom, the Templar rolled her eyes and taunted, "You are so amateur! At least endeavor to keep me awake whilst I end you, eh?"
Well, she certainly didn't take too kindly to the flash of Connor's dirk suddenly grazing her cheek. Mouth dropping open with a gasp, Eleanor reached up to feel a line of blood starting to form along her face. "Nice try," she scowled, wiping it away, "Except you missed."

"Hardly," Connor sniffed, "Do you really think my aim so poor that I could not take out your eye at five paces?" Looking over her shoulder for a brief moment, she arched a brow at Thomas, taking in how he casually leaned against the wall.

"Ain't me fight, darlin'," he drawled. "Hell, ya be the one who be callin' her out," he shrugged and crossed his arms at Connor's scowl.

"Why am I not surprised?" she droned.

"Yeah, don't go feelin' so bad," Hickey shook his head in agreement from where he stood a good distance away from them. "If I be a bettin' sort, which I very well be, me pounds be goin' on you, frankly. Sorry, sweetheart," he winked at Eleanor, who fumed in disbelief. "Nothin' personal. Cept ya haven't gone 'n had the privilege of seein' that maddenin' one in action," he indicated at Connor. "No matter the asinine odds, she don't never be backin' down, 'tis all."

"Enough of this mindless chatter!" the Red Coat bellowed, stomping her foot in indignation. "En garde!" she charged headlong, swinging her blade with efficient, deadly aplomb.

Eleanor may have been trained by the best swordsmen money could buy. Nevertheless, as Thomas could easily see, she was quickly turning into no match for Connor's approach. Obviously incensed now, the assassin's technique boiled down to mostly using her cutlass as a bludgeon to beat the ever-living shit out of her enemy. Sure, Eleanor technically landed more hits with the point of her double-edged spadroon. Hacking at Connor's torso definitely caused her light infantry coat get slashed into a few pieces. Regardless, Connor retaliated every single strike. An unanticipated ram of her shoulder or a well-aimed kick to her lower half after nearly every thrust of her cutlass constantly sent the General's daughter either brutally flying into the wall or stumbling against the ground. If not for Eleanor's fancy footwork, she would've been dead in the matter of a few minutes.

Connor's growing aggravation was becoming more and more evident. For most, it would signal increasing negligence in her form and missed hits. Then again, Thomas knew better by now. Especially when she hastily swapped out her sword for her trusted tomahawk and hidden blade. Thinking she had an opening as Connor traded weapons, Eleanor gracefully lunged and sought to strike the hilt of her spadroon into her opponent's forehead. As Thomas had witnessed in dealing with her in the past, this would usually allow her to take advantage of their break in defense. Snatching them by their shoulder and stabbing them through their stomach always finished them off. Of course, Connor was having none of that. Shifting her weight to the balls of her feet at the last possible second, she slid to the side and nimbly twirled about. The feint left her foe punching out in a completely opposite direction from where she assumed Connor would land. In turn, Connor had an almost laughably wide opening. So she settled for solidly backhanding Eleanor square across the face.

Her head snapping back with a painful groan, blood spilled down the Templar's mouth. Staggering away, she retreated from Connor's reach in stunned shock.

Thomas had never heard Connor curse. Well, not in English. However, judging by her implacable glare and the way she skillfully looped the handle of her tomahawk along her fingers, he could only assume she was sending a silent, "Fuck you" in the other woman's direction. Alright, so he couldn't hold back a cheeky grin as the assassin casually rocked back on her heels. Looking on as Eleanor spat out a glob of blood, she waited for the Templar to recover. It only seemed to make her adversary
even more incensed.

Wiping at her mouth, Eleanor's livid gaze slowly looked up from her bloodied hand. "You don't threaten me!" she snarled.

"I have done no such thing," Connor flatly replied, flexing her fingers before tightening her grip on her hidden blade. "For threats are futile. Markedly, when made in lieu of promises. For example?" her stare darkened with admonishment, "You threatened to kill me and you have failed so far. Apparently, Miss Mallow, you fare poorly when it comes to keeping your word."

Chest heaving with barely repressed rage, Eleanor scoffed, "Leave it up to a vulgar cunt like you to act in such a wretchedly uncivilized fashion!"

Thomas flinched at the expression of unbridled hatred that flew to Connor's face. Nonetheless, despite the rush of blood tainting her cheeks and how her shoulders stiffened, she remained silent. "Oh, so you've no words for me?" Eleanor sourly smiled, whipping her sword through the air with a flourish, "I am not surprised. No doubt, your command of the English language is wanting, to say the least, barbarian." He could hear Connor's growl, low and deep in her chest in all of its wolfish rapacity. Still, she remained rooted to the spot, patiently waiting for an attack.

Screaming in frustration, Eleanor sprinted forward and somersaulted behind her nemesis in less time than it took to let out a breath. Yanking her rival by the collar in midair, she aimed to drive her sword clean through her neck. At the same time, Connor refused to be deterred. Throwing all of her weight backwards, she reeled back and smashed her head right into the Templar's face. A crack reverberating in the air could only signal a broken nose. Judging by the Red Coat's screech of agony, it looked to be so. In spite of it, Eleanor smartly tossed her spadroon to her other hand and whipped it downwards. Kicking out, Connor parried the sword blow meant for her thigh with her ax. Twisting the edge of her weapon so hard against the Templar's blade that sparks flew, she punched Eleanor in the gut at the same time.

Her expression painted with venomous threat as the Eleanor doubled over and went careening to ground, Connor pressed her foot into the Red Coat's wrist, keeping her weapon at bay. "Yield," she ordered, looming over her and raising her tomahawk in warning.

"You rotten 'lil bitch!" Eleanor hissed. Her breath ragged and painful, blood poured down her lips and chin from her nose as she yowled, "How dare you!"

"I will not ask you again," Connor demanded, eyes bright with deadly intent. Leaning more weight into her foot along Eleanor's wrist, her gaze hardened at the other woman's frayed, guttural gasp. "You know as well as I do," she impassively added, "Only a little more pressure and the bones in your wrist and arm will begin to break."

"Well then," Eleanor viciously sneered, hand dropping to her coat, "I hope you appreciate my artistry."

"What are you-?"

A shot roared in Connor's ears, causing the assassin to brace and flinch. Yet she didn't feel the tell-tale sting of a bullet hitting her flesh.

"Are ya shittin' me?!" Hickey's voice painfully rang out behind her.

Panic rising, Connor spun on her heel and fixed her sights on him. It didn't make any sense, he didn't appear injured in the slightest. In fact, he frantically gesticulated at the ground while spewing out a
litany of curses.

At her back, Eleanor started screaming and begging, crying out for help. Connor's awareness shifting back to the Templar, she jumped and twirled around to find her on her feet again. This time, she made no move to engage Connor. Snatching up her weapons and retreating in the opposite direction, Eleanor sing-songed, "Enjoy dealing with the patrol, you mangy dogs!" Letting out a few more screams of false distress, she paused to add, "I don't believe they'll take two kindly to an indolent drunk and a filthy savage murdering one of their own, yes?" Without further ado, she took off, skittering up the side of the building.

"The fuck you waitin' for?!" Hickey bellowed as Connor dashed over to him. Calling heed to yet another patrol closing in on them, he snapped, "We gotta scram!"

"I assumed she shot you!" she exclaimed, scrutinizing him for any sign of injury.

"Naw," he shrugged, "She put a bullet in 'im," he pointed at the ground. Lying at his feet was a dead redcoat, his lower neck torn away by the bullet. Dropping to her knees, Connor checked for his pulse along his chest, though she knew it was futile.

"Ain't nobody got time for that, love," Hickey lugged her to her feet by her upper arm. Focusing her attention on the patrol of soldiers rushing towards them, including one mounted on horseback, he shunted her down to the other end of the alleyway. "Looks like me snoggin' ya won't be distraction 'nough this time neither," he winked at her as he broke out into a run, "A damn shame that be!"

"Thank the gods," she snipped back, right on his heels.

This group of soldiers wasn't nearly as forgiving as the previous others. The open terrain here at the very end of town and their mounted officer didn't help either. Not to mention, they were far more infuriated by the murdered redcoat they stumbled across after the two fled. As a result, Connor and Hickey found themselves crashing through a cornfield and deeper into the wooded landscape. The rush of the river somewhere ahead of them, they both headed in its direction, plunging into the forest. Normally, they'd easily give the slip to the authorities by separating again. Then again, splitting up and having to regroup would only result in a waste of time…

"Whoa, look sharp 'ere, girlie!" Hickey yelled, grappling out and nabbing Connor by the hood of her coat mere seconds before she went careening over the side of the cliff in front of them. "Fuck all!" he cursed as she windmilled her arms, only to crash into him and send them both sprawling to forest floor in a heap. "Omph!" he painfully gasped, "Why in God's name do ya be weighin' a helluva lot more than ya be lookin'?!!"

"Muscle, I assume," she distantly replied. Nimbly rolling off of him, she leapt to her feet and reached down a hand. He took it without question and dragged himself upwards.

"No shit," he exhaled. Staring over the wooded precipice they stood on, he took inventory. Not that it was much, admittedly.

Forced to jump back as clumps and dirt and rock broke away beneath his feet and went tumbling down into the ravine, Hickey shot Connor a look of vexation. A solid thirty foot drop down the sheer side of the overhang and into the river greeted them. While the water wasn't moving particularly fast, its temperature could prove disastrous considering it was mid-November. Nevertheless, with the patrol closing in some yards behind them, they didn't have much in the way of options.

Mouth pressed into a thin line of determination, Connor uttered, "I hope you have the ability to swim."
"Sure, yeah...but-

"Feet first and run into the jump," she interrupted, already backing away from the bluff. "It is relatively flat along its side, so you should not hit your head. Swim to the other bank and then we shall double back for our supplies and horses so that we may make camp and dry off. Otherwise, we may find ourselves in poor health from the cold."

Eyes widening in unreserved alarm, Thomas stammered, "Ya be outta ya fuckin' mind!" Frantically waving out to the empty air in front of them, he exclaimed, "Ya have no flippin' clue how deep it be. What if we go shatterin' our legs on the bottom? Or me head cracks open like a rotten melon against them rocks?" he pointed at the opposite shore.

"Judging by the patterns of the current, the water gives way to plenty of depth," she shrugged. "We will have ample room to dive."

"How in the bloody hell-?!"

They both hurled themselves to the ground at the sound of a volley of bullets blasting around them and thudding into the trees. Jerking his head up from where he lay and meeting her stubborn gaze, Hickey gaped as she resolutely replied, "It is our only option."

"Ya fuckin' daft in that ludicrous head 'o yours!"

"Am I?!" she snorted, jumping to her feet.

"Why can't ya just go fightin' 'em off?" he bellowed, getting to his feet as well, "Ya know, go 'n murder the shit outta 'em like ya usually do?"

She furiously nodded in rebuke, "The ground is quite unstable here," she stubbed her toe into the crumbling earth, causing more to break off and sift down over the lip of the ledge. "We are also far too close to the edge-"

"That you wanna FUCKIN' JUMP OFF OF?!

"All the better to control the angle," she huffed. "Besides, you should be grateful that I choose not shove you from the precipice in repayment for your kis...what you did back in the alley-"

"Oh, that?" he smirked, cutting her off and tilting his head to the side in his usual irksome manner, "Well 'en, miss, you certainly didn't go rippin' me face off ov'er it."

Shaking her head in utter disagreement, she sucked her teeth, "Do not make me rethink my patience-"

"Ready!" the redcoats thundered behind them.

Head whipping around, Hickey could easily make out their uniforms through a thin grove of trees only about twenty feet behind them. A fuckin' rock and a hard place, that was how this was playing out. Absolute bollocks to put it in laymen's terms. Still...

"I most certainly ain't gonna go hurling meself off a bloody mountainside!" he vehemently denied, throwing his hands up to the heavens for emphasis, "No fuckin' way, no fuckin' how!"

"Aim!" the ranking officer on horseback screamed out the order.

"You are willing to die for that notion?" Connor ground out.
"Hell to the fuckin' no. Just-"

"FIRE!"

He shouldn't have been surprised when she took charge. For once again, she moved far too fast for him to track. So all he could discern was her tightly hooking her arm around his and launching them both off the cliff top as the bullets danced around them. Using her momentum and his stunned disbelief at her latest, maniacal gambit, she sent them hurtling over the edge. Nauseatingly weightless and arms flailing, the chilly air whistled past his ears.

At least he had the wherewithal to not go screaming like some pathetic coward, he could give himself that.

Thomas didn't recall much as his feet slammed into the frigid water. But he did make an oath on the minuscule scrap of what little was left of his soul; God and his angels on high as his fucking witnesses, should he drown or otherwise perish, he'd haunt balmy git for the rest of her god-damned life. That was final.

Chapter End Notes

“I have learned to hate all traitors, and there is no disease that I spit on more than treachery.” – Quote by Aeschylus (c. 525/524 BCE – c. 456/455 BCE), an ancient Greek poet and author of tragedies such as the Oresteia trilogy. Considering Eleanor Mallow’s background, it can be assumed she received an excellent education, which would have included study of the great Greek and Roman ancient plays and authors.

**Spadroon** – Eleanor Mallow’s weapon of choice per canon. It’s a light sword that was popular with military and naval officers, though more during the 1790s versus the Revolutionary War era.
To Drive the Cold Winter Away

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

This ain't no place for no hero.
This ain't no place for no better man.
This ain't no place for no hero
To call "home."

--Short Change Hero, The Heavy

Exhaustedly hauling himself out of the frigid, churning water, Thomas collapsed to his hands and knees on the frozen shore. His body shook with effort to expel everything as he hacked and coughed up mouthfuls of icy liquid. At least the river wasn’t particularly filthy. Well, he hoped so, considering how much of it he felt as though he’d just swallowed. With a painful groan, he exhaustedly rolled to his back. Ignoring the muddy bank he lay upon, he swiftly ran his hands along himself, taking inventory. Save losing his tricorne, everything appeared in order. No broken bones or serious injuries, thank bloody hell. His baldric and weapons were intact as well.

Fuck, it was freezing.

In spite of his best efforts, he shivered nearly uncontrollably. Laboring to focus on the sight of the dark, Silvery branches of the trees hovering above, he found himself rapidly blinking. In spite of the lingering moonlight, his vision seemed strangely dimmer than usual. His clothes were also already beginning to harden along his skin due to slightly freezing. Well, that sure in the fuck wouldn’t do; if he didn’t find shelter within an hour or so, things would go south pretty damn soon.

He struggled to collect himself, gasping for breath. Slowly making his way to his feet, he stumbled and almost crashed back down into the snow. Hands flailing and scrambling for purchase against a tree trunk, his fingers clutched at the bark. ‘Fuckin’ assassin,” he muttered, throat aching with effort. Where in the hell was she?! He knew she hit the water a little ways after him. Seeing how she so god-damned readily shoved him off the cliff, he could only assume she could swim.

It took a while, but he was finally able to get his legs moving. Beginning to wander the shore, his gaze swept the area, searching. “Connor?” he stammered, lips twitching into a grimace. “The fuck is ya at?” he swallowed, voice raw and throat itching. Momentarily closing his eyes again, he slapped himself on the cheek to regain his focus. Scanning around, he finally picked out a fresh set of footprints in the snow. The undergrowth still sparse along the shore, her trail proved unexpectedly easy to discern. Strangely, she hadn’t bothered to cover her tracks. They led parallel to the river and then slightly to the left into the forest, which was eerily still and devoid of sound.

Then again, stumbling upon her sprawled out on her side along the snowy ground certainly explained why.

“Holy fuckin’ Christ!” Hickey shakily snapped. His breath white and misty in the cold, he snorted, “The bloody hell you think you doin’, girlie?!” Gingerly toeing at her leg, he jumped back when she suddenly she reeled back her heel at him.

“I would appreciate if you would refrain from kicking me,” she tiredly chided. Her side heaved as she took a deep, guzzling breath.
“Makin’ sure you ain’t dead,” he sniped.

Save waving him off, she made no reply. Running a hand up and down her arm, no doubt to warm up, she slowly rolled over to her back. Her eyes slid closed as she let out another ragged sigh. Like him, her clothes were soaked. Nevertheless she’d managed to divest herself of her weapons, long coat and waistcoat, which sat in a jumbled pile next to her. Were his teeth not chattering and his hands and face swiftly numbing, he would’ve appreciated how her wet tunic clung to her torso. Especially the clearly visible view of her bodice and chemise beneath it. There also came his bizarre relief at hearing her sound her usual nonchalant self. Well, save her gulp and stuttering hiss as she slowly moved to feet. Nonetheless, outside of steadying herself against a tree for a few seconds, she slipped into her typically silent, predatory gait.

Looking across the river and not finding any of the redcoats after them, she shrugged, “We have survived, so it seems.”

His swimming vision caused his irritability to dance dangerously close to all out wrath. So he settled for growling, “You be a right bastard, Connor!”

In spite of her paler complexion from her time in the river, she briskly pointed at the cliff behind him, “Would you rather be shot through instead of taking the fall?”

“Fuck to the no! But-”

“So what do you propose I should have done otherwise?” she scoffed.

“Bullocks!” he threw a hand up in the air, “I don’t bloody know! Go murder ‘em like you always be apt to go doin’?!”

“As I previously relayed,” she gestured for him to follow her up the bank, “The ground was too soft and I had no time to ambush them from the trees as an alternative.”

Too exhausted to do anything but shoot her a malicious look of reproach, he furiously trailed behind in her tracks. He barely acknowledged her as she commanded him to stay behind while she circled back for their horses and supplies. In fact, he settled for sliding down to sit haphazardly on a large boulder while she muttered instructions for him to remain in place.

When looking back at it, Connor realized that his lack of insult or threat to abandon her was a rather strong indication that Hickey was quickly losing his wits. Mostly due to his extended exposure to the cold. A pity, as it would’ve saved her further trouble on their strange little journey.

Sneaking the horses out of the stable back at the tavern didn’t prove particularly difficult. Not when Connor bribed the stable boy to keep quiet. All in all, it took her about an hour or so to ride back to the shore of the river with both their mounts. Mostly on account of having to find a way their side of the river bank that didn’t involve taking a second plunge over the cliff.

Of course, Hickey was nowhere to be found.

Her initial reaction was to curse him for giving her the slip. But it quickly occurred to her that it would make no sense for him to break their alliance at this point. Not at the very least without his supplies and a decent mount. So she allowed her vision to slip to grey. Her instincts taking over in
tracking him, the shimmering gold lines of his trail nearly blinded her. Which could only mean she
had to calm herself or else her strange gift would overwhelm her. Taking a series of deep breaths, she
shook her head to clear it. Ah, there it was; his ghostly image haphazardly stumbling forward, she
swiftly traced his route deeper into the forest. It was helped along by his rumpled tricorne, which she
came across further up the riverbank.

Confused when the trail ended at a bunch of dead shrubbery, she dismounted. Pulling them back
revealed a small opening to a cave. Thankfully, the dark didn’t pose much of a problem due to her
second sight. But judging by the increasingly bright flicker of dim light bouncing off the stone walls,
someone was already here. Likely built a fire as well. Silently nocking an arrow to her bow, she
looked around and once again focused on Hickey’s trail. It returned, though her stomach clenched in
spite of herself at the image of him barely able to keep to his feet.

She admittedly wasn’t surprised to see his crumpled form splayed out on the dirt of the cave floor.
Yet the sluggish, erratic pounding of his heartbeat echoing in her ears due to her heightened senses
sent her reeling. Something was certainly amiss.

“Hickey!” she hissed, racing over to him and dropping to her knees. He was face down, though
thankfully not completely in the dirt and smothering to death. “Hickey?!” she snapped again as she
shoved and rolled him over to his back. Ignoring her rising dismay, she clinically took in how he
proved deathly pale. In spite of that, the rhythm of his heart continued weakly fluttering in her ears.
A good sign he wasn’t wholly dead, yet he was most assuredly in danger of slipping away. Judging
by the way his eyes were half open and unable to focus on anything. His fingertips were also starting
to turn blue, as were the edges of his ears and down along his neck.

The upside of it all was that he was at least able to get a sizable fire going within the cave before he
collapsed. Going so far as to light it within a surprisingly neat circle of stones, it would save her time
in attempting to bring him back to full health. The bad news was that he was a solid twenty feet or so
away from it. Judging by his babbled muttering about the cold, he was likely attempting to burrow
into the dirt for warmth. A common side effect of people in the later stages of freezing sickness. With
no other option to ensure his survival, she’d have to strip him out of his wet clothes and bundle up
with him.

By the gods, this mission was getting more and more absurd.

Cursing in her native language, it took Connor a hell of a lot longer than she liked to drag Hickey’s
dead weight to the edge of the fire. Even longer to arrange him on pair of blankets that sat on the
floor of his tent she swiftly set up. Converting her native modes of measurement in her head, she
determined he had to weigh around thirteen stone or so. Clocking in at approximately 185
centimeters, he wasn’t exactly short either. In other words, he was a heavy oaf. To make matters
worse, he was increasingly dangerously cold to the touch. Nor did he respond when she thumped
him on his chest, save a slight shift of his eyelids. Completely passed out and sickly pale, even more
of his skin was gradually tinging blue from exposure. So time was of the essence in divesting him of
his damp, half-frozen clothes.

Connor always found the colonists’ aversion to existing in various states of undress strangely
amusing. Within her culture, especially during the younger days of her clan mother, the men and
women went about topless during the humid days of summer. Admittedly, within her lifetime, many
of the villagers adopted some of the colonists’ style of dress through trade. Conversely, they
thankfully had not taken to the colonists’ strange sense of shame at showing skin. Particularly in
regards to its necessity to healing. They also seemed to not deal with the cold as well. So she wasn’t
fully aware of the layers of livery the colonists insisted on wearing.
Stripping Hickey of his navy frock coat, beneath it came the matching navy Continentals coat trimmed in crimson and gold buttons. His white waistcoat proved the second phase. Next came a dark blue knitted scarf and the black cravat about his throat. Then, his ruffled uniform tunic. Maneuvering him out his boots, woolen stockings and tan breeches was an exercise in patience a well. However, she paused when divested him of his double layer of undertunics.

His form appeared surprisingly lean and lightly muscled. Likely, all those years of soldiering kept him from exploding in girth from his constant drinking. He also bore a litany of various old scars. The tell-tale, dark, round wound from a musket ball just below is right clavicle. A long, silvery, diagonal slice across his upper abdomen. The deep but neatly stitched dagger or bayonet indentation located horizontally above his left bicep. The freshly healed slash of the dagger she’d hurled into his right shoulder when she escaped the gallows some months ago. But it was the inked markings along his skin that immediately seized her attention.

Tattooed on his left pectoral and right along his heart, there lay a large green, four-leafed clover. Above it in archaic script read, “Fe Mhoid Bheith Saor.” It certainly wasn’t in English, so she had no idea what it could possibly mean. Written beneath the clover in the same script lay the word, “Dempsey.” Wrapped along his right ribcage in black ink was a list of names, two by two and four lines long. “Abigail & Peter” were first, followed by, “Darcey,” “Meryl,” “Siobhan,” “Caitlyn,” “Aidan,” and “Eamon.” A stylized, Celtic cross covered his upper right outer shoulder. On his left forearm, just below the crease of his inner elbow and also in black, was handsomely rendered flintlock pistol crossed with a sabre. Both weapons were inked above a crown of England, which Connor recognized from various British regimental colors. She found her fingertips tentatively tracing each of them. Yet when he shifted a bit, garbled words escaping his blue-tinged lips, she swiftly realized her distraction was wasting precious time.

She immediately made easy work of yanking off his woolen stockings, followed by his long johns. Now, he was left in his small clothes as she tossed a couple of blankets and a bearskin over him. Connor then quickly shed her own clothes, for they were wet as well. Left in her small clothes and chemise, she laid out all of their livery along the rocks to dry. Stoking the fire, she ensured its flames licked upward as high as possible. While she was sweating, she knew Hickey needed the environment to maximize warmth. Unbraiding her hair, save the plaited section at her left ear, she efficiently combed it out before sitting by the fire to let it dry, along with what she was left wearing. For if she remained wet, she too would come down with a fever.

To occupy herself, she took out her kit and sewed up the slashes in her coat caused by Mallow’s sword. After a while, she finally felt dry enough. Letting out a deep sigh, she looked over her shoulder to take him in. He’d fallen into a fitful, twitchy sleep, his breathing ominously shallow. Shaking her head to clear it, she steeled herself to action. For she was a woman of her word and it would not do if he died in circumstances within her control.

“Thomas?” she pointedly whispered, cautiously sliding under the blankets next to him and making sure the tent flaps were tied back to let in the heat of the fire. She knew she could defend herself despite the close quarters. At the same time, she doubted he would attempt assault, even if he was fully conscious. Regardless, the proximity still set her on edge.

Mouth pressed into a thin line of determination, she tentatively dropped her arms to him. Resolutely intertwining her legs with his to maximize his contact with a warm body, she swallowed as she tucked her head into the space between his shoulder and neck. He suddenly jerked and groaned as he still shivered. Startled and pulling back, she regrouped when he made no attempt to paw at her. Pressing her ear to his chest, she was relieved to hear his heartbeat wasn’t quite as erratic. And his skin was already slowly returning back to pale though he was still
cold to the touch. Her hand to his forehead reinforced that he hadn’t come down with a fever. At least not yet.

“Thomas!” she repeated, slightly slapping him. A second one sent him jerking awake. His glossy, hazel eyes slitted with discomfort, he searched her face with confusion. Furrowing his brows, he met her dark gaze with disbelief as he repositioned her arms around his torso.

“S hurts!” he hoarsely whispered, pressing his nose into her neck while he hunched himself closer to her, "But ya smellin' all good be makin' it better-

She abruptly jolted her shoulder away from the unexpected contact of his slightly parted mouth on her skin. "What-?"

"Ya be smellin' safe," he huffed, still shivering, "All spicy-like."

"You are delirious," she grumbled.

"No shit," he exhaustedly replied, "But if ya wanted some pretext for gettin' me all naked, all ya had to go do were ask, love."

"You remain in your small clothes," she hissed while shooting him a dangerous expression. "Additionally, my dagger is well within easy reach-"

"I be takin' yer point," his voice trailed off in a tired whisper.

For a few arduous, long moments, she remained perfectly still. But he remained silent and made no attempt to let his hands wander. She could only assume he meant no harm as he restlessly breathed against her. "What hurts?" she cautiously cleared her throat.

“Ev’ry fuckin’ thing!” he slurred. Crossing his arms tighter against his chest, he heaved, “Bloody freezin’-”

"You will remedy yourself within some hours,” she emphatically retorted.

“Ya gonna kill me,” he stiffened, feebly pushing himself away from her embrace. “Ya don’t be likin’ no proximity,” he weakly argued.

“To the contrary, not if it results in your death,” she locked her arms around him again. Normally, one of his size could easily break her hold, but not in this instance. All he did was erratically nod in disagreement. “Sleep,” she brittlely ordered, struggling to ignore how naturally her body fit flush against his.

“Fine,” he groggily huffed, “Have it be ya way."

Neither of them said another word as sleep overtook them both.

Thomas suddenly jerked awake to the feel of something warm, secure and oddly enough, soft pressed all up against him. The second thing he noticed was the earthy smell of dirt, grass and a tinge of sweat. Even more peculiar was that it was mingled with some alluringly spicy scent. Like soap, except not all girly and coy. Taking a deep breath, he let it sweep over him for a moment before opening his eyes.

“Shit, shit, shit!” he hissed, freezing at finding Connor sleeping flush against him. To make matters worse, her arms were clutched around his bare torso, as his were around her. That whiff of apparent
loveliness from before? Well, that turned out to be coming from where his nose was buried in her hair since they lay face to face. On top of that, he was in naught but his small clothes for some inexplicable reason. While she was in a thin chemise, thank god she wore small clothes beneath it. It at least left something to the imagination. Yet her legs were intertwined with his. That and the feel of her tits pushed up against his chest was starting give him some rather…carnal reactions.

Well, wasn’t this fan-fuckin’-tastic? Likely, she was going to murder ever-living the shit out of him once she awoke to his usual morning hardness all shoved up against her.

“You took a chill in the river some hours ago,” her mouth drowsily moved against his skin along his clavicle, her eyes still closed. “Our combined body heat should ensure it does not move into a fever. Or worse.”

He despised the way her warm breath inexplicably caused goose bumps to suddenly break out along his arms. Or how she could surely hear his heart starting to pound in is chest from her position. Not to mention, the firm feel of her back shifting and pulling as she stretched a bit. Yeah, he had to get the fuck out of here.

“I gotta take a piss,” he snarled.

“Be off with you then,” she brusquely shoved him away before rolling over to her other side and burrowing deeper under the bearskin.

“Gladly,” he snapped right back. She didn’t reply as he crawled out of his tent.

Letting out a curse as his bare feet hit the nearly frozen ground beyond the campfire, he quickly yanked on his boots before marching out of the cave and relieving himself. It was still dark out, not a lick of sun peaking over the horizon. Still, it didn’t occur to him until he returned to the cave that staying outside his tent wasn’t an option. Not when he was this exhausted and it was this freezing. Running his hands up and down his arms in a vain attempt to stave off the cold, he muttered in annoyance as he glanced around to determine his options.

“I need you alive and not to freeze to death,” she called out, voice muffled from within the tent, “And you cannot do that out there.”

“What, the she-wolf ain’t afraid I’ll be takin’ advantage of ’er?” he taunted, now hopping around in frustrated little circles to keep his circulation up.

Her reply seemed to take forever before she slowly said, “You have had plenty of opportunity to do so in the past.” That you did not do it in Bridewell is all I need to know, was left unspoken. “Additionally, I believe you are well aware of what will happen should you allow your senses to take leave of you.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he groused, “You’ll knob off me balls and feed ’em to me ’afore you slice me wide open with them blasted wrist blades o’ yours.”

“Something rather close to that,” she retorted.

“Bloody Christ,” he rolled his eyes.

Since when in the hell had he ever feared some mouthy ‘lil git? Since she almost snapped your neck and choked you out all by her lonesome back in prison, his mind reeled, And since she’s almost killed you a handful of times. Well, he wasn’t afraid of her, per say. More along the lines of finding himself having to remain relentlessly aware of her tendencies to act first and think later. Not to mention, her lack of predictability forced him to stay on his toes more often than not. At least it kept
things fresh and peculiarly thrilling, in a macabre sort of way. That comely face and her lithe form surely didn’t hurt either.

His tent was small and bordering on claustrophobic. Meant for only one, its canvas walls seemed to close in on him when he crawled back into it. But it was exceedingly warm in spite of the dying embers of the fire pit outside. “Hurry, you are letting the warmth out,” she yawned, looking up at him through tired, half-lidded eyes as he carefully maneuvered next to her. Why in the hell did feel like a boy at his first bedding as she flicked back the furred covers and nodded for him to slide back under them? Seeing his quizzical look, she shrugged, “I cannot afford to lose time in caring for an invalid if we are to track the Hessian all the way back to Boston.”

“Oi! Thanks ever so much for ya concern, mate,” he mocked, rolling over to his side so that his back was to her. “And what the bloody hell happened to ya stupid ‘Don’t go touching Connor or she’ll slice me balls off’ rule and wot not?” he groused.

“You are of no value to me dead.”

He couldn’t indeed argue with that. Still…”Ya know, poppet, a ‘lil finesse would do ya some good once in a while, eh?”

“I prefer veracity to your usual lies,” she sleepily snit, even as she pulled up the blankets and skin over him. “Now go to sleep. There are three hours until the sun will rise and we must be on our way.”

He stiffened at feeling her back pressed against his as she readjusted herself. Unable to nod off until he could hear her breathing slow, Thomas finally allowed sleep to settle over him.

When Connor groggily stirred awake with her back nestled against his chest and her head pressed into his shoulder, her first reaction was to burrow deeper into his warmth. Her second was to stretch a bit to get more comfortable. It was only her third reaction that caused her to clutch at her sheathed dagger at her side and easily within reach. Yet the pattern of his breathing didn’t change as she froze. In fact, it was slow, steady and pleasantly tickling her neck. Odd, she had very little inclination to shove his arm from around where it rested curled over her stomach in a loose embrace.

For now, she would blame it on the need to remain warm. That had to be the only explanation, versus any sort of comforting familiarity. Relaxing slightly, Connor drew her hand from her side and sniffed at the air. Judging by the lack of its frostiness, it was around an hour before sunrise-

“For fuck’s sake, woman, go back to sleep!” Hickey abruptly muttered in exasperation.

His voice raspy and breath hot against her ear, she was annoyed at how he’d startled her out of her thoughts. No doubt he felt her tense up. Letting out a loud snort, she hissed, “Perhaps you should follow your own advice?”

“I was! ‘Til all of ya movin’ about woke me the hell up again,” he carped. Without another word, he tucked in the blankets around them, effectively cocooning them closer. As he dropped his chin back to her shoulder, he ran a quick hand up and down her side. Almost as though silently soothing her back to sleep. After a few moments, his breathing slowed, signaling he’d drifted off.

Too tired to think any further on their proximity, Connor soon found herself slipping back into sleep. It’d been quite a long night, after all.

When Hickey awoke again, the sun was up and it was finally morning. The tent was empty too, as
was the cave. He admittedly didn’t know whether to be relieved or disappointed.

Yawning and stretching, he left the cave to find Connor already dressed and prepping her mare. However, she’d stoked a fire outside and some sort of meat was roasting on a spit over it. God-damn, if it didn’t smell delicious. It was then he realized he was starving. “It will be done in a half-hour or so,” she said, her back still to him. “Your clothes are dry by now,” she pointed to where there were neatly folded on a large, flat rock, right next to the fire. He would’ve complained that they were in danger of being burnt to a crisp. But as he dropped a hand on them, he could appreciate how they were nice and warm to the touch.

“Huh,” he simpered, “Well ’en, would you look at that? Thanks-”

“You should head down to the river and clean up,” she interrupted him from where she was leaning down and checking the hooves of her mare, ensuring no slipped horseshoes. “We need to get on the road soon if we expect to make any progress. Especially considering you have already slowed us down.”

He was about to reel off an insult until he realized that she’d likely ignore him. Rolling his eyes, he pulled on his boots, grabbed his clothes and headed down to the river.

Wrinkling her nose at how her stare inexplicably traced along the solid lines of his back as he retreated, Connor found herself letting out a deep sigh of relief as he left.

He was such an exasperating, irksome, arrogant, lecherous lout, just to name a few of his overarching qualities. His tastes were base and boorish. He mocked her at nearly every turn. He cared for nothing outside of women, money and alcohol. He freely confessed he only joined the Templars for the pounds that lined his pockets. When she just about killed him back at the gallows in New York, he was ready to pass from this world with nary a regret. He constantly undressed her with his eyes. And he had no qualms about thieving and smuggling for the sake of monetary gain.

So she despised that the longer they worked together, the less cause she had to expect his knife in her back.

He had plenty of opportunities to kill her, yet he had not done so. He also had numerous occasions to let her get killed during their undertaking. Yet he’d shoved her out of the way or gave her ample warning to an approaching enemy. While he tossed out endless lewd remarks, he’d never made any move to physically engage her. At least not beyond the colonists’ cultural need to be so frustratingly tactile. He had no respect for anyone putting any sort of airs. He refused to give a damn about one’s birthright or social class. He always valued talent and skill over empty promises of such. While he appeared utterly indolent, he put in solid work while on their missions, whether it came to gathering intelligence or fighting just as brutally as she. In spite of his coarse language, he certainly wasn’t lacking in intelligence. He couldn’t be, considering he ran one of the largest black market operations in the colonies and contained so many contacts.

Overall, such a dichotomy left her perpetually bewildered and perturbed.

She also hated the fact that she wasn’t blind. He wasn’t a bad looking sort, unfortunately. His bright, hazel eyes, straight nose and strong jawline could be appealing. That startlingly tall and well-honed form was impossible to miss as well. All lightly carved, hard muscle beneath warm, flushed skin, as she discovered last night. His accent bore a tantalizing draw, his voice rough and lacking any sort of pretension. As loath as she was to admit it, she could see how one could find him...physically engaging.

By the gods, if she wasn’t vigilant, she could only imagine various and rather awkward situations she
could fall into regarding Hickey getting under her skin. She certainly could not afford any mistakes in misplacing her trust with him. Or to be colored by any sort of distraction. That would not do at all.

“Thomas,” she steadily called out, interrupted from her wandering thoughts at hearing his lumbering approach behind her, “I take it you are ready to depart?”

“Well, would you look at that?” he snickered, purposely moving into her line of sight to her right. By now, he was washed and freshly dressed.

“Look at what?” she firmly asked, shoulders stiffening.

“Nothin’,” he smirked, eyes sparkling, “Just, I think that be the first time you bothered callin’ me by me first name.” Not granting him a reply and worrying her lip with her lower teeth, she preoccupied herself with checking the straps of her saddle one last time. “Oh, and how in the hell do you go abouts doin’ that?” he waved all around her.

“Of what do you speak?” she retorted, her back still to him.

“Hear me a comin’,” he shrugged, wolfing down his breakfast now, “Without seein’ me a comin’. I ain’t never able to get the drop on you.”

“I cannot help that you colonists are so heavy foot,” she replied, briefly taking him in over her shoulder. Her gaze flicked over him in detached consideration. Arching a brow at her aloof expression, Thomas nodded for her to continue. “Besides, if I allow my attention to falter, it could result in my death,” she slowly added, “Or worse.”

“Hmph,” Thomas nodded, “It must be a hell of a lot ‘o fun to always be livin’ in fear of someone lookin’ to slit yer throat at every turn,” he sarcastically said.

Letting out a deep sigh, she spun on her heel and watched as he put out the fire and scattered the ashes. “Such is my duty to something vaster than myself.”

“But can you take that to the bank ‘o cash it out?” he asked. Shockingly, it wasn’t said with his scorn as he’d done last time, when she hunted him down at her would-be execution. Rather, with real question as he swiftly saddled his mount.

“There prove far more significant concerns than money. Or power. Or influence. Or even one’s own life, at least when aiming to protect the greater good,” she quietly retorted. “I… I do not expect a flagrant opportunist such as you or your ilk to ever comprehend such, she was about to doggedly continue as she mounted her mare. But she bit her tongue at his mystified expression when his attention settled on her. “I live by that convention, simply leading others who choose to believe in it,” she continued instead. "We do not force our beliefs on those who choose their own path.”

“Until your ‘lil Brotherhood goes slayin’ anyone who refuses to fall in line with ya?” he bitterly replied, snatching up the last of his encampment, “Men like William Johnson, eh?”

It would not occur to her until years later that he accused the Brotherhood rather than her directly for the man’s death. Nor that she never explicitly told him that she was the one who committed the act.

She sniffed in disagreement, thoroughly unmoved. “Johnson attempted to cheat the Iroquois Confederacy out of its rightful land,” she sniped. “Then again,” her nostrils flared with contempt, “I do not expect a colonist to comprehend how poorly the Six Tribes fared at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix. Which I remind you, Johnson took it upon himself to contrive.”

“I don’t be needin’ no lectures from you, girl,” Hickey shot back, face awash with derision, “I was
there in any case, as ‘ole Willie’s right hand.”

“So do not make me rethink sparing your life back in New York,” she sneered, reining in her mare, “For you are just as guilty as he.”

“You troublesome ‘lil chit!” he snapped, eyes blazing with reproach as he mounted his horse, “Willie was tryin’ to save your lot ‘specially!”

“Then he should have given us the means to defend ourselves against incursions!” she snarled. “Are those not the same rights you colonists demand of the British? Is that not why you find yourselves at war to protect your land and loved ones? Yet you refuse to lend us the same freedoms?!”

Hickey clenched his fists around his reins as he spurred his horse to a trot. “I ain’t gonna waste my breath askin’ if ya ever been in a war, as you seem to be doin’ just fine murderin’ folks left ‘n right,” he grit his teeth, mouth twisted into an ugly scowl. "You ain't seen a damn pittance of what I seen during that bloody French and Indian War! Hell, you barely even seen a lick 'o action during this here 'lil rebellion."

“Your hypocrisy knows no bounds, Hickey,” she declared with rising animosity, “For you certainly bear no qualms with my abilities when it suits your motivations.”

“That be ‘cause I at least take the time to go plannin’ on how to use ‘em,” he accused. “You, on the other hand? You just go chargin’ in, never botherin’ to ask no questions. Or come to any sort ‘o conclusion on the best way to go ‘bout makin’ sure ya ain’t gettin’ no one else caught in your crossfire.”

“My actions ensure the liberty of choice and justice for the many!”

“Even if folks outside 'o our 'lil warring clubs be generally ignorant sorts?” he taunted.

“It proves better than control and repression!” she rebuked.

“No matter if a bunch more go dyin’ 'cause 'o it?” he icily declared. “Look here, I doubt ya ever been privy to watching a woman weep for her husband 'o son lost in a battle. You ain’t never stuck around long 'nough after you shot a man through his throat to see him choke on his own blood in a sorry attempt to beg for his life. Or seen him cryin’ out to his mother for a quick death after you go eviceratin’ him with those fancy blades 'o yours,” he condemned. “Nope, you just go ‘n slaughter ‘n rampage as ya fuckin’ please-"

“Do not accuse me of such merciless disdain! Nor should you ever presume to know anything of what I must undertake,” she barked, pointing an accusing finger at him. Her face darkened with barely contained wrath while her eyes slit to dangerous black. She ground out, “You dare spew your tirades against me? You, who are so proudly feckless and smug in your existence?”

“Hey now!” he sharply warned, “Ya best be watchin’ yer mouth, girlie-!”

“You who are driven by naught but greed and self-indulgence?” she brazenly plunged on, spinning about in her saddle and ignoring his sneer as she turned her back on him. “Unlike you, I never forget their faces. Nor do I ever take my burdens lightly. I only execute my duties to save those who cannot save themselves.”

“At least I ain’t blinded by life’s impossibilities. And I sure in the hell ain’t vainly fightin’ against people’s natural want to go screwin’ over each other,” he disparaged. “What, with yer diatribes ‘bout freedom, ‘n choice, ‘n lettin’ the world discover its own truth-”
“It is better than aiming to control and crush anyone underfoot who prefers to use their own intelligence to live out their lives!” she curled her lip in warning, now trotting beside him.

“And what of the sorts who ain’t got the power ‘o the means to make they own way? Don’t they need protectin’?” he demanded, cheeks beginning to flush. “Willie was tryin’ to avoid a war with your people and all that noble sort ‘o crap. For the sake of his pretty ‘lil wife, Ms. Molly, who be of your tribe. For the sake of his children with her, who the colonists ain’t never gonna accept as they own. If only so they don’t go dyin’ in the comin’ battle between me kind and the natives! Or do ya even bother to give two shits ‘bout them sorts?”

“All we wish is to be left alone!” she scowled. “Yet, you colonists infringe. You, who attempt to cajole us into trusting you. With your honeyed words and constantly broken promises that all shall be well should we cede to you our livelihoods and reject our way of life,” she spat. “My aims will lead my people on their own path to protection and their continued self-realization.”

“Oh-ho, sure it will. ‘Til someone more powerful comes along and sends you lot into ruin,” he snorted.

“And so we end his life,” she snapped.

“Until the next mad man comes ‘long and takes ‘is place?” Hickey jeered.

“No, until the people find their own way!” she sent him a withering look.

“So how does that be goin’ with you ‘n yours so far?” he gave a mirthless chortle. Despite her how her low growl chilled his blood, his raised ire refused to stop his words. “Oh, you can go ‘n shoot daggers at me with your eyes all you want, sweetheart,” he led his horse to road, Connor following, “But it be truth. Sure, I ain’t personally never had no problems with the tribes, as they ain’t hurt me none. But their days be numbered, you mark me words.”

“How dare you!” she seethed.

“Hey now, ‘afore you go stickin’ one of yer blades in me back,” he glanced behind himself to find her fuming in her saddle. Hunched down, her mouth was pressed into a thin line of repressed rage. “Just let me go explainin’ me self, yeah? All I’m sayin’ is the tribes won’t be ‘round for long. Though not because us colonists be supposedly superior. Frankly, we ain’t shit, to tell you the truth. Why? ‘Cause we, like all people, be greedy ‘lil sons ‘o bitches. It be pretty plain ‘n simple.”

“If only we all contained your resolute confidence in our fellow man,” she sarcastically quipped.

“If only ya could admit that people don’t never ‘ave their fellow man’s best interests at heart,” he rejoined. “Wot? Ya think I don’t wish the world be all rainbows ‘n kittens? Except I learned real young ‘n real quick that most certainly ain’t the case. Once the colonists get a taste for fresh land they can farm and all these pretty ‘lil trees they can cut down and sell to the highest bidder,” he waved to the forest surrounding them, “They’ll go doin’ everything in they power to go ‘n get it. You wanna know why, Connor?”

“Why, Hickey?” she clenched.

“Cause people be right evil bastards, that be why,” he declared with simpering aplomb. “They be selfish ‘lil gits who’ll stop at nothin’ to get a leg up on their neighbor. It’s a god-damned shameful truth. But that be the way the world always go workin’.”

She gripped the reins of her mare so tightly, she was sure her knuckles were beginning to turn white beneath her gloves. Her heartbeat roaring in her ears, it took far too much of her will to calm herself.
at his caustic words. So she settled for insult. “As though you know a thing about my people and their plight,” she jeered, “You are born of the conquerors who have tried time and time again to steal that which does not belong to you.”

He let out a jarring laugh at that, even as he held up a hand of surrender. “Don’t go lookin’ to choke me out, woman,” he quickly said. “I just be a ‘lil taken aback that you think your kind be the only ones who’ve gotten run into the ground by those that got all the power ‘n prestige. It’s obvious you be forgettin’ where I come from.”

“I doubt I bothered to ask,” she heatedly countered, “Save your feverish mutterings of Ireland deep into last night.”

“That place ov’er the sea ain’t exactly the safest haven,” he grunted. “Like your people, we be privy to the bloody English’s whims. To them, we ain’t no better than a colony to their rich landlords. And before ya go asking, it’s been like that for well over a couple ‘o hundred years,” he swallowed, looking away from her for a moment. “Fuckin’ English ain’t got no qualms ‘bout starving us out ‘o house ‘n home. Nor of usin’ our men for labor, our women for their bed sport and our children for servants.”

Furrowing her brow, she clapped her mouth shut. Surely, he could not be serious? “But you do not speak as the ones who come from there.” She’d always found Duncan’s soft burr comforting. Dobby’s proved a bit different but just as fascinating. For despite being born in New York, she retained the speech of her parents and their origins from the so-called Emerald Isle. She’d also heard other colonists who spoke in a similar fashion. “In fact,” she continued, “You sound more akin to those from England and its great city of London.”

He guffawed at that, retorting, “That be ‘cause me parents moved me family to its slums when I had but six or so years to me. Even went so far as changin’ our surname when we left home. Hence, I be speakin’ like a right proper English bloke. Gotta name like one of ‘em too, now.”

Brows shooting up to her forehead in surprise, she asked, “So you are more English than Irish-”

“No,” he swiftly corrected, pointing a finger at her. “In grand ‘ole England, the Irish be hated. That be why I appear more English than Irish, girl, as it be servin’ me purposes. Then again, no matter how much you try ‘n dress it up, a man’s blood always runs from his homeland. Which is why no one important knows of my true heritage, at least not here in the colonies. Let’s just say that it be safer that way.”

“But to deny your very essence-”

“No, I ain’t denying shit,” he cut her off, face twisting into a grimace, “People just don’t ask ‘n only be assumin’, ‘tis all. Like how if they don’t be lookin’ at you close ‘nough, they assume you be of some far off land. Like Spain or them kingdoms in Italia. Or some other place that be breedin’ black-haired, dark eyed, olive skinned beauties.”

Staring off into the distance for a long moment, Connor muttered, “Long ago, Achil…someone told me that I should disguise myself in such a way. I did not believe him when he relayed that ordinary people are not so forgiving of those of the tribes.”

Gawking at her for a moment, Thomas couldn’t miss her forlorn expression. Without thinking, he reached out and ran a quick hand along her horse’s mane and scratched under the mare’s chin. Remarkably, she did not spur her mount away him. Nor did she gripe out a warning at his proximity. “He be right, for better ‘o worse,” he shrugged, withdrawing, “People be soddin’ arseholes.”
“Apparently,” Connor quietly replied.

Her blood seemed to slowly cool its boiling wrath as she mused on his words. While he was utterly wrong in his estimation of society, she was unaware of his heritage. Making a mental note ask Achilles, and perhaps even Duncan and Dobby of what they knew of Ireland and its people’s apparent troubles, she occupied herself with her thoughts for a while.

After a couple of miles of traveling in silence, Thomas looked back at his companion. Taking in that she now sat up a bit straighter and her expression wasn’t quite so vicious, he softly began, “You know what, darlin’? In the end, I be similar to you.”

“Whatever you wish to think,” she arched a brow of disbelief while shooting him a dubious, sideways glance.

He gave a lopsided grin at her scoff of disagreement. “Just look at you, poppet! What, with your soldier clothes, ‘n your high falutin’ English, ‘n your British name of ‘Connor.’ A name which any idiot with a lick ‘o sense knows can’t possibly be your true one. Don’t go gettin’ your knickers in a twist,” he raised a hand at her wary expression, “It ain’t like I’m gonna go screamin’ ‘bout that from the rooftops.”

“As though anyone would believe the likes of you,” she retorted as her expression slid back its usual one of detachment.

“Anyways,” he rolled his eyes for a moment, “Like me, you’ve had to go splittin’ yerself in two to go movin’ about them that ‘as the power. And like me, I doubt you ever gonna forget where you really go comin’ from.”

“Perhaps,” she solemnly nodded.

“Yeah, so I be soundin’ English. But in me heart,” he pointed to his chest, right over the spot where she knew his tattoo of a four-leafed clover lay, “I’m always gonna be Irish to the core. So like you, no matter what you be wearin’ or how you be speakin’, you ain’t never gonna stop being what you were born into. Even when you go breathin’ yer last breath.”

“As you say,” she coolly said.

They rode in strangely companionable silence for the rest of the day. Unfortunately, the weather worsened once the sun started sinking below the horizon. The wind kicking up, visibility promptly became an issue. Especially with the untimely arrival of the icy, biting sleet. Looking over and seeing Thomas curse and wrap his scarf about his head, Connor pulled her hood tighter to herself. Taking in the descending, black storm clouds a few hours ride ahead, Connor came to a hasty decision. While she could tolerate the deteriorating climate, they would both be in less danger if they rested indoors for the night.

“I have utilized a hunting lodge a few hours ride from here,” she called out over the increasingly howling wind, gesturing to get her point across. “We will stay there the night.”

“It be a plan!” Thomas hollered. He always preferred anything to making camp outdoors.

“If we ride hard,” Connor shouted towards the slash of lightning illuminating the distant mountains ahead, “We should head off the tempest.”

Giving a grunt of agreement, Thomas reigned his horse to follow in her wake. After all, sleeping within walls always beat out being at the mercy of the elements, right?
"Fe Mhoid Bheith Saor" - "Sworn to be free" in Irish Gaelic. While Ireland doesn’t have an official motto, many consider this their motto. It’s also a lyric from the modern Irish National Anthem.

“I do not expect a colonist to comprehend how poorly the Six Tribes faired at the Treaty of Fort Stanwix.” – the Treaty of Fort Stanwix between the Iroquois and the British was brokered by William Johnson and signed in 1768 at Fort Stanwix in Rome, New York. It’s mentioned by name by one of the tribal chiefs in the cutscene at before William Johnson’s assassination in-game at Johnson Hall. To make a long story short, the Iroquois lost some land rights southeast of the Ohio River and felt they were tricked by the British into giving up those explicit land rights. It also set stage for future hostilities between the colonists and the natives.
Of course, as soon as Thomas slammed open the door to the hunting lodge, he ended up with a musket levelled right at him.

_Fuckin’ hell on the high water._

Petite, the blonde woman was slim of frame. Her lovely, full mouth, tangled, golden hair and bright, cerulean eyes didn’t hurt none too much either. But no matter who it was, Thomas never took too kindly to anyone who had him at the business end of any type of weapon. And this one didn’t look none too afraid it use it. Nope, not judging by her venomous expression of glee and the tight set of her square jaw.

The swipes of what he could only assume was black war paint slashing along her cheeks was right unsettling. Her black and white striped cloak tossed about her shoulders appeared woven of coarse, homespun wool. Combined with the duo of feathers fastened along the crown of her head, she appeared more savage than Connor. That certainly was a feat in and of itself. Like Connor, she also dressed in a more masculine manner. Beneath the cloak, she sported a black leather tunic edged in white. It matched her tan buckskin breeches, which were stitched up along the sides, and her tall, black boots. About her waist were a trio of belts sheathed with a couple of daggers, a small golden tin and her powder horn. They were in turn lashed about a white, fur sash. She also wore black leather gloves and matching leather gauntlets. He honestly couldn’t tell if they bore those mystifying hidden blades, similar to Connor’s.

Then again, his eyes were trained on the barrel of the musket aimed straight at his heart as she roughly bellowed, “Who in the bloody ‘ell is this lobcock?!”

“Fuck off, ya crazed cun-”

“_Hickey-._”

“This blasted ‘lil shit started it!” he barked at Connor as she strolled up the stairs behind him, having finished stabling her horse out back.

The blonde hellion dangerously leered, “Oh, and I’ll be fuckin’ _ecstatic_ to end it too, ya sonofabit-!”

“Peace, Emily,” Connor raised a hand of placation and nodded at Thomas. Ignoring his incensed expression, she swiftly added, “We are allies, Thomas and I.”

Frosty gaze narrowing with suspicion, Emily curled her lip and sniped, “Ya sure, hon?” Gaze sweeping over Thomas like a hunter toying with her prey before pouncing, she snorted, “He be a handsome ‘nough lout, yeah? But I still don’t be likin’ the cut ‘o his jib.” Cocking back he hammer of her musket, she derisively spat out her chewing tobacco onto the floorboards. It barely missed Hickey’s boots, causing him to jump back and fix her with a malevolent glare, even as he kept his hands raised in surrender.

“Ya be outta ya blasted mind, ya poxy wench!”

“First off, ya blaggart, it be ‘Emily Burke.’ Or ‘Calamity Mily’ if ya know me. Which ya fuckin’ _don’t,_” Emily smirked, poking her bayonet into his chest in warning when he attempted to
sneer out a retort. “Secondly? Shut yer filthy mouth, boy, ‘n consider yourself lucky. If Connor weren’t traipsing up ‘ere with ya, I’d have blown yer brains out a hundred yards or so back there. Ya know, when I first spotted ya,” she jerked her head in the direction of the open door of the cabin. “In the meantime, good to see ya, Con!” she shot a vulturine smile at the Assassin. “It’s been hella long since we be meetin’ out here on the Frontier.”

“Too long,” Connor nodded. “If I may ask, where’s Caleb?”

“Oh, him?” Emily chuckled, though her finger didn’t falter from the trigger of her weapon. “I wore ‘im out plenty last night,” she winked, “So much so that I’m ‘fraid the bed took a sound ‘lil beatin’.”

“I…I see,” Connor immediately blushed and swallowed down her embarrassment.

Emily let out a crude guffaw. ‘Forgive me, girlie. I be forgettin’ ya be a green as a saplin’, poor dear!”

“Seriously,” Thomas muttered next to Connor, “Ya’d think she’s been livin’ in a cave all this time.” However, he hastily shut his mouth as both Emily and Connor shot him a sharp glare of admonishment.

Fuckin’ Assassin women, mate.

“Anyways, it took me sharpshooter ‘bout half the day to go gettin’ ready,” Emily snickered before her expression fell to serious again. ‘Headed out ‘bout an hour ago. I was cleanin’ up a bit before catchin’ up with ‘im. We’ll be headin’ back to the outskirts ‘o Boston, as per usual. Gotta keep them rural roads all safe ‘n whatnot.”

Letting out an annoyed sigh, Thomas testily asked, “So, ya gonna get rid ‘o your musket pointed at me heart already or wot? For fuck’s sake-”

“He’s got a right foul mouth on ‘im, that much be true,” Emily cut him off, ignoring his curse, “So much so that ya should have been beaten as a child.”

“Oh, I’d love to give ya a right proper beatin’ right ‘bout now, ya mingy git!” he snarled.

“And I’d like to see ya try!” she sneered right back.

“Miss Burke,” Connor chided.

“Fine, fine,” Emily huffed. Gaze darting back and forth between the other two, she chortled, “Frankly, I’m shocked ya haven’t knifed ‘im through the ribs yet. Or,” she glanced down at his crotch, causing him to slightly wince, “Though his man bits. Judging by that lewd ‘lil glint in his eye, somethin’ tells me he’d miss ‘em more ‘n life it very self, eh Thomas?”

“Balmy ‘lil bitch,” he hissed, though not loud enough for Emily to hear.

Somehow, Connor picked up on it easily enough, for she shot him a look of reproach as she murmured, “Do no tempt me.”

Seeing Thomas roll his eyes as Connor stubbornly crossed her arms, Emily threw back her head and cackled. On the other hand, she finally lowered her musket. Dropping the butt of it to floorboards, she causally leaned on it while running a quick, gloved hand through her flaxen locks. “So, what brings y’all out this way?” she asked with genuine curiosity. “Specifically, the city boy?” she sent a feral grin at Hickey. “He seems rather outta his element and too far outta town from ‘is usual foppish pursuits.”
Taking a threatening step forward and about to reel off an insult, Hickey was stopped by Connor’s firm hand against his chest. Lithely moving in front of him, she solemnly said, “General Davenport originally. And now, Eleanor Mallow—”

“That high-falutin’, redcoat bitch?” Emily grit her teeth, expression sliding to murderous as Connor nodded in agreement. “What, her daddy done gone ‘n sent ‘er out a-murderin’ again?”

“Somethin’ like that,” Thomas grunted, “Along with ‘is Hessian dog.”

As the two women fell into hushed conversation over what’d occurred over the last few days, he glanced around and took in the simple, two-room log cabin. One area contained a single bed on an iron frame and piled high with blankets and furs. The hearth sat a few feet from the foot of it, simple and built of grey stone. The room they all stood in held a crude but heavy stove, a wide washbin sitting over a cupboard and a large larder next to the window. Hanging over the stove on an iron grate suspended from the ceiling were a cadre of cast-iron pots and pans. In front of the larder was a dark, wooden square table and two chairs. Next to it sat a worn out, leather chair that’d seen better days.

Due to only two windows in the place, the light was dim, save the flicker of a few candlesticks scattered throughout. Roughly only about 800 square feet of space, combined with the small stables out back only large enough to hold two horses, the house was obviously meant for short stays. Likely during the spring and summer in the hunting season. Thankfully, the logs comprising the place were sealed up pretty tight. They seemed to do a decent job at keeping the cold and draft at bay, at least.

“Somethin’ be on your mind, Connor?” Emily tilted her head to the side in question as the assassin slipped into silence.

Connor glanced back at where Thomas had dropped into the chair. He appeared distracted, warming his hands in front of the iron grate of the stove. Without further ado, Connor jerked her head for Emily to follow her outside. The two women quickly made their way to the front patio, closing the door behind themselves. Careful not to lean against the rickety railings of the porch, Connor clasped her hands in front of herself and gathered her thoughts. Emily settled for staring out into the drifting snow, humming a little tune to herself. Having known Connor for just over a year, she was used to the other woman’s long bouts of quiet.

“May I ask your assistance for something?” Connor finally proposed.

“Anythin’ for ya, sweetie,” Emily grinned, giving her an efficient, two-fingered salute from her brow.

“Duncan is back in Boston, as Clipper should be by now,” Connor began. “I need either you or Caleb to inform them to contact William de Saint-Prix as soon as possible. For the Hessian has him in his sights as his next target.”

“Ain’t that a flyin’ shame?” Emily frowned, scratching her head for a moment.

“No doubt.” Looking back at the cabin, Connor declared, “We should prove able to return to the city in the next three days or so. Nevertheless, I would rather ere on the side of caution than leave anything up to chance. Or in case we are delayed any further.” Pulling out her pouch of coins and counting out a few, she pressed them into Emily’s hand. “In thanks.”

“Well, this’ll be fun,” the blonde pocketed the payment, “It’ll go a long ways to helpin’ with gettin’ me ‘n Caleb more supplies back in Boston.”
“I would rather you officially join our Brotherhood,” Connor lightly implored.

Letting out a hearty laugh, Emily shook her head to the contrary. “Much as I be likin’ you folks ‘n your outlook, I be the independent sort, through ‘n through,” she shrugged. “Plus, I can’t claim that I be hatin’ Templars for anything more than all sorts ‘o selfish reasons.”

Shaking her head in understanding, Connor replied, “Avenging your father and brother, of course.”

“Ya see?” Emily knowingly said, “We both be orphans of a sort. But you be able to rise above yer past better than I.”

“Hardly,” Connor retorted. “Moreover, you have unwaveringly served the Brotherhood out here in the wild with Caleb. In various capacities and far better than most, I freely admit. Barring any sort of sacred ceremony, you are an Assassin in all but name.”

“‘Tis ‘nough for me, I guarantee ya,” Emily reiterated.

“I will not belabor the point-”

“Then don’t,” Emily chuckled. Nonetheless, she threw an arm about Connor’s shoulders. “I get y’all, through ‘n through. And I swear on my grave that I ain’t never gonna betray ya. Or any ‘o the others.”

“It seems that for now,” Connor murmured, stifling her initial instinct to flinch at the contact. “Your loyalty is all I may ask of you.”

Heading back inside, Emily left the other two to go finish packing her things. Adding more logs to the fire within the stove, Connor withdrew to peruse the larder. It was fully stocked, thankfully.

“Well,” Emily yelled out, clomping in from the bedroom after a while, “This is where we go partin’ ways, hon.” Spinning about in his chair, Thomas stared at the two. Mouth hanging open in disbelief, he was utterly astounded as Connor allowed Emily to freely pull her into an enthusiastic embrace.

“The storm will only strengthen over the night,” Connor clucked to her, withdrawing and dropping her hands to Emily’s arms, “Hence, you are welcome to stay.”

“Eh, it be headin’ north and I’m goin’ south,” Emily waved off. “Sides, bein’ indoors for the last few days or so has got me all jittery ‘n such,” she flexed her fingers for emphasis. “Furthermore, I gotta catch up with Caleb. So don’t you worry none ‘bout me.”

“Safety and peace, then,” Connor clasped a fist over her heart.

“Sure!” Emily replied, giving her other hand a squeeze of goodbye. “See ya when I see ya!” she briskly waved, turning on her heel and wandering outside.

“A pleasure, ya demented harridan,” Thomas sarcastically snapped out.

“A pity ‘bout ya, I gotta say,” Emily barely spared him a glance. Gathering up her supplies, she gracefully slung her musket over her shoulder.

“Wot ‘en?” he snarled.

“Yer mother shoulda drowned ya!” she taunted with a brassy hoot.

Before he could get in a word edgewise, the door slammed shut with a rattle.
Hickey retired to the bedroom with little complaint. Within a few minutes, Connor could easily make out his light snores. Taking her chance at privacy, she dragged the metal tub from the corner of the room to right in front of the glowing stove. Her preparations took a few trips to the well out back by the stables. However, after an hour or so of heating up pots of water on the stove and within its fire, she had a surprisingly warm bath ready. Double checking that Hickey still slept, she stripped down and stepped in. Meditating on her day for a bit, she dozed off for about a half hour or so.

The chill of water eventually woke her. Scrubbing herself clean with her usual soap she took with her on the road, she unbraided her hair and washed it as well. Dunking under the water one last time, she listened for any movement from the bedroom. Thankfully, there wasn’t any. Stepping out of the tub, she dried off and slathered herself in a bit of scented oil to protect against cracked skin. She then pulled on her small clothes, long John bottoms and her chemise. The cabin was almost too warm now, considering the roaring fire in the bedroom and the stove. But it was a minor complaint in the grand scheme of things. They had a solid accommodations against the storm, which was far more than they could hope for but a few hours ago.

“So,” she heard a loud yawn behind her. Swiftly spinning about on her heel, she instinctively snatched up her loaded pistol and dagger from where she’d set them on the table before her bath. “Wot be for dinner, lass?” She dropped her weapons back in place at seeing Hickey idly braced in the doorway of the bedroom. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he ran a languid hand through his mussed, dark hair. It caused it to stand up at odd, spiky angles, making him look strangely harmless. About to snap out a smart remark about how she wasn’t a servant and how he could make dinner for himself, she opened her mouth to retort. Yet his loopy look of contentment bore no signal of heckling or derision. Pausing, she instead settled for pointing at the larder. “It is stocked with plenty of food and liquor,” she steadily said before turning her back to him. It undoubtedly helped distract her from the fact that he only wore a thin undertunic and breeches. All in all, it left little to the imagination concerning the hard, solid planes of his torso. As well as the ink that covered them, as she discovered last night.

“Ya lovely folks be havin’ alcohol up in ‘ere?!” he gleefully said, “Well halle-fuckin’-lujah!”

Taking in her brief nod, he let out a piercing whoop of joy and crossed the room in a few long strides. The space small, he was forced to brush his chest along her back as he shoved between her and the table. She held her breath at the unexpectedly warm contact while he whipped open the door of the larder so hard it creaked on its hinges. “Well, fuck me backwards!” he cheerfully cursed, foraging for a bottle of whiskey and gin. He also pulled out a side of pork, some bread, a block of cheese, a handful of dried apples and a stick of butter. “Sandwich?” he exaggeratedly waved to his supplies.

Nodding, she distantly watched as he prepared two of them. Dropping hers on a wooden plate he’d found on top of the larder, he retreated to the kitchen table. Though not before grabbing a lamp and a few candle holders from around the room and lighting them from the flames of the stove. Sitting across the table from each other, they ate in unexpectedly comfortable silence for a bit.

“Drink?” Hickey suddenly said around a mouthful of food.

His voice causing her to jump and startle out of her thoughts, she stared at him for a hard moment. Finally shrugging in acquiescence, Connor let out a huff of agreement. They were safe and secure, in familiar territory and he hadn’t ambushed her yet. Why not? “No cups or tankards?” she tentatively asked.

“Nah,” Hickey smirked, “And quit bein’ so full ‘o it. I ain’t judgin’ if ya take it straight from the bottle. Hell,” his hazel eyes mischievously sparkled in the dim light, “Might even make me respect ya
“The latter,” she swiftly said. She’d tried gin but once, at Dobbie’s urging in a tavern New York. It left her throat dry and aching, in an unpleasantly harsh sort of way.

Hickey guffawed, shoving the glass bottle over to her side of the table. Glancing at him for a moment, she picked it up and took a long draught. While she sputtered for a bit, it went down relatively smooth. “Come now, poppet, don’t go drinkin’ the whole flippin’ thing!” he winked, snatching it away from her and taking another pull.

“You are saying that I cannot?” she retorted with such blatant rebuke that she surprised herself. She chose to blame it on the liquid courage newly flowing her veins, though logically, she was completely sober for now. Likely, it was more the result of the lethargic ball of comfort skimming along her skin in tingling relief. A fresh bath, shelter, plenty of food at her disposal; for the first time in weeks, she felt utterly at ease. That it was with only a decadent Templar for company didn’t bother her much. Their alliance so far remained remarkably beneficial.

To reassure herself of her instincts, she allowed her vision to slip to its eerie talent for tracking truths and lies. The world slid to grey, save Hickey who appeared...a faint violet? Neither red nor blue. In fact, the color flickered slightly closer to the latter on the spectrum.

“Ya ain’t addled in the head, is ya?” he snapped his fingers in front of her pale face as she caught her breath. “Fuck!” he suddenly lurched back, “Why ya bloody eyes be lookin’ all weird ‘n golden-like out ‘o the blue?”

Rapidly blinking at her realization, she closed her eyes and rubbed the bridge of her nose. Opening them, she hastily allowed her sight to swing back to normal. “It must be a trick of the light,” she lied with a subtle shake of her head, “And the liquor hit me quickly.”

“So eat ya damn sandwich already,” shrugged, “As I sure in the hell ain’t gonna go cleanin’ up ya drunken puke.”

“That much we can agree on,” she snorted, leaning in and stretching over the table to easily unhand the bottle from him. Taking another long drink, her gaze narrowed in challenge. “Try to at least keep up, Hickey,” she shoved it back over to his side.

Eyes widening at her boldness, he was about to go chiding her on how little girls shouldn’t go playing grown-man games. At the same time, it dawned on him that in spite of her youth, she no child. Far from it, what with her murdering, meticulous planning and foolish, if lofty goals. She could handle herself just fine. So arching an impish brow, he crooned, “Wot’s this ‘en? Do ‘Lil Miss ‘Stick Up ‘Er Arse’ be darin’ me to a game ‘o cups?”

“You are lucky I have not removed the proverbial stick in order to beat you about the head with it,” she shrugged, causing him to let out a bellow of wicked laughter. “And what do you mean by ‘cups?’” she asked.

“Nothin’ fancy,” he seemed to magically produce a deck of playing cards from somewhere on his person. Expertly shuffling them with a nimble flurry of his hands, he said, “Just what I like to call a simple drinkin’ game,” he waggled his brows.

“Ah, I am aware of such,” her eyes lit up with recognition. “Those of my village usually partake during various festivals and important rites. The last occurred during what you colonists consider the summer equinox. Le jeu de la crosse, the French have taken to calling our game, for it is too complicated to say in my language,” she hummed. “It is played upon a great field between warriors
over a few days. All in order to give thanks to the Creator. Bets are placed on the victors, either with items or via fermented drinks in order to give honor.”

“Yeah, well, this ain’t so grand,” Hickey smoothly replied. Cutting the deck of cards a few times, he set it down between them. “Just a harmless game ‘o Pharaoh for us to get up to,” he shrugged, “Ya know what that be?”

“I am thoroughly unfamiliar with such,” Connor’s mouth twisted in confusion as she drummed her fingers along the table. “No doubt, you cheat at it, yes?”

Hickey snickered. “Of course I do! Now,” he swiped out the cards into a fan pattern on the table between them, “Ladies first. Highest card picked gets first turn. Ace be the top, as per usual.”

Furrowing her eyebrows in concentration, Connor carefully took a card from the middle. With a fleeting grin, she flipped it over to reveal a ten of hearts. “It seems fortune resides with me.”

“Beginner’s luck, eh?” Thomas drawled. Swiftly snatch a card from all the way to the right, he slapped it on the table. “Well ‘en, would ya look at that?” he shot her a sneaky grin, “A king of spades for me!”

Eyes widening in disbelief, Connor implored, “How did you-?!”

“No worries, I can go bein’ a gentlemen, if I be so inclined,” he retorted with an amusingly dramatic sigh. “So since ya be all green at this, ya can go first anyways.” About to rebuke him, Connor paused as he added, “Lemme teach ya some ‘o me tricks, darlin’. Then, after a few practice rounds, whoever be losin’? Well, he ‘o she needs to swig a drink,” he pointed at the bottles with a flourish of his hands.

Hesitating, Connor mulled over his offer. But looking up and seeing the taunting confrontation etched along his expression, she utterly refused to retreat. “Fine,” she held out an unwavering hand, which Hickey eagerly shook with a roughish smile, “I agree to the terms.”

Now, the game was afoot.

Lord almighty, he was three sheets to the wind. Hell, six to nine sheets considering how his vision swam. The best part of it, though? His drinking mate was all sorts of fucked up too. Well, he’d at least like think so, seeing how she actually fucking giggled as she finished off the third bottle of whiskey between them.

She’d lost far more games of Pharaoh than he did, of course. Granted, he’d taught her a few of his cheats. Still, he wasn’t a total moron and hadn’t shown her nearly of half of everything he knew of his usual deceptions. Regardless, she picked up on most of his sleight of hands with relative ease. Yet it didn’t save her from the bottle. He had to give her credit, for she never refused to honor her end of the bets. Which explained why her head currently rested on the table. Her cheek was likely imprinted with its ridges from sitting there for so long. The bloody apocalypse must have rolled in at some point, for she was freakin’ laughing into her hand.

It sounded bizarrely charming, her looney little chortle as he recalled hauling ass through the stinking, squalid streets of London. His pockets weighed down with the pounds he’d won in a gambling hall made it all the more treacherous. Having around thirteen years to him but big for his age, no one realized they’d been swindled by a mere kid. At least not until he started drunkenly railing on and on about all the fine French wine and Swiss chocolates he’d get to go buying for his brothers and sisters. The god-damned, complimentary, fancy little glasses of scotch they kept
Duke Dumbass Who Was Too Much of a Fucktard to Realize He Was Getting Fleeced by a Cheeky Tyke for the Last Couple of Hours or So naturally didn’t keen too kindly to that. His calling the guard sent Hickey leaping over the railing from the second floor. Crash landing to the slick, rain-soaked cobblestones below, he nearly broke his ankle. Stumbling to his feet, he took off back to his usual stomping grounds in Whitechapel, over in the East End. Easily losing the soldiers on his ass, he and his family had the best Christmas and New Year’s in well, ever.

“And that’s when I got to learnin’ the true power ‘o havin’ a nice bit ‘o coin linin’ me pockets,” Thomas shrugged, sloppily dealing the cards again.

Connor suddenly frowned at that. Slipping along her seat and struggling to sit up, she swayed as she finally managed it. He couldn’t quite tell if she shook her head in disagreement as she slumped back in her chair to stare at the ceiling. Judging by her silence as he looked down to cut the cards, she was back to her usual judgmental self. If he were sober, he would’ve reeled off some slur about her misplaced faith in humanity versus the surety of having resources within reach. Whatever, he’d always been a cheerful, jovially randy sort of drunk.

Speaking of getting all frisky, why in the fuck-all did she have to be so damned comely?

He hoped to God that she didn’t realize how finely spun her chemise was, for her smallclothes were clearly visible beneath it. It’d certainly afforded him a shadowed view of her tits all night. Not to mention, the soft contours of the rest of her beneath it. Not bothering to braid her hair back, it remained loose and streaming down her shoulders, save the beaded piece along her left ear. Her cheeks were flushed from the heat of the stove and liquor as well. Combined with the flickering, orange light from the lamp and candles along the table, her freckles stood out in fetching contrast to her bronzed skin.

“You are,” she sluggishly began, “Fortunate that I am far too…inebriated to lecture you…unfortunately.” Fingers scrambling for purchase against the table, she grasped the bottle of spirits after a bit. For she’d lost the latest round of Pharaoh.

Her lips parting as she took a languorous swig of whisky, Thomas’ gaze heatedly traced along the supple line of her throat. Especially as her tongue darted out to lick away a few remaining drops of the amber liquid. His groin tightened at how her heavy-eyed gaze never left his as she did so. Dark eyes fiery and bright, her mouth curled into feline grin. Which only deepened as she slid the bottle back to his side of the table.

She couldn’t be purposely fuckin’ with him, could she?

*Could she?*

“And with that,” she waved with a flowing hand, her relaxed murmur yanking him out of his lascivious thoughts, “I fear that I must…retire for the evening.” Thankfully, her expression abruptly slipped back to her usual one of distant appraisal. Yep, there was no possible way she was deliberately toying with him. Not in the slightest. It was all a just the result of his intoxicated, increasingly heady hallucinations.

“So ya givin’ up?” he taunted, “Just like that?”

“Per…haps-”

“It either be a yes…”’o…no,” he slurred.
“You,” she retorted, lazily pointing at him, “You will not…remember if I did come morning, no matter. So, uh…yes,” she threw up a hand of surrender, “I do not seem to be victorious tonight. Fancy…that.”

Holy shit, did she actual reel off one of his sayings?

“A pity sweetheart,” he swayed in his chair, hearing the legs of it creak as he leaned back on two of them, “I was always rootin’ for ya.”

“Lying does not become you,” she smirked, “Or rather, I expect no less of you…yes, that sounds fairly more accurate.”

“Now, why ya always gotta go thinkin’ so ‘lil ‘o me, dearie?” he crookedly smiled, expression full of lusty promise. "Like I be sayin’ afore,” he winked, "I got all sorts ‘o talents that'll go makin’ ya toes curl somethin’ fierce. Only if ya go ’n gimme a chance at ya…of course.”

"Hmm?" she slowly arched a brow of question. That she didn’t backhand him across the face or stomp away in a huff at his intent was right miraculous. Instead, she settled for asking, "Is that so?"

Hand slapping out, his fingers twitched along the table before they settled on the nearly empty bottle of whiskey. Knocking back the last of it, he messily wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He lifted bleary eyes at hearing her chair scrape along the floorboards, only to be met by her inexplicably standing right in front of him. Snickering and waving the bottle right under her nose, he taunted, “Maybe…maybe there be a lot more to me than meets ya eye, eh-?”

Without warning, her mouth sloppily captured his, fervent and determined.

Not since he’d been a callow youth, years ago and back in England, had he found himself so absolutely frozen at such a gesture. Frankly, it took every fiber of his being not to grab her pert behind, haul her down into his lap and let his hands start their heated exploration. After all, he always finished what he started.

‘Cept ya didn’t start nothin’, his mind distantly reeled. Drunk…she be drunk as shit…can’t conceivably be knowin’ what in the fuck she be gettin’ goin’…

The silky feel of his hand tangled in her dark tresses while he shoved his other one all up under her chemise. The sight of her writhing beneath him as he fucked her into the table, sending his cards flying all over the damned place. The sound of his name falling from that delicious mouth. Her heels digging into his ass as her fingernails scraped down his back. The taste of her skin as he ran his eager tongue along every nook and crevice. The images of it all tilted and whirled in his thoughts. Unfortunately, it caused him to let out a ravenous groan of appreciation. But bloody hell, instead of sending her off, she only deepened the kiss. While her lack of experience was obvious, her enthusiasm more than made up for it. Her tongue sliding against his, he tasted whisky and fresh mint.

His strained to keep his arms pinned to his sides. Praying that she didn’t notice his shaking hands, he took her by the wrists and lightly pushed her away. “Nope, love,” he whispered, eyes half-lidded and watching in carnal fascination as she ran the tip of her tongue along her lips. Good lord, did she even realize how hard that careless little gesture was making him? Probably not. “That a-ways lays disaster,” his breath hitched, chest heaving with effort to keep his distance.

"In spite of the fact that you...kissed me first?” she scoffed, eyes snapping open, “Back in the… alley?” Her pupils blown, her lips were slightly swollen.

"A distraction,” he slowly retorted.
“I care not for... a supposed catastrophe,” she sniffed.

His mouth going dry at the sight of her dark tipped breasts outlined through the thin fabric of her shift, he swallowed for a quick moment before he drawled, ‘Oh, you’ll go carin’ come mornin’.’ Yanking his hands from her as through she burned to the touch, he let out a labored chuckle, adding, ‘Sides, I ain’t lookin’ to be no one’s hazy mistake.’ So what if it was a bald-faced lie? She surely didn’t need to know that. Or how much he appreciated keeping his balls intact. For as easily he could handle a crazed woman come morning, he had little desire to deal with an armed one.

Straightening, she swayed to her feet. Yet her knees still touched his as she clasped her hands in front of her. “So I was a mistake back in the alley outside the tavern?” she carefully inquired, twitching a brow. “What?!” he snorted, “Why would ya go thinkin’... it be just a ways to... No,” he finally settled on, “No, ya weren’t-”

“Then... what has changed?”

_I don’t fuckin’ know me self, ‘lil wolf_, he wanted to say aloud, ‘Cause I’d have me mouth all up on ya right now if ya was another other. Instead, he slurred, “Nothin’. Ya be plenty tired, Connor,” he scraped his chair back away from her. “Have a good night, yeah?”

Slitting her eyes at him, she pressed her mouth into a thin line. Then, without further ado, she spun on her heel and all but fled towards the bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

**Notes:**

**Pharaoh** – A French card game originally called “Faro” that originated in the late 17th century. By the 18th century, it was extremely popular in England. While it’s not a direct ancestor of Poker, it has similarities.

“...his usual stomping grounds in Whitechapel, over in the East End.” – Thomas Hickey has an obvious Cockney accent despite being born in Ireland. So at some point, it can be surmised that he and/or his family moved to London and settled somewhere in the East End in order for him to retain such a strong accent.

Traditionally, those with his accent are generally of an area of London within the earshot of “Bow’s Bells.” Bows Bells refers to the church bells of St Mary-le-Bow, located on Cheapside Street in the East End. Meanwhile, Whitechapel is considered a core district of the East End, which is one of the areas from where people who speak with a Cockney accent come from. So all East Enders are Cockneys, but not all Cockneys are East Enders. As a result, my fanon is that Hickey spent most of his childhood in Whitechapel, which explains is accent.

**Le jeu de la crosse** – This phrase is believed to be from where the word “Lacrosse” came from. It roughly translates to the French term for field hockey. The Mohawk and other tribes in the area and in Canada played lacrosse, though a different version from the modern game. If you look closely in Connor’s bedroom at the homestead in-game, he actually has a lacrosse stick leaning up against a cabinet of drawers.
Every time I close my eyes, I think,  
I think about you inside.  
And your mother, givin’ up on askin’ why -  
Why you lie, and you cheat  
And you try to make a fool outta she...

--Short Change Hero, The Heavy

For the first time in her life, Connor wished she was a hell of a lot more drunk. If only to render herself completely unaware of Hickey sinking into the bed behind her. His heavy weight shifting the mattress, she huffed out a snarl as he pulled the blankets up over them both.

“Don’t ya go a kickin’ me,” he sniffed in terse warning.

Infuriated that he could feel her reeling back her leg, her snarl rose into a growl as she took an extra pillow and mercilessly shoved it between them. Back rigid, she snapped her eyes closed. She didn’t know what she hated more; the fact that she had no legitimate reason to kick him out of bed, or that in spite of her pride, she could already feel her hands starting to trail downwards. Her fist gripping the edge of her chemise, she hissed in retort as her fingers began making lazy circles along her upper legs, seemingly of their own volition. Heading upwards, they ran closer and closer her smallclothes…

Stop this madness! her mind furiously railed against her. It wasn’t as though she was alone, exploring herself in the dead of night within her quarters back at the Homestead. Or stuffed into a tiny room at a tavern in one of the cities. She certainly wasn’t lying solitary in her tent next to the campfire, her hushed, shaking cries muffled by the crackling pop and crackle of the fire. His infernal proximity was of absolutely no help at all either. His scent of lemony soap, a tinge sweat and whiskey invaded her nostrils. The solid weight of his calf propped against hers only magnified the throbbing ache, deep and heated in her core. Not to mention, his breathing still hadn’t evened out. So she knew he was just as wide awake as she was.

“What ‘n the bloody hell-?”

“I would prefer to sleep in the other room,” she spat, alternately ashamed and incensed as she attempted to jerk out of bed and yank the topmost blanket from it. However, the alcohol in her system prevented it, instead sending her crashing back into the bed in a heap of limbs.

Oh, how she loathed his arched brow of question as he swiftly sat up and leaned back on his hands. Or the way his hazel eyes flashed with brief pity while he held out a steady hand for the blanket. So she settled for hurling it at his face. Of course, he easily ducked it. Of. Fucking. Course he did.

Vainly attempting to save herself for further embarrassment, she flopped back down to the bed, rolled over and squeezed her eyes shut. Surely, all that whiskey would soon knock her out, right?

“Like I be sayin’,” his words abruptly caressed her ear, “I ain’t lookin’ to be ya plastered lapse in judgment.”

Her back was suddenly spooned against his chest as he moved against her. While she flinched, she
was admittedly stunned at how she didn’t summarily threaten to disembowel him at his action. She also despised how she shivered at the feel of his hot breath dancing along her skin as he leaned over her. Or how she didn’t attempt to elbow him in his smirky little face. It had to be the liquor. That was the only explanation. It seemed to cruelly toy with her baser desires, shoving them through her well-honed filters of restraint to the front and center of her brain. Her mind was utterly afire, thoroughly unable to focus on anything else. Now, she was rapidly discovering the single-mindedness she utilized for everything else ostensibly applied to her carnal desires as well.

“I ain’t a good sort ‘o man, lass,” his voice snapped her attention back to the present, “Not ev’en a ‘lil bit.” He lightly dragged his fingers along her wrist, feeling her heartbeat pounding beneath his touch. “And I ain’t got no problems with that. Yet, ya do.”

She definitely didn’t slide her hand under her pillow and unsheathe her dirk. Or tumble over to her knees to straddle him as she pressed her blade to his jugular. Well, actually, she absolutely did.

“I know you would not take advantage me,” she shallowly exhaled, thumbing the edge of her blade, “For you did not do so back in Bridewell, which proved your best chance.”

“Which be explainin’ why ya got a blade pressed all up on me throat?” he slowly raised his hands in surrender on either side of his head, all in spite of his lecherous grin. “Ya social skills be needin’ some work, mate.”

“I always ere on the side of caution,” she swallowed.

“But like ya said, I didn’t lay a finger on ya back in the clink,” he rejoined with a churlish pout. “Well,” he winced, “Save when ya went ‘n jumped me in that crazed attempt to go breakin’ me neck-”

“Why?”

“Why didn’t I go violatin’ ya?” he shrugged. Seeing her nod in agreement, he breezily drawled, “Probably ‘cause maybe, just maybe, I ain’t a completely evil piece ‘o shit?”

Leaning back on her haunches, she slit her eyes at him, muttering, “Still, I find you rather loathsome-”

“In spite ‘o your efforts to fuck me?” he let out a low chuckle as he was met by her indignant expression. “It be a funny sort ‘o thing, being in sexual congress with someone ya supposedly so despise, sweetheart,” he clucked, “Bein’ six sheets to the wind be tendin’ to only enhance those sorts ‘o impulses.” She sneered in reply. It only caused him to harshly laugh even more. “Ain’t no shame in satisfyin’ natural urges due to proximity,” he knowingly snickered. Cocking his head to side, he gave a lazy wink and purred, “Frankly, I’m surprised a lovely ‘lil chit like ya self ain’t done it before.”

“I-”

“I ain’t mockin’ ya neither,” he interrupted, voice dropping and gaze locking with hers.

While her blade didn’t falter, she didn’t force it any harder to him. If anything, judging by the feel of her shifting, she leaned back even more. “No,” she carefully retorted, “I do not believe you are.”

They sat in silence for a moment, the air thick between them before Hickey slowly murmured, “Connor?”
“...yes?”

Gradually letting his hands drop to mere centimeters from where her knees were braced on either side of him, he airily declared, ‘I’d rather ya not go slittin’ me throat, I’m just sayin’. We can at least go agreein’ on that, yeah?’

She stared at him for a long while before nodding in ascent. Slowly moving the blade away, she leaned over him and carefully set it on the table next to his side of the bed. Biting his lip, his closed his eyes for a moment at the feel of her breasts brushing against his chest as she retreated. Still, he never took anything of that sort without solid confirmation.

“Connor?” he repeated.

“Hmm?”

“If ya don’t get off me, I can’t be sleepin’ up here in this bed with ya. Not without givin’ in to ya,” he muttered. “So it be best if I go make me self comfortable in front of the stove-”

“I release you from it,” she insistently cut him off.

“Wait,” he raised a bemused brow, “Wot’s this ‘en?”

“We will share the bed tonight,” she steadily added.

“Oh, we gonna be doin’ much more than sharin’, darlin’” he lewdly winked, “If ya catch me drift, aye?”

“I do,” she inhaled, worrying her lower lip with her teeth. “I…I believe that I do.”

He smirked, letting his hands slowly move upwards to rest just above her knees. Tentatively running her hands under his tunic, she pressed a fiery palm to the solid muscle of his torso. How he instantly relaxed beneath her touch gave her a tinge of confidence. Letting her continue her cautious exploration,  he began drawing random patterns along her lower thighs with his fingertips. Straightaway taking note that she didn’t withdraw, he lifted his hips and lightly jerked them up into hers. While she blushed, she didn’t flee. If anything,  she instinctively twitched her hips over him.

“So,” he hummed, “I take it you be saying yes to all ‘o this?” he languidly waved around a hand.

Shaking her head in agreement, she closed her eyes. His hand at the small of her back guiding her to tumble forward onto him, before she could doubt it, his mouth was upon hers. But he lightly pressed his lips to her. In spite of his other hand moving up her thigh inch by inch, he didn’t venture under her chemise. If anything, she sensed him holding back. In turn, she took it as encouragement to shyly nip at seam of his mouth.

As with before, he promptly realized how her fervor made up for her inexperienced movements. Likely, all that whiskey up in her as well. No matter, she was likely a fast learner, judging by her youth and other skills. Drawing his arm across her lower back to clutch her closer, his other hand tangled in her hair. She leaned into his touch, though she let out a startled exhale as his hand palmed her behind. Taking the opportunity, his mouth slanted against hers. Possessive, hot and deep, he nearly stole her breath away. She retreated, sucking in air, only to claim him again. At the same time, she scratched down the hard planes of his chest. Not roughly enough to cause harm, but impulsively impatient.

Without hesitation, he braced his hands against her upper arms and swiftly rocked her over to her back, reversing their positions.
His burly form surrounded her with little warning. All solid, blistering heat and heady awareness as he friskily licked and nibbled a path of kisses across her jaw. She moaned in bemusement when he reached her neck. The junction of her shoulder, the turn of her clavicle, the swell of her breast; he committed each part of her to memory with his tongue. His mouth reaching the dark, tightening bud of her breast, he sucked at her skin through the homespun fabric of her chemise. It created a tantalizing friction that seemed to shoot straight to the depths of her belly. Her toes curling along his calf, her throaty surprise as she arched up into him earned her his licentious chuckle. His hand palming her other nipple, he stroked her in time with his attentions.

But then his knee delved between her thighs, firmly moving them apart. Settling in between her legs, at the same time, he grasped her other wrist and brought it above her head. Interlocking his fingers with hers, he lightly pinned it to the bed. His lips moving to her other breast, she was met with a ravenous flurry of teeth and tongue.

Overwhelming, it became too much. This sort of contact, all so new, so foreign. Her heartbeat thudding in her ears, a strangled tingling of warning zipped through her.

Trapped.

Her free hand flailed, snatching at his short hair. Only her own discipline stopped her from reflexively driving her knee into his crotch and flipping him off and to the floor.

“Hickey?” she stammered, vexed and uncomfortably stiff beneath him.

Combined with that, her anxious tone immediately caused him to pause. “Yeah?” he looked up at her, dark lashes framing heated, hazel eyes. Nevertheless, taking in her peaked countenance, ruddy cheeks and sharp frown, he at once released her hand and propped himself up on his forearms above her.

“This is…extraordinarily fast,” she swallowed, chest heaving.

“Dammit,” he purposefully exclaimed, “See ‘ere now, I don’t be meanin’ to scare ya half to death, I swear to it."

Pursing her lips for a moment, she lifted her chin in understanding, “I do not assume that you do,”

Letting out a deep sigh and running a hand over his face, he firmly continued, “Look, if you don’t wanna, well, ya know,” he ruffled a hand through his hair, “I’ll go headin’ to sleep in front ‘o the stove in the other room, yeah?” After all, he could attend to his own balls if need be. Anything to avoid her knife in his back for taking things too far.

“It is not you-”

“Even if it be that, ya got all the right in the world to go stoppin’ me,” he deliberately replied.

Worrying her bottom lip, Connor took a deep gulp as her mind scrambled to reflect on her current situation.

She did not contain any true fear of what they were undertaking. Thankfully, Prudence back at the homestead insisted on becoming her source for such embarrassing inquiries. And frankly, it wasn’t until now that Connor wholly appreciated the other woman’s candor in explaining everything. Of course, Achilles attended to all other forms of her education. But he never touched on the more physical aspects of the fact that when she first arrived for her training, she was obviously a girl growing into a woman. Not that she blamed him. Prudence also discreetly supplied her with Queen Anne’s Lace. Ensuring she would not become with child until she wished it, Connor ingested the
herbs to her clear instructions. So she held no qualms about that aspect of it. Still, her mind reeled with the implications of continuing. Thoughts drifting away in abrupt analysis, she fell silent.

The sudden but steady feel of Hickey’s thumb painting brief circles of comfort along her forearm didn’t cause her to lash out and slap him away. In fact, his touch settled her. Much like an experienced rider soothing a frightened colt.

*Be without fear in the face of the unknown.*

“Connor?” he finally snorted, “How ya fairin’? ‘Cause whenever ya be goin’ all quiet ‘n whatnot, things don’t go…endin’ up for the best.”

Eyes snapping open, she looked down to find him resting his chin on her belly. Even more striking in the firelight, he appeared golden and warm.

Never one to dally, she took his other hand and placed it on her breast. His fingers at her arm stilled while he quietly questioned, “Ya sure?”

“Yes,” she resolutely replied.

“If I be doin’ anything ya don’t be likin’, don’t ya ever be afraid to go stoppin’ me. Understand, darlin’?” he all but ordered.

“As though I have ever feared such with you,” she defiantly retorted.

“Well ‘en,” he burst out with a cackle of bawdy laughter, the sound washing away the tension as he resumed their little diversion, “Challenge accepted!”

Thomas generally preferred his women softer. All luscious curve and heaving tits and rounded hips. Ready for his plunder and pleasure, which he of course always gave in return.

Obviously, there was no doubt Connor was of the fairer sex. Especially with her rich brown locks free of her usual hooded coat. For once, they weren’t plaited back into a braid and tucked into her layers of clothes at her back. Or tamed into a twisted knot at the nape of her neck. Now, her hair fell thick and soft to her mid-back. Her full lips, sharp, freckled cheekbones and the darkening depths of her eyes betrayed so much more as well.

She did not prove petite and demure. Nor flirtatiously enigmatic and full of the usual female seductions most women found at their disposal. She did not contain that delicate, fragile quality that brought most men to their knees in a fiery desire to protect her from the world’s evils. Her physical strength was evident, honed muscle beneath subtle curve. Her calloused fingertips tracing along his arm as he ghosted his hand along her side, they were not soft and yielding. Rough from constantly wielding weapons, they exhibited the obvious marks of her trade. Yet Connor was beyond so simple a description as “pretty.” If he were to bet on it, she’d likely consider being called such an epithet of sorts.

Strikingly arresting though? Aye, her beauty proved remarkable.

As she apprehensively pulled her chemise over her head, Thomas’ hands wandered upwards above her smallecases. Like him, she too bore a litany of physical scars. Regardless, she didn’t react as he expected. While she blushed under his hungry, wandering gaze, she made no rush to conceal herself with a flurry of ashamed hands. Nor to direct his attention elsewhere with an anxious surge of her mouth to his. Instead, she tensed before closing her eyes and gracing him with a light tremble when
he ran a delicate fingertip along the largest of them. An old, vertical stitch, a few inches long, it cut parallel to her right breast.

“Ya be a right lovely sight,” he found himself declaring aloud before grazing his lips across her ear. Experimentally sucking it between his teeth, he hummed with lecherous satisfaction at her accompanying moan. Not to mention how she unflinchingly bowed up into his hand lightly brushing along her taut midsection.

Eyes snapping open and narrowing in reproach, she shakily countered, “I assure you that there is no need for flattery-”

“I don’t be lyin’, Connor,” he huskily answered, dropping a quick peck to the hollow of her throat. “Wot this be then?” he asked of her scar, voice remarkably free of any sort of derision.

Fixing him with a stare of utter disbelief, she slowly began, “One of my first injuries. I did not realize the bayonet sliced me until roughly a half hour later. The fog of battle, one must assume,” she fitfully shrugged. “The barkeep at a tavern in Boston I returned to after a scuffle with the night watch was rather horrified at the blood seeping through to my overcoat. The doctor he sent me to?” she steadily continued, “Even more scandalized.”

“Hmph,” he cocked his head to side, “I doubt he be used to seein’ a woman with them sorts ‘o injuries that be signalin’ fisticuffs.”

Furrowing her brows, she replied, “Nevertheless, you do not appear to find it odd-”

“It ain’t a bad sort ‘o thing,” he swiftly cut her off with a hint of a grin. “Different?” he carefully rubbed the pad of his thumb along the middle of the scar, “Fuck yeah. But that don’t be makin’ it necessarily terrible. See?” he leaned down and licked a stripe along the mark. Planting a sloppy kiss at the bottom of the stitch, he smiled at her ticklish, startled snort even as she heaved up towards his mouth for more. “Ain’t nothin’ wrong with a few scratches ‘n wot not.”

“I…thank you?” she quizzically replied.

“Nah,” he shot her lopsided grin, “Thank you-”

“For?”

“Oh, you’ll be seein’,” he simpered, eyes darkening with debauched promise.

Without further ado, his mouth traveled downwards yet again. Gentler this time, he knew he had to take it slowly. It’d been a long while since he bedded a green sort. And judging by their willful dance back and forth, he would have to be deliberate and clear. So he left a flurry of kisses along her breasts while his fingers wandered. Alternately pecking lighter and harder, he increased his contact depending on her pleased breaths.

His hand grazing a round indentation along the top of her abdomen, he casually asked, “Musket ball, ‘eh?”

She shook her head in agreement and muttered, “The worst of them, so far. A fortnight to recover from it after Achil…the doctor removed it. It was not too deep.”

“Ya be a lucky lass,” he moved a bit, lips sweeping that scar as well. His cock hardened at the moan
that she sent up at his action, as well as how her stomach quivered beneath his mouth. “Quite a few men be tendin’ to die of infection.”

“Evidently,” she distractedly inhaled. Her hands dropping to the top of his shoulders, she dug her fingers into his skin while he continued his journey of discovery.

“Don’t go bein’ nervous,” he drawled when she flexed her upper leg against him dropping a large hand near the junction of her legs.

“I am not,” she lied, voice going high.

“Whatever ya wanna tell yourself,” he rolled his eyes before changing directions and crawling back up her.

She sniffed at that, retorting, “Do you think me craven, Hickey-?”

Interrupting her insult and covering her body with his, he rewarded her with a hard kiss to her mouth. She accepted the unspoken dare, returning it in equal measure. Her hands sliding along his sculpted back in eager purchase, she shoved his tunic upwards. In reply, he hastily stripped himself of it and hurled it to the floor. Only her hand abruptly tracing along his left pectoral and over his heart stopped him from diving back in.

Her fingers outlining the strange script reading, “Fe Mhoid Bheith Saor” above the large, green, four-leafed clover tattooed there, she murmured, “What does it mean?”

“Ya be seriously wonderin’ at that?” he countered, “Right now? Of all times?” he attempted to claim her mouth again. However, her resistant push against him kept him at bay.

“Yes,” she rejoined, “I want to know of what it says.”

Mouth curling with genuine astonishment at her insistence, he brushed her hand away before quietly answering, “‘Sworn to be free-’”

“In what language is it written?” she probed.

“Fe Mhoid Bheith Saor,” he repeated, “It be Gaelic…the mother tongue of me people.”

She slowly repeated its pronunciation, rolling the sounds around her mouth in thoughtful rumination. “That language,” she thoughtfully said, “It is very melodic...like a spoken song.”

"I guess you don't be meanin' no insults," he shot her a crooked grin.

“I do not, I assure you. And the word ‘Dempsey?’” she lifted an inquisitive brow, splaying out her hand along the ink, “Below it?”

Biting his lower lip, he briefly glanced away before softly replying, “It be me family’s Irish name. ‘Afore we crossed the sea to England and be changin’ ourselves to ‘Hickey’ to go fittin’ in.”

“To ensure you may never forget your birthplace,” she whispered, “For the blood of a man always runs from his homeland.”

“Somethin’ like that,” he distantly recalled as he leaned down and captured her mouth. Admittedly,
she found herself far too distracted to inquire about the significance of the list of names inked along his right ribs. Nor the tattoos along his arms.

He was pleased at her growled annoyance when he withdrew after a few moments. Bracing himself over her on one elbow, he resisted her clambering attempts to pull him to her again. No matter how potent her hot, increasingly frantic touches felt. “To go answerin’ as to whether ‘o not I think ya craven?” he breezily replied, breath dancing along the tops of her breasts, “Oh ya be a lot ‘o nutty things, fer sure. But cowardly ain’t one ‘o ‘em, me lovely.”

“I do not know whether or not to be insulted,” she questioned, face twisting with charming confusion.

“So don’t go worryin’ ‘bout it,” he swore against her ear before returning to her mouth again. Grunting in indulgence, he dropped a hand to bring her knee up his side. His weight settled between her thighs as she tentatively nipped at his lips. She wasn't nearly as skittish this time. So he opened to her, deepening the kiss and lazily sliding his tongue against hers. His cock hard against his breeches, she certainly didn’t seem to mind how he began slowly grinding himself against her. Not judging by how she pushed up against him in return. Curling a leg around his, she panted with increasing need as he purposefully rolled his hips into hers.

She whimpered in aggravation when he inexplicably rolled off the bed. The air empty above her, she looked around in bewilderment as he maneuvered himself and took her by the ankles. Without warning, he dropped to his knees on the floor. At the same time, he heaved her to the edge of the bed. She snorted in surprise, her feet hitting the warm hardwood on either side of where he suddenly knelt in between her legs. Freezing, her movements rippled under where his hands dropped to her waist. Stopping, he rested his cheek against her outer knee.

“I, erhm…well, I assume that you…?” she faltered, hesitantly gesturing at the bed. Sitting up on her elbows and looking down at him, she took in his easy, lackadaisical expression.

“Patience, ‘lil wolf,” he purred, voice low and ebbing in her ears.

Bewildered by his casual reply and about to comment, she instead let out a flabbergasted moan as he kissed the inside of her knee. Her flesh sensitive and not anticipating his action, she shivered at the swirl of his tongue along its crease. His other hand gripping her other leg, he stayed her instinctive flex of her foot. Had she moved more, she would’ve nailed him in the chest. Thankfully, that was avoided as he nibbled at her. Smiling against her as she gasped, he gradually moved his hand upwards. His fleeting touches left modest spots of pink along her bronzed skin as he pressed into her flesh. Soon, made his way to her undergarment.

“Hickey?” she stammered, placing her hand firmly over his some inches above her knee, “What… what are you-?”

“Ya think I’m a gonna go hurtin’ ya, Connor?” he questioned, bright gaze locking with hers as he withdrew from her leg. As he awaited her answer, he determinedly hooked both his hands along the hem of her undergarments. However, he didn’t move to strip her of them. Not quite yet.

“No,” she directly replied, without second-guessing herself.

Pleased at her unblinking answer, he smirked. His head dipping to drop a quick kiss to the hollow of her upper thigh, his words were liquid fire against her as he replied, “Then trust I ain’t gonna make ya regret nothin’, yeah?”
“I regret little in general, truth be told,” she throatily replied, still distracted by the feel of him upon her. He hadn’t shaved in a couple of days, so his stubbled cheek created a pleasing sort of contrast against her. Her stomach fluttering in the dim firelight, warmth whipped through her with building frenzy as she said, “But I—”

“Or do nothin’...unseemly,” he added, almost as an afterthought. However, his voice was muffled, his lips briefly against her again. “No matter what prudish idjits be a sayin’ of how they expect a man and ‘his woman to go lyin’ together,” he continued, “They don’t know shit, understand?”

“Y-yes,” she trembled as his mouth meandered along her inner hip. This time, he gave her a quick, strangely affectionate nip of his teeth, causing her to words to hitch, “Please?”

“Please do ya want me to go doin’ what?” he wickedly replied, pulling away again, even as he maintained a firm hold on her. Quick as a cat, he maneuvered her legs so that her knees were now braced over his shoulders, her heels dangling above his shoulder blades.

Though she could move easily enough, it occurred to her that she was now thoroughly at his mercy. She also found she had no qualms about being such a position. And so she nearly begged. “P-please,” she panted, mouth parted and pink, “Continue...?”

“Ya don’t be soundin’ quite so sure, love,” he cocked his head to the side in supposed confusion in spite of the roguish glint in his eye. “I’ll get to stoppin’ right now, if ya wish—”

“No!” she speedily declared, hands trembling to her sides in protest. “No,” she repeated, steeling herself to sound calmer, even as she snatched at his hand. “Go on,” she whispered, giving him a squeeze of permission.

He chortled at her becoming unwound. That much was obvious, judging by the flush running along her. All because of him. Something primal and possessive flared up within, knowing that he could bring her to such a state with a few strokes and caresses. He was rather startled that it caused a strange sort of pride to well up within his chest. He chuckled aloud again, for they hadn’t even gotten to the diverting part. “If ya wanna stop, me lady—”

“If you dare do so,” she nearly hissed, “I swear on high that I shall -”

“Are ya sure?”

“Whatever do you mean by that, you imbecile!?”

The insult bubbled up from her mouth, the edges of it laced with the barest of drunken amusement. Just a bit higher, her brain seemed to order him, of its own accord. She had no idea why. She’d never done this sort of thing before. Well, not with another person at least. Yet she positively ached for him to get on with it. Her hands falling to his, she tried to shove them closer to fully divest her of her undergarments.

“Patience, ya naughty ‘lil git,” he smirked in reply, “I’m a gonna go doin’ this in me own time. After all,” he paused to give a ticklish lick at the top of her hip. Closing his eyes and reveling in how a panting groan escaped her parted mouth, he grinned, “I always be rewarding them that ‘as me back. Ya could’ve let me go a freezin’ to death out there.”

“One would hope you would do the same for me,” she huffed, voice tense with anticipation.
“Aye,” he darkly chuckled, “For ya skills with those blades ‘o yours, of course.”

Slapping his hand away from her behind, she retorted with breathless indignation, “You are a thorough miscreant.”

“Oh, yeah?” he guffawed, withdrawing slightly, “Well ‘en, ya be seein’ why I be mildly surprised ya let me continue to go livin’. ‘Specially when ya could’ve easily gotten rid of me bein’ such a fuckin’ albatross ‘round ya neck.” he drawled. “So don’t ya go worryin’ that pretty ‘lil head ‘o yours, ‘cause you’ll be gettin’ ya just rewards ‘n whatnot. Of that,” he snorted as he finally divested her of her smallclothes and carelessly tossed them to the floor, “There ain’t no doubt.”

Rapidly blinking, she muttered, “I do not understan…oh my!” she keened out in her as his mouth was suddenly upon her. He gave a throaty laugh at her instinctive reaction as his tongue dipped and ebbed into her. Taking his prize like a starving man at oasis, his other arm dropped to her lower abdomen, firmly holding her in place beneath him. Her hips beginning to buck into him, her rhythm proved haphazard and unpracticed at such things. He didn’t mind at the least. Not with her eyes locked with his, half-lidded, pupils dilating and bright with rising desire. Not with how she tasted, sweet and tangy, more ribald than his darkest dreams.

Her hands balled into the sheets on either side of as her, threatening to tear them to shreds as he continued to make love to her with his mouth. But it wasn’t enough, and he found her fingers dancing in his hair, pulling him closer. Anything to lose herself to him and the havoc he wrecked upon her. She welcomed it, reveling in his boldness. Begging for his mercy while at the same time demanding he never stop, her slurred words came out in short, shaky spurts of need. Soon, her native language slipped through. Swirling about him in foreign melody, it was a sweet litany upon her lips.

Throwing her head back, she panted a filthy curse of appreciation as his thumb slicked over the center of her pleasure. Descending, he plundered her wetness, sinking first one and another finger into her. Moving in time with his mouth, he urged her ever upwards. Her hips jerked and trembled, his willing hostage as she scrabbled for leverage, digging her heels into his shoulders and lifting her thighs from the bed. He growled in approval as she grasped his hair. Goading him on, his vibrations caused her to squirm and writhe in earnest. Her rising gasps and moans now mingled with his name. A sacred prayer for deliverance, her words were supplicant his efforts.

So he decided to deliver her from this exquisite task.

“T-thomas!” she howled as he captured her clit.

His tongue licked and sucked at her as his hands fell to her bottom, opening her to him. As he brought her closer to the brink, he delicately scraped his teeth about that little bundle of nerves. For that, he was rewarded with his name feverishly spilling uninterrupted from her lips. Her motions combined with her increasingly bold noises of delight crackled and sizzled around him. Almost painfully hard for her, the final threads of his control were fraying by the second. Near about to shove her back onto the bed and fuck her hard and deep beneath him, loosing himself to her searing depths would be just reward for them both.

She was seconds from her peak when she suddenly found him braced over her. His mouth devouring hers, she tasted herself on his lips, rich and intoxicating. Pulling him flush, she reveled in the feel of his sweaty, sturdy strength engulfing her. Her hands seemed to be everywhere at once. Wild in their searching, she ran them along his chest, shoved them down to the small of his back, along his sides, even slanted her fingers beneath the hem of his breeches.
When he suddenly pushed away from her, she babbled something in her mother tongue that sounded mightily pissed. At least he assumed so, judging by her amusingly petulant expression. Not to mention how her hands immediately fell to his forearms in an effort to keep him close.

“This may go hurtin,’” he panted.

Sure, he didn’t have proof that her virtue was intact. Still, it would do well to remind her just case. One of his hands still worked her wet folds. But lightly, keeping her from tumbling over the edge. Frustrated, she clawed at his back and buried her nose in his shoulder. Yet she could feel his hardness along her thigh, thick and heavy. Somehow, he’d shed his breeches. Not that she gave a damn, at least not in her current state.

“W-why?!” she slurred, thighs squeezing his hand between them in a vain effort to gain more friction, “Why would you assume-?”

“Just makin’ sure ya be aware,” he clenched. Withdrawing at feeling her begin to tighten around his fingers, he stroked his cock between their bodies.

She furiously shook her head in disagreement. “I…I do not care,” she strained, “You must…I will not ask…again!”

“Fine, fine,” he huskily teased with a cavalier smile, “Ain’t gotta go tellin’ me twice,”

Thrusting into her, he swallowed her loud exhalation into his kiss at the sudden, throbbing invasion.

“lah tewake'nikohrai'en:ta's?!” she hissed against him, mouth desperately sliding against his and hands dropping to his hips to stop him from pulling back.

“What ‘en?” he grunted. Now, he was acutely aware that it was her first time. Especially as she jerkily bucked beneath him.

He admittedly refused to dwell on it.

“It…it is strange!” she hitched, fingers digging into him with increasing desperation, “This feeling...all of this!”

“It be gone in a bit,” he rasped, “I promise on me grave.” Mouth claiming hers again, he momentarily distracted her from the sharp sting as he snapped up to sink into her again. Blinking in surprise, she took in deep gulps of air. Wrapping her legs around his, her entire being fluttered with this new sensation. “Fuck me, lass, ya gonna be the death ‘o me!” he grit, fighting to remain still again to assuage her. While he didn’t understand her keening reply, she didn’t appear to want to kill him. So he took her hand and interlaced his fingers with hers as his other slid down to rest on her hip.

Before long, instinct compelled her to move again. However, the twinging prickle made her halt, her chest rising and falling with each labored breath. Reverently kissing away the tears of discomfort on her cheek, he kissed the tip of her nose as well before moving again. Thankfully, her tenderness seemed to steadily dissipate.

"Ya be a hungry 'lil minx, ain't ya?” he groaned, words sultry upon her ear.

She retorted with something garbled in her language as she moved under him for a bit. The unease
slowly spilling away into wanton gratification, she eagerly propelled her hips up against his.

"Connor, me lovely," he rumbled as the feel of her, hot, tight and wet around him, "Keep goin' sweetheart," he breathed, restraint hanging by a thread. “Just...like...that!” he strained in between his drives into her.

They began moving in the age-old carnal dance, sight and sound peaked and blurring the edges of their exquisite desperation. Sucking at her lower lip, he moaned her name as she scraped at his arms. Tongue darting out to wet her lips, she mewed in pleasure as their actions became more frantic. Her pace was careless and jumbled. But he gave no indication of displeasure, all sorts of his filthy declarations recklessly spilling into her ear. Her hips eventually moving in time with his, her ramblings in her language were indistinct, mixing with his steady groans of reckless gratification. As he rocked in and out of her, her hands moved to his back. She distantly marveled at how hard muscle moved under soft skin.

Without warning, he sucked a mark of possession onto her neck, where her heart beat in frenzied time. It sent her over the precipice. A strangled cry, she drove upward. Hands scraping down his back, her body and mind were completely overwhelmed with this compelling delight. Without warning, she shuddered and cradled his body to hers. Plunging into her over and over, he grabbed her by the thighs as he groaned in blessed release. His fingers massaged her still, drawing out her desire to the fullest as she came down from her own heights. Collapsing back onto the bed, though it was illogical, she swore she saw the ceiling above them tilt and swirl together in time to her breath.

Silence fell between them, save their labored panting. Shifting, she rested her head in the crook of his shoulder, lips moving against his skin as she murmured.

“I hope that wasn’t no threat against me life,” he half-joked, pulling away a touch to settle his gaze on her.

Her eyes widened slightly before she resolutely replied, “No...it is not.”

“Good ‘en,” he proclaimed, dropping a kiss to her lips for a long moment. “Good,” he reiterated, twining his fingers through her hair before rolling off of her.

Silently moving to her side the bed, she started at the feel of him dragging her towards him. “What-?”

“Ya be fuckin’ delicious, love, that’s wot,” he groggily slurred, spooning against her back, “But sleep…now.” She stiffened at the feel of his arms draping around her. One hand grazing her breasts, the other fell to her waist. “’N calm the fuck down, yeah? I ain’t gonna murder ya,” he hummed at her stillness, “Too much blood ‘n whatnot to go cleanin’ up.”

“A likely tale, Hickey,” she drowsily retorted, even as she relaxed into him. Tentatively moving a hand to where his arm ensonced her waist, she ignored his little huff of contentment. As well as how he almost protectively shoved a leg over hers. “You would not bother to scrub the sheets and floor of the mess,” she added, “Due to your own, sheer indolence.”

“Shut-up, ‘lil wolf,” he woozily chortled, his lips at her cheek taking the sting out of the order, “I’m a trying to get some shut-eye.”

Her hasty, acerbic sounding reply in her language was unintelligible. Then again, it fell on relatively deaf ears as he slipped into unconsciousness. Besides, there was always tomorrow to deal with the repercussions of whatever in the hell they’d just gotten themselves into.
Author’s Notes:

**Queen Anne’s Lace – *Daucus carota***. A type of wild carrot plant whose seeds women have historically used as birth control for centuries. They can be taken daily, or around ovulation to prevent implantation of the fertilized egg into the uterus.

“Iah tewake’nikonhraién:ta’s?!” – “I don’t understand?!” in Mohawk.
Morning Regrets

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He really shouldn't have been so flabbergasted to wake up to the cold space of the bed beside him. Or the empty silence that permeated the house. But what was even more disconcerting was the barest twinge of his stomach at finding her gone. And he wasn’t quite sure if could blame all of it on his head-splitting hangover.

Cursing, Thomas blearily stumbled into the kitchen and promptly threw up into the wash basin. Sure, he was able to hold his liquor last night. A feat in and of itself, considering how distracting the little assassin turned out to be. But his shenanigans caught up with him this morning. Likely caught up with her as well. She couldn’t have wandered off that far. At least that’s only what he could assume at ambling outside to find her grey mare gone from the stables. Judging by how the rest of the cabin was utterly devoid of any trace of her, she wasn’t coming back either. At least she hadn’t stolen any of his crap. Hell, she even had the fire nice and banked in the stove, leaving the cabin pleasantly warm.

It still didn’t make him any less pissed off.

“Who the fuck do ya think ya be, Connor?” he muttered to himself.

Ain’t like she owes you shit, his mind raced. She hadn’t killed him in his sleep. Or ransacked his belongings. Nor had she made off with all the food and supplies, considering how full the larder remained. It wasn’t exactly like he stuck around to make deep and meaningful conversation after bedding one of his lovely tarts either. So really, he shouldn’t have given a flying fuck.

“Jesus bloody Christ,” he snorted to the empty air as he wolfed down a quick breakfast. Well, he had only one option at this point.

Hopefully, tracking her wouldn’t prove too difficult.

Sure, she only had a five to six hour lead on Hickey. But she was a fast rider and thoroughly familiar with the wilderness. No matter that her thighs ached with each impact at the steady canter of her mare as she determinedly rode for Boston. Besides, the mission proved far more important than second guessing herself.

Well, it wasn’t so terrible when she woke up with the sunrise to find him possessively curled around her in a comfortably warm embrace. Nor when she slowly slid out of bed after a long while and headed to the kitchen to start breakfast. But then some screaming instinct in her mind suddenly caused her to frantically gather up her things and flee from the cabin. No matter the handful of times she had to stop and throw up the final remnants of the alcohol in her system. She refused to give her sore legs a bit of relief from last night’s happenings. Her head pounding, her stomach rolled while beads of sweat broke out along her face. Regardless, she forced herself to keep pace. The clip-clop of her mare’s hooves on the hard-packed, frozen dirt of the road helped drown out her thoughts. Though not quite enough for her taste.

Warm hands sliding along skin, eager in their explorations. The taste, the feel of taunt, inked muscle moving beneath calloused fingertips. Lips trailing downwards, nipping, lapping like a starving sort
of thing. Hitched sighs, the trembling ache, the sated release. Murmured laughter, a tangle of sweaty limbs, slowed breaths, sleepy contentment.

Strange, there was no feeling of loss over what she’d given up last night, this being her first time and all. It anything, she felt utterly reckless. A bizarre sort of unhinging that made her mind wander. Furiously blushing at the glimpses of last night flashing in her head, she could make neither heads of tails of what in the name of the gods possessed her to allow him to take such liberties.

Cursing to herself, Connor ducked her head against the elements and spurred her mount forward. She took what she needed from him in tracking down the Hessian. So his usefulness was at an end. All that mattered now was arriving to Boston in one piece to warn William Saint-Prix of the threat against his life at the hands of the monstrous Hessian. These childish contemplations had no bearing on her duties at hand. In fact, if she wasn’t careful, such distractions could easily spell disaster.

Tailing William De Saint-Prix wasn’t particularly difficult. Then again, his talents were always put to better use hiding in plain sight. Connor promptly learned of such things within her first few weeks of knowing him. For unlike most of the Brotherhood’s other recruits, William sought her out directly. Or rather, he sought out Achilles four years ago, right around his 17th birthday.

William’s letter of introduction from his family arrived a month before he set foot in the colonies. It certainly seemed to sway her mentor into a less cynical disposition, for once.

“This was delivered to me today,” Achilles declared one late afternoon at the Homestead. Without further ado, he placed a medium-sized, carved, dark wooden box with a gold lock along its front on the dining room table between them. At the noise, Connor paused in shucking a large bowl of peas for their supper. Gingerly opening the box revealed an interior lined with plush, scarlet velvet. Embossed on the inner lid in gold leaf was a shield of arms. Written beneath it in florid script were the hyphenated words, “Saint-Prix.”

Seeing that Achilles didn’t rap her knuckles with his cane for taking liberties, Connor dragged her fingertips along the fabric. “This is quite…lavish,” she said with astonishment.

“I’m not surprised,” Achilles shrugged, “An old line of assassins from France, this William comes from.” The old man promptly ordered her to read the first letter on top a pile of folded papers within it. “They’re a noble and well-connected family,” he nodded before settling down into the chair next to her. Placing his cane within easy reach, he continued shucking the peas at her side. “In fact,” he added, “His great grandsire from a few generations back translated the Auditore Codex into French. From there, it made its way to the other Assassin bureaus across the continent. Then, eventually to the New World.”

“I see,” Connor furrowed a brow. She’d studied Achilles’ copy of the treasured codex from cover to cover. Utterly fascinating and highly detailed with a plethora of sketches some attributed to Leonardo da Vinci himself, the Auditore Codex quickly turned into one of her favorite references. Mostly on account of its collaborator, one Sofia Auditore. Even despite being written years after the various events occurred, her vivid retelling of her husband’s life proved invaluable. Overall, it was second only to the Ibn-La’Ahad codex of the now extinct Levantine branch of the Brotherhood.

“But do not the Assassins frown upon wealth?” she questioned while re-reading the Saint-Prix missive.

Achilles let out a surprisingly genuine laugh despite shaking his head in disagreement. “We’ve never
rejected use of the resources that money may buy. You’ve read multiple times of *Il Mentore* and the funds at his disposal back during the Renaissance era? Not to mention tireless dedication of his sister, Claudia?’

Connor took in his words for a moment before carefully replying, “It was she who managed his estates and ensured the Brotherhood never wanted for funds.”

“And that was before her brother officially inducted her into the Brotherhood. Yet her work was just as vital to its existence as his, yes?”

“Without doubt.”

“Being born into one of Florence’s oldest families also gained them access to the highest reaches of government. Kings, dukes, popes, those ruling clans of the city states of Italia,” Achilles continued with a hint of admiration. “At one point, the Auditore and their allies brokered a level of influence the likes of which have yet to be duplicated elsewhere.”

“And one must be born into wealth and status to create such?” Connor asked with disbelief.

“Not at all, girl, you know that,” Achilles chided. “But you cannot deny it can be a tool put to excellent use. Or have all of those lessons that I’ve pounded into that thick skull of yours already fallen out?”

“Hardly,” she retorted.

“In the meantime,” Achilles prodded her leg with the end of his cane, “William is scheduled to arrive within a fortnight. His ship, the *Talon de l’Aigle*, will dock at Boston Harbor.”

“*Talon…de…l’Aigle*?” Connor butchered the French.

“The Eagle’s Talon,” Achilles smoothly translated. “When the time arrives, go, meet him there and help him settle into Boston.”

“I do not understand,” she replied, folding the letter and stuffing it back into the envelope before dropping it into the box, “Surely he may secure himself?”

“The boy comes from wealth,” Achilles smirked, “So I doubt he will settle for lodging in some rat and flee infested boarding house. He’ll likely purchase some prime piece of property in an affluent part of the city, set up a fine home that will be the talk of his neighbors and then wish to get a lay of the land. As any experienced Assassin is want to do, eh?”

“Understandable,” Connor nodded.

“So you’ll be needing to show him around. As well as introduce him to those other ones you’ve brought into the Brotherhood,” he prodded her leg with his cane again. “And since I’m far too old to be ambling about, you’re to be his guide.”

Connor frowned at that, her hands coming to rest on the box’s lid. “How long am I to undertake this?”

“For as long as he requires you,” Achilles swiftly retorted.
“But my lessons here-”

“May be put on hold for a bit,” Achilles rebuked. Leaning forward, he began drumming his fingers along the tabletop next to her arm. “Frankly, I think that you would appreciate a change of scene. And teacher.”

“I…you…” she slowly began, glancing away from him, “You have always undertaken my education.”

“Things change all the time, as you are aware. Such is life,” he insisted, going back to the peas, “Especially for one of our kind.”

“What have I done,” she swallowed, dropping her gaze to listlessly stare at the table, “To deserve such…punishment?”

“Punishment?” Achilles balked. Letting out a rasping laugh, he stopped his work to look over at his ward. However, her sobering expression immediately caused his look to shift to one of surprise. Especially as she stopped her quivering lip with the hard set of her jaw. “Oh, Connor,” he let out a deep sigh and ran a quick hand over his face, “I would never do something so cruel as send you away. You should know that by now-”

“And yet you are so eager to be rid of me,” she grit, gripping the edges of the box so hard, she scraped the grain of the wood against her fingertips.

Gently pulling the box away from her, Achilles murmured, “How many years have you to you now?”

Expression peaked, she hissed, “My 16th has just passed.”

“So you are a woman full-grown, yes?” Achilles lightly declared. “Some would even say such was true two years ago. Many women at your stage in life have married and have at least a child. Not that I expect that of you.” She gave a strained shrug, which he took it as a sign to continue. “It would do well for you to broaden your horizons in other ways, girl.”

After a long, tense moment of silence, Connor jerked her head in his direction. Frankly, whether or not it was a nod of agreement, Achilles didn’t quite know. But the proverbial bird had to learn how to fly on its own at some point.

Reaching out to pat her on the back, he came up short at seeing her freeze. Fists clenched, her cheeks were beginning to blaze pink. “You will not see it now, but this is for the best.” When she only replied with a restrained groan, Achilles summarily said, “It is settled then; I’ll write a letter for you to deliver to Mousier Saint-Prix upon his arrival that shall include further instructions concerning you.”

“So it seems,” she groused. Snatching back the bowl of peas from him, she continued her work. Often, so hard that she ripped the majority of the string beans clean in half. Shooting her a resigned expression, Achilles made his way back to his feet. At least he could retreat back into the kitchen to finish preparing their supper.

Wrangling William required Connor to remain in Boston for nearly a year. Admittedly, in getting him acquainted with the colonies’ busiest city, Connor’s knowledge of the Brotherhood’s current methods in Europe increased ten-fold. Especially of how various techniques could easily be applied
on this side of world.

Achilles was proven correct yet again; William’s cultured upbringing absolutely prevented him from settling for anything less than the best. The first thing the young noble did was purchase a home in Beacon Hill. The wealthiest neighborhood in the city, he charmed his neighbors within the matter of a few weeks. Throwing numerous, lavish parties at his home gained their trust. It also helped cultivate his cover as a supposedly empty-headed, vain fop who had nothing better to do than fashionably waste his wealth in keeping up with social whirl of activities. All of which brought him a seemingly endless stream of invitations to nearly every social event of the season. Soon, he had access to all sorts of influential sorts. In turn, it allowed him to carry out the work of the Brotherhood within the highest echelons of society. So for the first time in decades, the Assassins were on the road to matching Templar influence.

It also didn’t hurt that he insisted on Connor remaining as a guest in his home. While in the presence of company, she posed as servant. Not only to remain anonymous, but also to eavesdrop on their Templar targets. While Connor would never admit it out loud, there was something to be said for living in such a grand home with as friendly company as William. He was genuinely fascinated by and respectful of her Native heritage. As well as eager to teach her all he knew of his own training back home. She never paid a single pound for her room and board either, no matter her insistence to the contrary.

“Non, absolument pas, ma chérie,” he indulgently grinned in his native tongue. While her accent needed far more refinement and she struggled with writing French, she understood him perfectly well. All on account of his continued lessons. “A sister so singularly dedicated to our fight against the Templars shall spend no coin on account of me.”

Preventing his murder at the hands of the Hessian was the absolute least she could do.

“Ya seem distracted, lass,” Dobby teased, bringing Connor’s thoughts back to the present.

The biting cold of mid-November didn’t faze either woman from their elevated vantage point on the roof. No matter the light swirling snow of late morning. Or the dreary grey skies above. Frankly, it was nothing compared to what Connor faced on the road back to Boston. Taking nearly five days rather than the usual three, she was plagued by terrible weather as soon as she left the cabin. The heavy snow let up after two days only to turn into sleet. Her only luck seemed to be that the Hessian was similarly delayed. Now, it wouldn’t be too late for William.

Rubbing her gloved hands together, Connor chewed her lower lip for a moment before steadily asking, “How so?”

“I don’t know,” Dobby shrugged with a languid lift of her shoulders. “Just a bit…quieter? If that be possible,” she chuckled.

“You sound taken aback,” Connor replied. Hastily standing up from her crouched position near the roof’s lip, she pulled her black hood closer about her ears. Since her robes were filthy from her travels, she stopped into the general store near the southern wall of the reinforced city. Leaving them to be cleaned, she changed into a set of dyed robes that’d finally come in per an earlier order from roughly a month ago. Hence the Baltimore Black ones she currently wore.

“Just observant,” Dobby reassured. Dark hair pulled back beneath the brown hood of her frock coat, she dressed in her usual mishmash of new and worn clothes. Similar to Connor, she favored the efficiency of male livery. Yet her ample bosom was on full display, as per usual. It didn’t matter, not with how fiercely she wielded her sword and flintlock. Leaning against the chimney of the
blacksmith’s in the North End neighborhood they were staking out, she gave her friend a once over before returning her gaze back to the street to keep an eye on their mark. Crossing her arms, she casually asked, “Everything alright? Ever since you came back from the wilderness, ya seem to be all lost in ya thoughts.”

“This has become a far different sort of mission than what I have previously undertaken.”

“That’s it, eh?” Dobby arched a doubtful brow despite the amusement tinging her voice.

Rapidly blinking her eyes to readjust her special sight against the onslaught of the crowds exiting the church services across the street, Connor zeroed in on their golden target. Flexing her fingers, she quietly said, “The life of our brother is in danger.”

“Aye. And ’tis mightily important we don’t go ’en botch this up,” Dobby nodded, expression sliding to serious for a moment. “Not that we’ve ever gone ’n screwed up too much before.” Reaching out, she carefully dropped a hand to Connor’s tensed upper arm, “So calm ya nerves, yeah?” Connor didn’t shrug off her touch, letting Dobby withdraw in her own time. Yet her expression remained stony. “You sure ya don’t want me takin’ point on this?” Dobby leaned in and quietly asked. Connor toyed with the idea for a few seconds before shaking her head in disagreement. Sliding her a look out of the corner her eye, Dobby settled for cracking her gloved hands and stretching her arms above her head for a bit. “Alrighty then,” she lightly laughed, “The offer stands, though.”

“I am grateful for it,” Connor let out a deep sigh.

“He’s on the move, ‘en,” Dobby jerked her head in the direction of their tail. “I’ll take the roofs?”

“That will do well,” Connor replied, “And I thank you for taking Duncan’s place on this.”

“It ain’t a problem, the man needs a break. Especially since Clipper came back from Trenton slightly worse for wear. Besides, he got word from Calamity Mily ’bout all this a couple of days ago,” Dobby waved off. “Ever since he told Will, he’s had me put eyes on him since then, too.”

"At least now I will be able to relay to him the full breadth of everything," Connor replied.

“It's plan then,” Dobby breezy replied, “I’ll be yer eyes in the sky.” With that, she gave Connor a quick salute before speeding off and taking an effortless, flying leap across to the next rooftop. At the same time, Connor scrambled down the side of the building to street level. After all, completing the tasks of the Brotherhood always took precedence over all else. Even one’s own personal discord.

From his viewpoint causally leaning against the column of the general store across the street from the church, Thomas didn’t recognize Connor initially. Rather, he intently focused on picking out this William Saint-Prix character. Considering he was the next target of the Hessian, it would be easier to track down the murderous kraut this way.

This time, he didn’t utilize his usual Templar informants to find Saint-Prix. Instead, he relied on his personal network of low-level fiends. The ones who had no idea he worked for the Order. He always kept a few at hand and outside of Haytham’s sniffing around. If only to never put all his eggs in one basket. Lord knew when he'd have to disappear or find himself on the wrong side of his current employers. Not to mention, languishing in jail for three weeks certainly made him question just how important old Kenway considered him.

While none of them knew exactly where Saint-Prix lived, they all agreed that he preferred the
company of the city's elite. Since it was Sunday morning, he probably attended church services, like most everyone else. On the affluent side of town, no doubt. Considering he'd arrived in Boston around four years ago, he'd likely have to be Protestant in order to welcomed into the social milieu with such open arms. Going with his instincts and the target's description provided by his informants, Thomas turned out to be right.

Gaze locked on Saint-Prix, Thomas missed the bob of Connor’s black hood as she slid her way through the crowd exiting the church. Tossing away the straws of hay he chewed on, he nearly ran into her heels. Of course, she would be here. Their endgames were in alignment, after all. Thinking quickly, he ducked into an alleyway just to her right as she paused and turned in his direction at what he could only assume was sensing his presence. Counting to ten, he stepped out from his hiding place to follow.

His utter shock at seeing Connor’s faint grin when Saint-Prix gave her a deep bow and brushed his lips across the tips of her fingers caused him to nearly crash into a troop of Continental soldiers hanging about along the sidewalk. Thankfully, he swiftly recovered with only their glare of annoyance at his proximity. However, he almost lost the other two to the crowd. Remaining a solid length behind the pair without discovery was a challenge. Luckily, the Sunday bustle helped conceal him.

His expression remained stunned as he watched the two nonchalantly traverse the boulevard. Not once did Connor shove the fop away, or purposely keep her usual distance. If anything, she fell into easy step with him before dropping a hand to his forearm.

It was evident Saint-Prix was a moneyed one. His dusky, black long coat bore a black hood. Both were lined with scarlet silk, which matched the trim of his black tricorne. The edges, collar and cuffs of the coat were also lined in fur. Beneath it, he wore a black frock coat and waistcoat edged in white lace and clasped with gold buttons. The ruffles of his shirt were lace as well. His spotless white breeches spun of heavy white cotton, they were tucked into his shiny, black, buckled dragoon boots.

Thomas was able to get a better look at the bastard’s face when turned and dropped a handful of gold coins into the hands of the street urchins who appeared in front of the pair. Save his tanned skin, he bore a patrician look. His high slash of cheekbones, sharp, pointed nose and bright, colbalt eyes combined with his naturally pouty mouth gave him the look of someone who never settled for anything less than his own way. A delicately trimmed black goatee completed the appearance of a dandy. His easy smile and brief chat with the urchins significantly softened his visage. Especially when he sent them off with a leisurely wave.

Swallowing down the flare of alarm at how casually Connor allowed the smarmy tosser to steer her into a tavern after a while, Thomas let out a snort of irritation. Waiting for a bit, he slipped into it as well, using a handful of customers as cover. Taking a seat in the darkened corner, he ordered a pint of ale. The Assassin and her apparent mark were huddled in deep conversation. Taking table nearest to the back door, they could be gone in a matter of seconds. Not that he blamed them.

Huddling down at Connor’s gaze sweeping the dining area for what seemed the millionth time, Thomas shooed away the middle-aged tavern owner’s wife for a refill and continued nursing his drink.

The two talked for some time. While the rich one conversed in an animated fashion, waving his hands about and bobbing his head, Connor remained her usual subdued self. Facing partially in her direction, Thomas could only make out the measured shift of her shoulders, the relaxed line of her back and the way she flexed her feet along the chair legs. Every so often, she pulled her hood closer
about her head and slightly leaned forward. To anyone else, nothing looked amiss. But soon, he
could make out how she drummed her fingers along the table in increasing staccato. Or the way her
foot thumped along the floor planks in faster rhythm. She even heaved a sigh a few times, her spine
snapping tense before relaxing again.

After about an hour or so, Connor gracefully got up from the table. She made no gesture of goodbye
but still disappeared out the back door. Coolly moving to his feet, Thomas followed while making
sure not to be spotted by her apparent partner.

“I expect more of your skills when it comes to following someone,” she sniffed as soon as he exited
the rear of the tavern. Leaning up against the brick wall of the establishment with one foot propped
on it, her arms were crossed. Inspecting her nails for a moment, her hard gaze flicked up to meet his.
“I realized you were at our back but a few minutes after I caught up with William.”

“Maybe I be wantin’ to draw your attention, sweetheart,” he snapped.

“Whatever you may say to convince yourself,” she sneered.

Barking out a mirthless chuckle, Thomas propped himself up against the wall opposite her and in an
identical fashion. Thumbing back his tricorne bought him time enough to give her an obvious once
over. Save the slight downward twitch of her lip, she didn’t react to his leering. Not even her usual
blush at his gaze colored her cheeks. “So I’m guessin’ ya always be this bloody difficult after a good
dicking?”

“A good what?” her expression slid to genuinely curious.

Oh, she had to be fucking pulling his chain, right? “Holy fucking hell!” he threw his hands up in
disbelief, “Do ya really not be understadin’? How can ya not get...seriously?!”

Her frown deepened as she replied, “I do not comprehend what you mean.”

Rolling his eyes, he shrugged and drawled, “All I be sayin’ is that ya got a hunger in ya girl.
Somethin’ all fierce ‘n panting I didn’t be expectin’ when we, well, when we went ‘n did
our thing, ya know?” Jerking his thumb over his shoulder, he smirked, “Back at the cabin?”

Steeling her voice to flat, she squared her shoulders and replied, “I do not comprehend what you mean.”

His gaze darkened, purposefully sweeping over her again in a way that made her hate how her
stomach curled and tightened with sudden heat. The accompanying crackle tingling along her skin
didn’t help matters either. “I think you know what I be speakin’ ‘bout,” he slowly grinned, “After all,
ya ain’t never been the daft sort, love-”

“I assume you refer to when we fucked?”

What the hell had gotten into her?! She certainly had no idea what prompted her to use such words
usually reserved for his ilk. Not to mention how satisfying it felt to say it out loud, as though a heavy
weight was suddenly lifted from her shoulders. Perhaps it also had something to do with the lick of
satisfaction coursing through her at how his eyebrows seemed to shoot up to his hairline at her retort.

Unfortunately, she also felt her cheeks sear scarlet as soon as the last word left her lips. Swallowing
even as she pulled herself straighter up against the wall, she added, “That is what you meant to say?
Or perhaps I am mistaken?”
“You sure in the hell be lookin' surprised at seeing me back 'ere in Boston, darlin’,” Hickey abruptly changed the subject. His brittle smile accompanying his heated gaze only heightened her irritation.

She should’ve known getting rid of him wouldn’t prove so easy. “Hardly,” Connor brusquely retorted. “I have never underestimated your propensity for appearing in places where you obviously do not belong.”

“Like all up in ya?”

“Mr. Hickey...” she clenched one of her hands in warning.

“Ah, she calls me ‘Mister,’” he snickered while absentmindedly scratching behind his ear. “Now I be upgraded to fancy titles ‘n such? So lemme ask ya this, lass,” he leaned in, nearly nose to nose with her, “What sorts ‘o pleasing ‘n filthy things do a bloke be havin’ to do between them comely legs ‘o yours to get back on a first name basis, eh?”

Admittedly, he braced for her slap across the face. But the sheer force of it sent his head snapping back with a painful jolt. Thank God for his thick skull and vast experience in taking a blow. It allowed him to recover quick enough to hear her viciously reel off something that sounded awful peeved in her native tongue. Not that he gave a flying fuck.

Cracking his neck from side to side and slowly rubbing his smarting chin, his smirk deepened. “That, love,” he deliberately said, eyes now flashing with savage fury, “Was untoward.”

“I should not let my temper get the best of me,” she grit, chest heaving with barely controlled restraint.

“So don’t be fuckin’ apologizing if ya don’t fuckin’ mean a bloody word ‘o it!” Thomas mocked.

“Pardon me for your notion that I was doing anything of the sort.”

“What in the fuck-?!”

Squaring her shoulders, Connor swiftly pushed herself up off the wall. “I have nothing else to relay. Good day-”

“Not so fast, poppet,” he growled. Reaching to snatch her by the upper arm, he came up short at the sight of her left bracer blade sharply flashing in the pale light of the early afternoon.

“Consider your next actions, Hickey!”

“You do the bloody same, Connor!” he barked.

Eyes darting to his right hand, she immediately made out the glint of his dirk. Rocking back on her heel, she readjusted her balance to defensive. It was subtle, but he had years of experience on her, as well as recently witnessing her in the field. “We appear to be an impasse.”

“Speak for yerself,” he drawled, tone sliding to nonchalant despite how smoothly he palmed his weapon. “I just be defendin’ me self from some balmy chit who drew on me first. What, with ya assaulitin’ me and now looking to gut me for no goddamned reason!”
His icy emphasis on his last words caused her to visibly flinch. Yet she refused to tear her gaze away from his.

“And just who is this piece ‘o work, Connor?” a woman’s lilting brogue called out just to Thomas’ left. That it was accompanied by the soft click of a flintlock hammer being pulled didn’t escape his notice either.

“No one,” Connor swallowed. Relaxing slightly, she sheathed her bracer blade. Dark eyes following his motions as he intentionally did the same with his weapon, she slowly repeated, “No one at all, Dobby.”

Well would you fuckin’ look at that horseshit-

“He sure in the hell don’t be lookin’ like no one, darlin’,” Dobby retorted, now at Connor’s side.

Thomas’ eyes swept to this ‘Dobby.’ Yet another Assassin, judging by the similar bracer she wore around her right wrist. In her mish-mash of clothes, she appeared only a bit younger than him. Her flinty, green gaze and implacable expression gave away little beyond that. Add to that how she kept her weapon trained on him, he’d bet his arse she knew how to use it. Still…

“Yer one of the old country, ‘en?” he purposely softened his accent while forcing his stance to relax. Leaning back, he gave her a playful wink.

Eyes darting to Connor, who gave her an almost imperceptible nod in spite of her openly harried expression, Dobby slightly lowered her weapon and said, “Maybe…what of it stráinséir?”

Yep, she was definitely of Ireland. “Oh, just wonderin’ at how lucky Connor be at knowin’ another one like meself-"

"Your accent be plenty wrong to be of my kind,” Dobby interrupted with a defiant jerk of her chin.

“Aye,” he shrugged, steeling an easy smile to his face and throwing his hands up in surrender, “Ya got me, dearie. Mo mháthair agus a athair, me folks moved us from Waterford on the ‘ole Emerald Isle to London when I be a wee lad.”

“Oh yeah, then?” Dobby smirked, “How nice for ya, mo buachaill álaimn.” Relaxing a bit, she dropped her hand completely and flashed him a grin. “Still,” she kept her finger on the trigger, “None ’o that explains why you’re having clandestine conversations and whatnot ‘ere in this alleyway with me dear Connor, yeah?”

"Your dear Con-?"

"Did ya catch me stutterin’, mate?" the Dobby woman snorted, beginning to raise her flintlock again.

“It is nothing,” Connor huffed. If he wasn’t so wound up, Thomas would’ve found it amusing at how Dobby clucked her tongue in disagreement, like a mother hen scolding a child. It was even more apparent in how Connor restlessly swayed from foot to foot while pouting in the other woman’s direction. “I am on my way back inside.”

“Good,” Dobby replied, sheathing her flintlock. Moving to cover Connor’s back, she glanced over her shoulder and gave Thomas a purposeful once over. “Ya sure he ain’t anyone?” she chuckled, “He looks like a lout. Well, a handsome lout-”
“Why does everyone always insist on relaying that?” Connor hissed in exasperation.

“’Cause it be fuckin’ true?” Thomas obstinately tossed back. Whipping her head around, Connor stared at him in annoyed disbelief. “What ‘en, sweetheart?” he snorted, “Ya think I don’t got ears too?”

“I—”

“Besides,” he followed after her, though he made sure to keep his hands in plain sight at seeing Dobby silently flick out her hidden blade at his movements, “We had a deal, right? And last I checked, ya prided yerself on bein’ a woman of your word? Unless ya forgot how to even go ‘bout doin’ that too?”

“What’s he prattling on ‘bout?” Dobby stopped in her tracks just before they made it to rear door of the tavern.

“Oh, just makin’ sure ya man in there don’t go getting’ killed, ‘tis all,” Thomas graced them with a supposedly innocent smile. “Wouldn’t want yer ranks thinned out none too much, now would we, Connor?” he came to stop just outside arm’s reach of both of them. Seeing the Assassin drop her head and rub the bridge of her nose in frustration, he barked out a derisive laugh. Swiftly looking between him and Connor, Dobby fixed him with a jaundiced eye before approaching. While she sheathed her hidden blade, she still remained out of his reach. *Smart lass,* Thomas thought to himself.

“I don’t believe ya ever formally introduced yourself,” she insisted.

“It really is not necessary at all for him to—”

“Come now, Connor! No need to go hidin’ ya allies, yeah?” Thomas mocked. Dobby's gaze narrowed even more at the utterly furious look Connor shot him. Rocking back on his heels to appear less threatening, Thomas gave Dobby an exaggerated bow while smoothly saying, “Oh, and I be Thomas—”

“Thomas what?” Dobby insisted.

Still bowed but looking up at her through dark lashes, he smiled, “Seein’ that we be havin’ our own agendas goin’ on here, you can just leave it at ‘Thomas,’ miss.”

“That so?”

“Quite so.” A dangerous expression crossing her face for a split second, Dobby slowly waved for him to continue. “Like I be sayin’,” Thomas insisted, “It always be a pleasure to be meetin’ another of the Old Country, Miss…?”

“Call me ‘Dobby,’” she deliberately replied.

“Dobby what, madame?” Thomas replied with all the politeness of a school boy in front of his headmaster.

“Just ‘Dobby’ will do ya,” she replied with slightly more ease. However, she made no move to curtsy or shake his hand. She didn’t appear to have the patience for such manners. Not surprising, considering she was one of Connor’s ilk in their little Brotherhood.
“So Connor,” Thomas rose and whipped open the door of the tavern, “Don’t ya think it be high time you go introducin’ me to this William bloke? Considering we gotta so savin’ his life and whatnot?”

Dobby’s eyes darted over to him again as he waved them both inside. “And how exactly does he go knowin’ all of this?” she prodded Connor in her arm with an elbow.

Grinding her teeth but following Dobby back inside, Connor muttered, “It is a long story.”

“And now, ya be stuck with me, lass,” Thomas breezily declared.

“Unfortunately,” she droned.

As they all made their way back to where William sat at his table and charmed one of the serving women, Connor seriously contemplated how much worse this could all get. By the gods, hopefully it would all be over soon.

Chapter End Notes

Notes:

*Non, absolument pas, ma chérie* – “No, absolutely not, my dear” in French.

*strainséir?* – “Stranger” in Irish Gaelic

*mo mháthair agus a athair* – “My mother and father” in Irish Gaelic

*mo buachaill álaimn* – “My lovely boy” in Irish Gaelic
Entering the tavern from the rear with Dobby, Connor stiffly introduced Thomas to William. She purposely only used the Templar’s first name, as there was no need to create an even more awkward situation. Or have her comrades attempt to kill him. She’d have plenty of time to let them know of how the two became bound together later. Preferably, after they rid themselves of the Hessian and she banished Hickey from her sight upon the natural conclusion of their Faustian alliance.

William breezily greeted Dobby with a gentlemanly press of his lips to her fingertips. She smirked in turn, giving him a warm slap of “hello” on the shoulder. He then graced Thomas with a low bow of regard in his typical, florid fashion. “A pleasure to meet you, good sir,” he blithely introduced himself. Pressing one hand over his heart, he held the other outstretched in welcome. His French-accented English melodious and charming, he smoothly added, “Any friend of Connor’s is a friend of mine.”

“We are not friends,” Connor immediately clarified, crossing her arms and giving Thomas an expression of warning. It caused him to snort back a guffaw. At the same time, Dobby arched a brow. Silently leaning back against the banister of the stairs leading up to the second floor behind them, the older assassin rolled her shoulders and shoved her hands into her trouser pockets. Barely able to bite back a chuckle at watching the scene unfold in front of her, Dobby settled for a brittle grin. “It is an alliance born of pure necessity,” Connor insisted next to her, “For we are both tracking the same quarry, who in turn, is aiming to kill you.”

“How diplomatic of ya,” Thomas sarcastically replied, dropping William’s handshake.

“Yet, do I lie?” Connor dismissively retorted.

“Sin ‘o omission, darlin’-”

“Come now, I’m sure that nothing is so simple,” William smiled to relieve the obvious tension between the other two. Fixing Thomas with a murderous glare that seemed to last a lifetime, Connor finally huffed in agreement. In return, Thomas raised a hand of interruption as William pointedly continued, “But considering there is little time for an explanation—“

“Actually, I could go fer one right now,” Dobby brightly declared in supposed innocence.

“Or perhaps you would rather not?” Connor sharply replied out the side of her mouth.

“I’m just sayin’ that you seem all wound up ‘bout something—“

“Oh, so ya be seein’ it too, then?” Thomas gaily interrupted Dobby while throwing his hands up in surrender. “Told ya so,” he triumphantly tilted his head in Connor’s direction.

“Excuse me?!?” she balked, taking what most would call a threatening step forward.

“…I will settle for a full explanation at a more convenient time,” William authoritatively settled the conversation while shooting Connor a look of sympathy.

“At least one of us has not lost their senses,” she muttered, briskly waving for them to follow her out the back of the tavern.
As William attended church earlier that morning, the trio retraced their steps back to it. Heading to its stables, they found William’s coachman, McGuire, and the coach boy, Harris, waiting for them. Harris gave a quick bow to William as he nimbly dropped down from inside the coach. Around thirteen or so, his warm, ochre skin, wide nose and big brown eyes appeared in youthful contrast to his maturing, sinewy limbs. Patting down his tightly curled, nearly black hair, he reaffixed his midnight blue cap back on his head. He then wound his thickly knit, white scarf about his neck and flexed his hands in his fingerless gloves before clapping up the gold buttons on his heavy, matching blue servant’s uniform coat. Since he’d ride standing along the outside seat at the back of coach, protection against the cold was necessary.

Recognizing Connor, he smiled, “Ma’am!” while dipping his head. Yanking open the door, he also tipped his cap to Dobby as she hopped into the ornate, navy blue carriage trimmed in gold. Settling into her seat inside, she winked as she flipped him a coin of thanks from out the window. Deftly catching it and stuffing it his pocket, he gazed up at Connor, saying, “It be a while since I last seen ya!”

“Thank you, Harris,” she graced him with a fleeting grin. Thomas practically crashed into her from behind, gawking at her shockingly pleasant demeanor. Clasping her hands behind her back, she asked, “How is your schooling?”

“He be a bright child, miss,” McGuire tipped his tricorne to her from where he sat in the seat front. Despite his slightly stooped shoulders, white hair and whiskered chin, he spryly tightened the reins around his pale knuckles. Clucking his tongue, he murmured a bit at the duo of speckled grey geldings shuffling forward and tugging at their bits. “Boy just needs to go deciding where he’ll go to be apprenticed in a few month’s time.”

“Apprenticed?” Connor questioned.

“I wish to go printin’ ‘n binding books, miss,” Harris gleefully said. “Maybe one day go workin’ in a great library, too! Like at one them new colleges they’ve gone ‘n built.”

“You certainly don’t lack for the intellect to do so,” William assured him with a light pat to his shoulder, "And as you know, I shall gladly sponsor you in such.”

Smiling and rocking back and forth on his heels, the boy waited for the rest of the party to board. However, Connor and William both stopped Thomas from following Dobby in. William subtly pulled up short, quietly directing Harris to head to his usual seat at the back. At the same time, Connor whipped out an arm in front of the Templar. A tick more force, and it would be considered a solid smack right across his chest.

“A blindfold?!” Thomas grunted in disbelief. Staring at how Connor held up a black silk scarf William produced from his inner coat pocket, he rubbed the back of his neck. “Are ya bein’ serious, love? Or just pullin’ me leg?”

“I assume you ask if I make a jest?” Connor flatly replied. Thomas rolled his eyes as she pulled the scarf tautly between two hands. “I assure you that I do not,” she nodded in disagreement. Folding the slip of silk over on itself, she added, “It is better for everyone that you are not aware of where we are headed.”

“What, ya don’t be trustin’ me, sweetheart?” he cooed. It caused both William and Dobby to exchange looks of confusion over Connor’s shoulder. Especially as the Native narrowed her eyes and wrapped each end of the scarf in her hands over her knuckles. Almost as though preparing to use
to it as a garrote. Thankfully, she quickly released it, even as he added in a mockingly sweet voice, “After all we been goin’ through ov’er these last few days to boot? A pity that be.”

“There are alternative ways to ensure your silence,” she curled her lip with derision.

“Such as?”

“Rendering you unconscious,” she tilted her head in appraisal. “It would save me further trouble for at least a few hours.”

“…and the blindfold it is then,” Thomas uncomfortably chuckled.

The carriage slightly shook with their combined weight as they all made their way inside. Connor sat next to William, Thomas across from her and Dobby next to him. William immediately drew the white curtains closed, shielding them from prying eyes. Such wouldn’t be seen as unusual, considering the crisp cold that threatened more snow at any moment. Meanwhile, Connor ignored how Thomas’ eyes lingered on her chest as he purposely leaned forward to let her blindfold him. Firmly pushing him back by the shoulder to sit, she kept her legs and feet as far away from him as possible. All in spite of how he utterly owned the space between them. Sprawled haphazardly across the seat, he attempted to throw an arm around Dobby’s shoulders. However, she put an instant stop to that, gingerly picking up his hand and dropping it in his lap.

“Nice try, mate,” she merrily replied, “Except I be doubtin’ you want me to go accidently stabbin’ ya, eh?”

“Quite so, lass,” Thomas snickered.

He then heard William call out in French for them to be off. The sound of the two mares clip-clopping along the stone road then filled his ears, followed by the recognizable lurch of the carriage. The ride was jerky, as expected. At the same time, their transport was expensive, the standard jostling kept to a bare minimum. The heavily stuffed, black velvet pillows lining their seats also went far in alleviating most of it. All in all, it was obvious that the carriage cost a small fortune. He sure in the hell had no complaints. That was until he heard Connor and William whispering back and forth. Since it was in French, he could only pick up a few phrases here and there. But despite his inability to see their faces behind his blindfold, the strain in both their voices signaled the news wasn’t good.

“Oi there, mates!” he called out, “Wot do ya two be all furtive ’bout?”

“You will have to excuse Mr. Hi…Thomas,” he heard Connor casually retort. Regardless of the slow pace of her words, the malice dancing at the edges of her voice was unmistakable.

“Ah, pardon?” Saint-Prix asked across from him, his tone ringing with his usual amusement.

“Unfortunately, he was, how do you colonists say it?” she replied. Thomas easily pictured her brow furrowing as she searched for the apparent translation. Along with the sneer contorting her face. “Oh yes, I believe it is quite obvious he was raised in a barn.”

Thomas chortled, shooting a smile in her direction. “Interesting that,” he shrugged, “Considering a barn ain’t that much different from one of them longhouses your people be lovin’ so much.”

He could only hear the hasty shift of body weight and the rustle of clothes. Suddenly feeling the air flutter in front of him, he laughed even more. So it was no surprise that it was summarily met by her
solid kick to his shin. It admittedly sent him cursing and swatting a hand in her direction. Nonetheless, from the abrupt creak of the carriage seats, Dobby’s quick sigh and Saint-Prix’s muttering in his own language, they likely had to physically restrain her.

It was utterly worth the snap of pain ringing though his leg. Particularly as he snickered, “And I rest my case, ladies and gents.” Her accompanying snarl had him guffawing even more.

After a long while of hearing Connor brusquely continuing to mutter in French with William, Thomas felt Dobby her sink back down into the seat next to him. “We should be there in a trice,” she said at his left. Connor paused only long enough to grunt in reply, William acknowledging it also.

They rode through town for roughly a half-turn or so. Despite feeling the cab sway back and forth around various corners, Thomas counted the turns to himself. It would be the best way to retrace his steps when he was released. Unless of course, the motley crew counted on him to do so and were purposely traveling in circles. While Connor might not necessarily contain such foresight, no doubt the other two were familiar with that sort of subterfuge. Yet after a long while, their transport didn’t bump quite so much beneath his ass. It left Thomas had to assume they were either on a dirt road or the smoother streets of the upper-class districts that lay far from Boston’s center squares. Likely the latter, as he couldn’t imagine a man of William’s wealth living anywhere else. Plus, the sounds of civilization still carried on outside. In all likelihood, they couldn’t have left the city fortifications…

Without warning, the harsh crick-crack of gunfire exploded in the air, sending all four ducking in their seats at the same time as someone squealed out a shout. Followed by a painful gurgle, the carriage shuddered, jolted and then lurched at a near ninety degree angle to the side. Swinging up on two wheels, it hurtled forward for some feet before slamming back down onto the road.

Heaved into Thomas’ side, Dobby’s head smacked against his chin. It sent his teeth rattling so much that he nearly bit his tongue hard enough to draw blood. Wincing, his arms instinctively flew out. Mercifully, he caught her flailing form before her full weight slammed down onto his groin. At the same time, William was hurled on top of Connor, who’d pitched to the floor with a sharp thud. Followed by the panicked neigh of the horses, their transport staggered forward again before it crashed to a stop.

Shaking her head and cursing, Dobby frowned, “That was a solid bevy ‘o pistol shots, though they be far off.” Pulling herself out of Thomas’ grasp, she grit, “An ambush, no doubt.”

“Aye,” he darkly retorted. Dropping his hands from her, he yanked off his blindfold. At his feet, William gracefully rolled off of Connor and popped back up into his seat. She took his offered hand, using it to haul herself into her seat as well.

“McGuire and Harris!” William insisted, locking eyes with Connor, “I must secure them!”

“You should stay inside, considering you are the target,” she tersely nodded, "I will take care of their safety.” Tightening her bracers, she didn’t catch Thomas peeking out the window from behind a curtain.

They sat on the pastoral edges of Back Bay. Just west of Shawmut Peninsula, it lay on the far side of the city’s harbor. Which likely meant that they were on their way to the neighboring, wealthy neighborhood of Beacon Hill before they were so rudely interrupted. The smell of seawater and wet wood from the harbor proved especially strong. Helped along by the damp chill of the early afternoon air, the scent was carried downwind from the rich fops up on their hill. “We’ve gone ‘n got tossed inna tree right ‘long the edge of Back Bay marshland,” he sniffed. “Someone sure be pickin’ a solid spot to go puttin’ us down.”
“Hopefully no one coming to your rescue?” Connor asked, face clouded with suspicion as she leaned back on her hands in the seat. Beginning to fiercely kick at the door on the side of the coach that’d hit the tree, she steadily knocked it off its hinges; it’d been forced out of its frame, trapping them on one side.

“Who would I tell?” Thomas snapped. Hastily loading his second pistol, he rebuckled his baldric. “Even then, all them twists ‘n turns y’all took wouldn’t go makin’ it easy. Hell, they might ‘ave followed you out here.”

“Doubtful,” Connor huffed.

“And she got the nerve to be accusin’ me ‘o bein’ the cocky one,” Thomas inhaled in exasperation. Holstering the rest of his weapons, he continued, “Between the mud ‘n the tide going in ‘n out from the Bay, the ground be soggy as shit. It’ll be fuckin’ hard to fight on.”

“Ain’t no Continentals about to go putting a stop to murder either,” Dobby narrowed her eyes. She swiftly pulled her hewing ax from her back. The handle carved of dark maple, its curved, triangular head made its balance perfect for a small hand to wield. “Plus,” she added almost as an afterthought, “They’d take a solid ten minutes or so to show up if anyone goes sendin’ word.”

“No matter,” William flexed his fingers. “I pray Mcguire and Harris fare well.”

A loud splintering of wood followed by a shuddering thump indicated that Connor finally sent the door flying open. Righting herself and running her fingers along the pouches on her belt, she felt reassured to find her supplies mostly full. She had less than handful of arrows on her. But the rope darts, throwing knives and dual, loaded pistols would serve as effective projectiles.

Palming a couple of smoke bombs, Dobby cast them a predatory smile. “To cover our exit, yeah?” she swirled the glinting silver spheres in her hand. “I mean, unless ya folks are lookin’ to get ya brains splattered as soon as we step out?”

“I will not argue that,” Connor nodded.

“Connor will usher Mcguire and Harris into the protection of the cabin,” William ordered, “While Dobby and Thomas take on our foes.” Dexterously twirling his dagger along his fingers before clutching it in reverse grip, he continued, “From there, we cut through whoever stands in our path.”

“No doubt they be havin’ horses we can go poachin’ to go makin’ an escape,” Thomas replied. “Together,” he pointedly added as Connor fixed him with dark expression over her shoulder. She remained silent, save flicking out her bracer blade and spinning it into its hinge while balancing her pistol in her other hand.

“Should the carriage be beyond repair?” William shrugged, “Oui.” He braced his other fist over the grip of his double hookblade. The razor-sharp metal glinting in the light, Thomas winced at how much he’d hate to be on the wrong end of it. Even one half-assed strike from that, and your guts would go splattering at your feet.

“Once we be gettin’ enough clearance, I’ll go taking Mcguire’s place in drivin’ it then,” Dobby squared her shoulders.

“Should you end up outside, have a care with yourself,” Connor briskly warned William, “This
could easily be a feint to separate you from the group. We are still unsure if they wish you dead or plan to use you for information.”

“I will make do,” William tilted his chin upwards in challenge. Smoothing down his neatly trimmed goatee, he thoughtfully added, “Overall, it is a rough plan.”

“Like we ain’t had to ever deal with worse,” Dobby grinned.

“I take it you will not wander off?” Connor flatly demanded of Thomas.

“Calm ya tits, she-wolf,” he jerked his head at her. Cocking back the hammer of his flintlock and inspecting the barrel, he ignored her look of consternation and smirked, “We still be in alliance, girl.”

“Shall we?” William lightly declared.


The smoke bombs exploding in a cloud of grey and white upon impact, Dobby and Thomas sprang from the cab on one side. Met by a swarming circle of poorly clad but well equipped mercenaries racing towards them, they began slicing through their ranks. That they were outnumbered five to one meant little.

Meanwhile, Connor went out the opposite way. Grabbing a stunned but thankfully uninjured Harris by the scruff of his coat from where he’d climbed under the carriage to hide, she hauled him back inside of it. Ordering him to remain on the floor next to William, she heaved him up. The lithe climb up to the driver’s seat had her precariously balanced out in the open. Shooting down a mercenary attempting to pull McGuire from his seat, a pool of blood dripping down to the floorboards met her, staining her hands when she heaved herself up. Along with McGuire slumped forward over the reins. Biting her lip, Connor called out for him as she maneuvered his weight to the edge of their transport.

He finally groaned at her third, light smack to his face. “Forgive me,” she murmured at his blue eyes sluggishly snapping open and taking her in, “We must get you inside.”

“Got a bullet in me gut,” his breath hitched before he took a shuddering gasp. But he was alert enough to clutch at her shoulders when she pulled him to the ground. Doubling over, he groaned, “Ain’t hurt t-this bad since I got shot those few times in the French Indian War...all them years ago.”

“We will soon get you to a surgeon.” Connor insisted, dragging him to the carriage door, “You have my word.”

“D-don’t ya go worryin’ yourself, miss,” McGuire whispered.

“I always do for a friend,” she swore.

Despite her warning, William met them outside. Removing the dark scarf from around his neck, he tightly wound it about McGuire’s stomach. “To stop the bleeding, my good man,” he iterated before helping Connor pull him into the coach to lie on the floor. However, William did not get back inside.

“I know you are a brave boy, Harris,” he dropped both hands to the child’s shaking shoulders, “But remain within here. We will be back shortly.” Backing away and examining his weapons one last time, he calmly continued, “However, if we are not, I want you to run to the other side do the marsh
and go find some Patriot soldiers on patrol. Remember the lessons I have taught you? About climbing and hiding and how a boy as keen as you can outsmart someone when you put your mind to it?"

"I-I do, sir," Harris frantically shook his head from his seat on the floor of the coach. McGuire’s head in his lap, he used his handkerchief to wipe the old man’s sallow brow.

"Do that, use the hillier parts for cover, and you will easily make it. When you do, find some patrolling soldiers, tell them what happened and bring them back here, oui?"

“Y-yes sir,” Harris stammered.

“Just run, Harris, do not look back,” Connor commanded.

“A-aye, miss.”

Overlooking the melee from the ridge some yards in front of them, Eleanor Mallow wiped at her fading black eye and tightened the bandage wrapped around her sprained right wrist. Due to her bruised ribs from their last encounter, only a day had passed since she could finally breathe without wincing. She didn't bother holding back a vicious hiss at the sight of her hired help slowly crumbling in the group’s path. No matter, for there would be no escape for the assassin. Not for the turncoat and their conniving little allies either.

No, certainly not this time.

One…two…three…and four.

A scream. A howl. A grunt. And then a fall.


One…two…three…and four.

They staccato of her heartbeat. The flow of air through her lungs. The dance of her steps as she hacked and slashed her way through the ambush. The only cadence Connor ever swore by. No matter how the odds were stacked against her, it proved her constant. It thrummed through the dances and songs of her people. She slowed its pulse to concentrate when shooting game in the forests of her adolescence. Achilles pounded its rhythm into the floorboards with his cane as he took her through her daily training for hours on end.

One…two…three…and four.

Connor exhaled as she threw extra effort into extracting her tomahawk from between the ribs of the man she’d hacked. Blood spattering along her coat sleeves, she was forced to plant a foot on his thigh to yank the weapon out of his corpse. Lucky for him, he was dead before he hit the ground. To be expected, considering she’d driven her hidden blade through his heart from behind mere seconds ago. As his body dropped to the snow-dusted, sodden wetland with a thud, Connor blinked and took in the chaotic scene.

One…two…three…and four.

A few yards behind her, William and Dobby fought next to the carriage, protecting McGuire and Harris huddled inside. Surrounded by five men, they cut a vicious swath into their midst. William fluidly lashed out with sword and double hooked blade, his movements elegantly lethal. Dobby, a brutal and unyielding brawler, struck and deflected using her ax and hidden blade while occasionally
utilizing throwing knives for distance. Far off in front of the duo and near the edge of the steep dip at the middle of the glade, Thomas whirled and landed a punch to another mercenary’s gut. As he the other man let out a hoarse grunt and toppled over, he brought a knee up to his head. The crunch of his broken jaw snapping in the air, his scream instantly ceased when Thomas followed up by running him through with his sword.

The bodies were quickly beginning to pile up. Meaning they all had only a few minutes left to finish before word spread of the disturbance and triggered a patrol of Continentals. They’d either arrest or kill them outright. It’d probably be the latter, considering the bloodshed. Despite that, Connor needed a mercenary alive to question. She suspected who sent them, but the boldness of the ambush was disconcerting. Only a madman or an imbecile would be so obvious in their strike. Either way, both methods of operation removed a lot of useful predictability they could use against their enemy.

Ending another man, Thomas paused, spun around and shot her a lazy smile. She shook her head in disagreement and frowned in return. He only laughed at her before he marching down the incline while reloading his flintlock to deal with another set of mercenaries.

She was exhausted, though more mentally than physically. Hickey’s sheer presence grated on her from the start. That much was obvious, considering they’d came very near to murdering each other at first sight. Unfortunately, it only seemed to become worse after that night in the cabin. It utterly frustrated her that she didn’t know whether it was all on account of him knowing how to goad her on. Or perhaps, her discipline was slowly slipping, thereby allowing him to pry apart her defenses piece by piece.

*We never seek to control, only facilitate. For no one ever fully commands the circumstances of their existence. Yet you may rule your reactions to them, girl.*

She ducked and twisted to the side, a pistol shot narrowly missing her neck. Hurling a throwing knife in retaliation, she hit her mark. The mercenary’s shriek trickled to a rasping death rattle before he dropped his dagger and plummeted face-first into the dirty snow. She didn’t bother to retrieve her blade; over a half-dozen remained on her person and she didn’t have time to kick over the body to yank it out of his breast.

Achilles’ words echoing in her head, Connor shuttered her conscious to all else, save the fatal flow of her movements.

*One…two…three…and four.*

A scream. A howl. A grunt. And then a fall.


*One…two…three…and f-*

Black stars pricked against her eyes as an explosion of pain ripped through her right calf. *A bullet…* I *am shot,* she coolly evaluated while stumbling forward. Hopping on one foot, she sheathed her tomahawk for her flintlock. A close quarter attack would be sure to follow, a projectile better suiting. Yet it was impossible to stay upright. Not with the way her injured leg refused to bear any of her weight. Sheer will or not, it simply couldn’t handle the physical shortcoming of being without a solid limb to stand on. Collapsing to the ground was the only option at the moment.

“Well, well, what have we here?” came an irritatingly familiar, sing-songy voice from above. “A
real, live, Indian, eh? Masquerading as anything but the barbarian wench she is, too. How *droll-*”

Connor’s shot in her direction went frustratingly wide. All due to a combination of Eleanor Mallow’s training and the unexpected, seizing throb that rocked through the assassin’s leg. For her trouble, the Redcoat rewarded her with a violent kick to her side that sent her ribs rattling.

“Always a Templar, Mallow,” Connor grit, raising herself to her hands and knees. Blinking away the sharp snap of pain ebbing through her calf admitted took a few seconds. Judging from the reek of gunpowder wafting from the Redcoat’s direction, she’d fired the shot that brought her down. “But never a pleasure,” she tersely added. Mallow’s vicious punt to her arm had Connor wheezing out an grunt. “Hmph,” she panted, “As before, you are lacking in civilized discourse.”

This time, the Eleanor squarely aimed her kick for her wound on her lower leg.

Connor choked down a howl at the impact, tears springing to her eyes and vision swimming at the raw spasm of agony that raced up her limb. Biting her lip so hard she drew blood, she pressed her forehead to the snowy ground. She balled her fists so tightly that her nails dug into her palms as she gulped down a few mouthfuls of the frigid air. The jolt of the cold filling her lungs forced her back to her senses. As well as the rather troublesome fact that the Templar now had the icy steel of her flintlock pressed to the back of her head.

“And another pithy word, Assassin,” the Redcoat threatened, “Just one more fucking utterance out of you, and I’ll be cleaning your brains from my barrel.”

“If you wished me dead, you would have done so by now,” Connor frostily retorted, turning her head to the side to take her in. This time, the Redcoat managed to get her hand on a blue Continental uniform, allowing her to blend in. Obviously, their enemy was no fool. “Or perhaps,” she narrowed her eyes at the yellowing bruises all along the other’s woman’s face and neck, “You wish me to balance out your visage with a matching left black eye?”

The ruthless strike to the top of Connor’s shoulder from the hefty, silver butt of Eleanor’s flintlock reverberated down her spine. It sent her sprawling back to the muddy, ice-slicked ground with a grinding gasp. “That,” she shakily exhaled, nostrils flaring, “Was untoward.”

“Where is Grand-Prix, savage!?” the Redcoat brayed as Connor winced and rolled to her back. She barely had time to take in the bloody corpse of the mercenary she’d knifed just seconds before she’d been shot when her breath hitched at Eleanor’s boot connecting with her thigh. “I will not ask it again, you bloody cow!” Mallow spat. Pressing her stacked heel into Connor’s lower abdomen for emphasis, she barked, “Where. Is. The Frenchman?!”

Hands dropping to her side, Connor remained wholly silent. Dark eyes flitting over the Templar with defiant calculation only served to raise the Redcoat’s ire. Winding up, she flashed the assassin a malicious smile as she struck out again.

But her gloating prevented her from taking note of how Connor skirted her fingers closer to the dead mercenary. Within a heartbeat, the assassin nicked his dagger from under his limp arm and punched upwards. Its edged steel met the Templar’s pistol dead on. Sending sparks flying as it slammed into the silver grip, the force of the collision knocked the Redcoat off balance. Connor then crossed her wrists to gain extra leverage. Thrusting skyward, she blocked the Eleanor’s follow-up in mid-air, whipping her weapon to slice deep across the other woman’s wrist. Reversing direction, she feinted a stab down, only to arc it up again. Regrettably, instead of burying the blade in Mallow’s shoulder as intended, it sliced through the layers of her clothes down to the skin. For Mallow coiled and sprung
away a split second earlier than anticipated.

Eleanor screamed in rage, the rush of blood spilling from her freshly cut artery and staining her garb. The only reason it wasn’t completely severed was due to Connor rolling away from her attempt to blind her by kicking up mud and snow into her face. Missing her target, the Templar tumbled forward. Although she didn’t completely overbalance and hit the ground, she still fell within the assassin’s reach.

“Your emotions will always rule you to your detriment, Redcoat,” Connor flatly declared, seizing her by the shirt collar with one hand and mercilessly twisting it against her throat. Eyes bulging at the sight of the assassin about to sink the dagger into her heart with her other hand, Mallow smacked out and backhanded her. The powerful blow to her chin reflexively caused Connor to drop the knife with an annoyed mutter. Nevertheless, the Native swiftly reeled back and bashed her forehead into the other woman’s face.

Stunned and head ringing at the brutal impact, the Redcoat hit the ground, her behind crashing into a large, icy puddle. "M-my teeth!” Eleanor gurgled, her hand covered in blood as she frantically reached up to her mouth. "You!” she flung out, "Y-you fucking knocked out my...TEETH!”

Unable to get to her feet as a result of her injury, Connor again snatched up the dead mercenary's blade from the ground. While flipping it along her fingers to throw, she dragged herself backwards and away from her foe. Within a few moments, she reached a tree trunk some feet from their sparring. It allowed her to pull herself into a sitting position. However, the click of a hammer being pulled back caused her roll her eyes.

“I don’t think so,” Eleanor lisped out a sneer on account of her newly missing canine and cuspid teeth. She stumbled forward to stand in front of Connor. Though she furiously blinked and the pistol in her uninjured hand slightly shook, it remained trained right at Connor’s chest. “Looks like you forgot that like any expert in my line of work,” she huffed, “I always carry two pistols.”

“But unlike you,” Connor calmly countered, gaze shifting to some spot just behind the Templar’s shoulder, “I am constantly aware of my surroundings.”

Eleanor smirked at that, her gun still firmly aimed. At the same time, she pressed her other bleeding wrist against her stomach in a vain attempt to stop its flow. “I know English isn’t your first language, savage,” she jeered, “So what in the hell are you prattling about?”

“Pretty much me,” Dobby drawled behind her. Feeling a sword point immediately pressing between her shoulder blades, Eleanor’s face when ashen. “Drop it,” Dobby stonily ordered, “The gun of course, ya toothless bint.”

Shoulders stiffening, for once, Mallow was rendered momentarily speechless. Yet her face suddenly twisted into a malevolent smile. “Do you truly think you can run me through before I shoot your precious native?” she mocked.

“Maybe. ‘O maybe not,” Hickey’s amused voice rang out at Connor’s rear. Despite the rivulets of blood trailing down his temple and a couple of bullet holes marring his coat sleeve, he still strolled into her view full of his usual bluster. Then again, his flintlock pointed at Connor’s head wasn’t hard to miss either.

“Sorry lass,” he chuckled with a shrug but still maintaining his unwavering bead on her. Considering he only stood only a few feet away, it didn’t prove particularly difficult. “But I never really thought
that ya’d go an actually trust me. Frankly, I ain’t realized that ya had it in ya. Not considering how near to killin’ me ya was at first.”

“What in fuck all do he be talkin’ about?!” Dobby demanded, though her smallsword resolutely remained at Eleanor’s back.

“Well, color me surprised,” the Redcoat squinted at the scene in front of her, “But it appears that you blighters have a mole in your midst after all.”

Giving her a firm shove that nearly sent Eleanor to ground, Dobby growled, “Shut your gob!”

“Make me, you flea-ridden cunt.”

“For fucks sake, Ellie,” Hickey interrupted, briefly rubbing a palm against his brow in irritation, “How ‘bout ya go ‘n button up that filthy mouth ‘o yours fer once, yeah?”

Lip curled with derision and cheeks crimson with barely repressed fury, Connor finally spat, “Forgive me, Dobby.”

“For what?” the Irishwoman exclaimed, eyes darting between Hickey and Connor while her other hand surreptitiously removed a smoke bomb from the pouch on her belt.

“Apparently,” Connor swore, “I have made a terrible miscalculation.”

“Oh, if only ya knew,” Hickey shook his head in disagreement.

“I refuse to insult us both by feigning surprise at your treachery,” Connor snorted.

“Well, sweetheart,” Hickey leered, “This usually be the point where most folks go threatenin’ all sorts ‘o nasty revenge at me for sellin’ ‘em upriver.”

Chest heaving, she grit, “I assume William-”

“Be dead?” Hickey raised an amused brow, “Naw, that ain’t occurred yet. Likely be soon, though.”

“It may not be today,” Connor darkly promised, her grip tightening along the pommel of her dagger, “But your life will end by my hand.”

“See, I ain’t got no doubts that ya be a woman of your word,” he smugly saluted her. “Just like I ain’t got no doubts that you rarely be missin’ them shots ‘o yours. Be it from a flintlock, or even a nasty ‘lil knife. Hell,” he fixed his eyes her hand that clutched her weapon to her chest, “Especially with a knife.”

“Why do you insist on prattling-?!?”

“Some might even go sayin’,” Hickey continued, completely ignoring her interruption, “That if the circumstances be all in alignment, bringin’ a knife to a gunfight can actually go workin’ out better, eh?”

Without warning, he spun and raised his flintlock in Dobby’s direction.

“Your brain be addled, boy?” the older assassin snapped, “What in the seven hells do ya be playin’
“The irony be this, poppet,” Hickey blithely replied, “I don’t ever be jestin' when it comes to evening me odds 'o survival.”

And with that, Thomas pulled the trigger.
It was impossible for the Eleanor's mind to register the flash of silver inexplicably flying from the native's hand. Not before the piercing agony ripped across her stomach. Unfortunately, at the same time a bullet tore through her side and ricocheted off a rib. The thick, grey haze blinding her and filling her nostrils from the detonated smoke bomb behind her certainly didn't help. Strangely, the sound of two pistols roared in her ears as she collapsed to her knees. She knew she'd squeezed off a shot before she was so unceremoniously brought down. Yet judging by the Indian bitch's skittering gasp, she hadn't killed her outright. In fact, she'd kicked away the filthy assassin's flintlock earlier in their skirmish.

So who in the _fuck_ just shot her?!

Doubled over and sight swimming, she vainly reached for her sheathed dirk. However, she was shoved over to her back by the firm toe of someone's boot to her shoulder.

"I'll be takin' that," Dobby snorted, yanking the knife from her fingertips. "Though I've gotta say, this nice lookin' flintlock is more to my style. Thank ya!" she grabbed it from the ground mere inches from Eleanor's reach.

"Dibs on that there pretty 'lil dirk, yeah?" Eleanor heard Hickey gleefully inquire, the fucking sod.

"As long as you promise to shut your yap for a few minutes," Dobby huffed, even as she tossed him the weapon, "Your chatter be tiresome, boy."

Craning her neck as the contents of the smoke bomb finally dissipated, the Templar owlishly blinked at the blurry sight of that traitorous bastard pulling the Indian to her feet. All as infuriatingly casual as can be, to boot. Then, instead of blowing the blighters' brains out, Thomas frowned at the assassin as she slumped against him. Eleanor's eyes narrowed at the sight of his smoldering pistol. "You?!" she squaked. Her futile attempt to lift herself up using her uninjured arm only led to her crashing back down to the icy grass. Despite her heartbeat roaring in her ears and turning her head to the side cough up the blood gathering in her throat, she fixed him with a withering look. "You dare shoot me?!" she howled.

"Looks like that's how it went down, Templar," Dobby tossed out from behind her while marching towards the other two. Leaning down, she inspected Connor's leg with careful fingers. Sighing in relief and moving back to her feet, she said, "It ain't just a flesh wound, but it ain't nothing too bad. No amputation or nothing like that," she nodded at the other woman.

"That is better than I initially assumed," Connor slowly said, readjusting her weight to balance between Hickey and the tree trunk at her back.

"Aye," Dobby replied with a grin, "Lucky for you, lass." Then, without warning, she lashed out and punched Thomas in the jaw.

Reeling back from the blow and cursing, he rubbed his fingers along the side of his face "Wot in the _fuck_ be gettin' into ya-?!"

"That be for putting a _leanbh na páirte_," Dobby angrily exclaimed, pointing at Connor, "In certain danger!"
"I fuckin' saved yer stonewalled arses, ya ungrateful 'lil cailleach!" Thomas snit.

"Go n-íthe an cat thú, is go n-íthe an diabhal an cat!" Dobby scoffed in their shared, native Irish Gaelic.

"Oh yeah?" Thomas yelled, haphazardly shoving Connor into Dobby's arms. As Connor snorted in surprise, he jeered, "Go mbeire an diabhal leis thu!"

"You sonabitch!" Eleanor screamed out, causing both of them to pull up short from their verbal assault. "A bloody fuckin' disgrace! You throw in your lot with this Indian cunt and her 'lil mick whore?! A god-damned Frenchman as well? For what?!"

Hickey sneered, doggedly crossing the ground between them. Crouching down, he balled his fists in her collar before yanking her upwards. Ignoring how she grunted and clutched her side, the blood pouring from between her fingers and grotesquely staining the white snow, he growled, "You 'n ya pop be betrayin' us first! Ya went unleashin' that sick fuck Hessian on the entire McCready family," he railed. "He went murderin' the mark's wife 'n kid-!"

"Such are the consequences of crossing a Templar," Eleanor jeered.

"The 'lil tyke had but seven years to 'im!"

"Sic semper evello mortem tyrannis," she fiendishly smiled, it made all the more savage by her scarlet-stained lips.

"What in the bloody fuck do ya be squawkin' bout?!" Thomas demanded, shaking her so hard, her head jolted back.

"Thus always I eradicate tyrants' lives," William quietly translated the Latin as he silently materialized behind the two.

"Shockling, his comprehension," Eleanor drawled. "Though I suppose even animals may learn a few tricks for their betters' entertainment," her eyes slid to where the French assassin stood at her feet. "How tragic for the McCreadys," she gurgled, coughing up more blood, "The family line ending in such an exquisite fashion, yes?" She only brayed even more as Thomas suddenly pressed her own dirk into her neck. Hard enough for a fine trickle of blood to begin flowing down her collar, it dug into her jugular. "You always were a pikey git," she hurled at him, "Good for nothing but kissing Haytham's arse and getting railed by that dead, Scottish prat, Johnson."

Hazel eyes blazing with violent fury and reeling back for the strike, Thomas snarled, "Go to hell, ya demonic bitch!"

Yet his arm was yanked back in an iron grip. Fingers digging into his bicep hard enough to leave bruises, Connor's exhausted voice pierced through his frenzied wrath.

"She baits you-"

"Ya think I don't be fuckin' knowing that?!" Hickey fumed, spinning around and fixing her with a murderous glare.

"She will be put out of her misery after questioning," she quietly retorted.

"If I may?" William ventured, stepping between them.

Eyes flitting between Connor and the Frenchman, Hickey finally shoved Eleanor away, aggressively
shook off Connor's hold and jumped to his feet. Ignoring the Redcoat's wheezing laugh, he stomped over to stand behind the assassin, grumbling under his breath all the while.

"I'll go take McGuire back to William's," Dobby declared, handing off Connor back to Hickey despite her glare at him that mostly translated to, *You'd better be real fuckin' careful with her.* "I'll swipe one of them mercenaries' horses since the coach still looks in decent repair 'nough to bring y'all back to the house."

"He requires a surgeon," Connor breathed, "Sooner rather than later."

"Of course." With that, she stole back to the carriage and was off.

Meanwhile, though bloodied and bruised, William appeared without major injury. Gaze flicking away from Connor, his stormy, azure eyes took in the Templar on the ground. A lessor person would've shivered at his predatory expression, utterly taciturn and devoid of all sentiment. Especially as he readjusted his grip on his double hooked blade and dropped to his knees over her. Instead, he paused, his weapon at his side rather than buried in her neck or heart.

"What, ya frog?" Eleanor smirked, pausing only to cough up the blood beginning to pool in her throat again, "You haven't the balls to rip my throat out?"

"Alas for you, Templar," his accented voice lilted along her ear, "We require information."

She could only darkly chuckle in satisfaction as her bloody spit landed on his cheek. Coolly removing a white handkerchief edged in lace from his pocket, William studiously wiped his face.

Eleanor screamed her throat raw, convulsing as his double hookblade plunged into her shoulder. Stars exploded in front of her eyes when William gave it the barest of twists. Just as swiftly, it was over as he jerked it from her skin. Wiping its crimson end on the grass, he flatly commanded, "You shall give us what we seek. The sooner, the better for you, *mademoiselle.*"

Eleanor could barely register the sound of his voice above her ragged breathing. Combined with her fading vision, it was a pathetic struggle for her keep her senses. "Search her," Connor's voice warbled in her ears from above. "Not you," she shook her head at Hickey as he moved forward, "William."

"What, ya don't be trusting me?" Hickey pouted. "Hell, it obviously be a feint back there when I had you the end of me flintlock."

"You acted out of turn-"

"To stop ya from gettin' shot to shit!"

"And any one of us could have *killed* you at any moment!" Connor breathlessly replied, closing her eyes against the throbbing that sliced through her leg yet again.

Hickey guffawed, "Like ya would've been missin' me."

"That is not the point-"

"Oh-ho?" Hickey sent her a lazy, if somewhat lurid grin, "So ya would've been weepin' over me handsome corpse at your feet then?"

"I did not relay that *in the slightest*!"
"It was plenty inferred, love."

"Quiet yourselves!" William brusquely ordered, batting away Eleanor's shaking fingers and snatching a stack of tied letters from her inner pocket. Moving to his feet, he frantically scanned their contents. A hiss of annoyance escaping his lips, he grimaced at Thomas. "Your Hessian," he shoved a letter into his hand, disdainfully adding, "He is already in the city."

"Jesus fuckin' Christ," Thomas huffed, sheathing his pistol as he read it.

"Likely, he's aware of where I reside," William rejoined.

"So we wait for him to arrive there," Connor instructed. "It is always to better to fight on familiar ground rather than waste time searching the city for an enigma."

"I believe that will-"

The shouts and cursing of a group marching out of bushy the edge of the marsh caused William to stop mid-sentence. Glancing over her shoulder, Connor glowered, "Continental soldiers!"

"We gotta scram!" Hickey barked. Stuffing the letter into his pocket, he scooped her up and tossed her over his shoulder with a grunt. "Again, girl...why do ya weigh so bloody much?!" he mumbled.

Too weary to reply, she settled for purposely digging her fingers into his shoulder hard enough to make him wince. Yet it was summarily forgotten as a Patriot regular fired a shot. Apparently, the Patriot regulars were trigger happy at the moment. That notion was reinforced as William dodged behind a tree some yards behind them. Narrowly avoiding a volley of musket fire, he swooped down to retrieve one of the mercenaries' unused flintlocks. Balancing it on his forearm, he squeezed off a shot. Fired from such a long distance, it only managed to maim one soldier. But mercifully, the trio had the hilly terrain on their side as they wound their way around its perimeter. Still, they all would've welcomed a cleaner escape.

"Should've killed the poxy bint at first chance," Thomas snapped before the carriage appeared ahead of them. "They likely be thinkin' we went attackin' one of they own."

"I prefer to not have left any loose ends," William rejoined, sprinting next to them, "Though she didn't have many more breaths to take."

"A pity, that," Thomas sniffed, Connor nodding in agreement for once.

Reaching the coach first, William nimbly swung up into the driver's seat. A few steps behind them, Thomas yanked open the door and shoved Connor inside. She nearly crashed on top of Harris. In spite of his stunned expression at the mayhem, the boy's solid reflexes allowed him to dodge out of her way. Hauling himself behind her, Thomas smacked the back of the carriage to signal William. A shouted command sent the horses lurching forward. Despite the coach groaning in protest and its damaged door barely hanging on its hinges, it shuddered into submission and hauled them back onto the road.

Fingers spasming, Eleanor labored to raise a crimson-stained hand in signal to the patrol. For being in a blue uniform easily fooled them into she was one of theirs and allow her to get her wounds treated. But even as the Continentals rushed to her side, their voices fell about her ears in garbled nonsense. Her chest heaved, a lung drowning in her own blood. No matter her efforts, her tongue couldn't form the orders to go after the assassins. The last thing she recalled as the darkness fell across her vision was her whispered oath to end them all. Either by her own hand, or that of whoever the Order sent to tread in her ruinous footsteps.
Connor grit her teeth in utter frustration.

It wasn't that she hadn't been shot before. Rather, being hobbled at such a significant point in their current mission didn't help them. Not to mention, the high probability of infection that could settle in, considering how filthy the colonists generally tended to be. Overall, her fellow assassins were some of the few who bathed on a regular basis. It was necessary, considering how much time they spent running about in the wild. Surprisingly, Hickey also took his personal hygiene seriously. Something he mentioned in passing with being in the army for so long and realizing that the more often he washed, the less ill he generally became. There also proved his quicker recovery from various injuries.

Shaking thoughts of him from her head, she slumped back against the carriage seat, closed her eyes and took a few aching inhales. Without warning, she felt someone gingerly take her leg, lift it and brace it against themselves. She cursed in her own language as they jostled her calf. Regrettably, it had to be done as they speedily sliced away the bottom of her trousers. However, they immediately noticed her discomfort and relaxed their hold, beginning to carefully feel around her wound.

"Bloody thing went straight through, but didn't shatter no bone-"

"Excuse me?" she swallowed, eyes snapping open to find Thomas holding her leg in his lap. He didn't seem to mind how she bled all over his trousers and coat. Or how she nearly kicked him in the balls as another stinging spasm shot through her. Attempting to yank her leg away from him didn't work due to his firm grip on her ankle. If anything, it caused her to bite her tongue against the warbling ache and immediately stop her efforts.

She willed herself to stay still as he continued his inspection with careful fingers. "I ain't gonna kill ya," he quietly promised, meeting her eyes.

"Not in front of witnesses. Surely you would not be so obvious," she retorted, sliding her eyes to where Harris furiously dug through her pouches she normally wore on her belt. Seated next to Thomas, he'd taken them from Connor after she settled into her seat. Distracting him for the moment, she instructed him to locate one of the many bandages she kept on her person for precisely this reason.

"As you constantly be sayin'," Thomas snorted, "I be lots 'o things-"

"You are not brainless. No matter how much you attempt to appear such for the sake of deception," she tiredly admitted, causing him to briefly arch a brow of surprise. "A lot of your other personality failings immediately come to mind, yes. But 'stupid' is most certainly not one of them."

He chuckled and shook his head at her insult before focusing back on the task at hand.

As he probed her wound, she settled for biting the inside of her cheek. The taste of liquid copper filled her mouth again at how hard she bit down. Letting out a ragged sigh, she took in the sight of Harris frantically unrolling a bandage from her things. His dark hands shaking, he swallowed and tried to casually wipe at his tear-stained face.

"There is no shame in such feelings," Connor quietly declared to him.

"It ain't manly, miss," he rasped, avoiding eye contact.

"Yet you are not a man full-grown," she assured him, "And even if you were, your reaction is not unbecoming. Now give him the bandage," she nodded to Thomas.

Harris shook his head to the contrary. Squaring his shoulders, he insisted, "I'll help ya. Ya helped me
'n McGuire in that...ugliness."

Connor nodded and closed her eyes, waving, "Do as you wish, Harris. I can always use an extra set of hands."

"I be wrappin' it tight 'round her," Thomas warned the boy, even as he stared at Connor. She was glad he didn't explicitly say it was going to hurt, if only to save her pride. "So ya gotta go makin sure this wrap ain't got no folds in it as I go, yeah?" Frantically nodding, Harris began stretching out the white cloth. "Atta boy!" Thomas ruffled the child's hair, "Now, just make sure ya be stretching it out as I be goin'."

Cracking one eye open at the Templar's ease with Harris, Connor pressed her lips into a thin line of contemplation before saying, "Proceed."

She purposely muffled her hiccups of pain in her throat as Thomas swiftly wrapped the bandage around her calf. In order to ensure her bleeding stopped, he had to nearly cut off her circulation for the time being. Upon its completion, Connor grit her teeth while taking in Harris' bewildered expression. "Do not worry yourself," she assured him while leaning back against the seat and opening her eyes, "I have been injured worse."

"I...I'm sorry for it, miss," he whispered, wringing his hands where they'd fallen into his lap. "Do not be," she retorted. She immediately flinched at how harsh it sounded echoing in the carriage. It wasn't helped by Hickey's huff of disagreement as he avoided meeting her eyes.

Damn him. And damn how this day was turning out.

Staring at the Harris for a long moment, she tentatively held out a hand. He took it without hesitation. "Niá:wenh ki' wáhi," she gave him a reassuring squeeze. His brief grin caused her to quickly add, "You did well," before she released him.

Thomas still hadn't let go of her ankle in the meantime. Preferring to conserve her energy for the moment, she didn't argue over his physical contact. Also, while she should've blindfolded him again, the curtains of the carriage were drawn. He made no effort to peek out, so there was no point in forcing the issue.

The trio rode in silence until the carriage came to a smooth stop over the gravelled entrance way of William's home. Leaning over, Connor brushed back the curtain. Biting back a sigh, she closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose at the sight that greeted her. For on the front drive lay the prone body of McGuire. His top half hastily covered with a horse blanket, Dobby knelt at his side. Face twisted with anger, she argued back and forth with a middle-aged man dressed in dark clothes. Connor assumed it was a surgeon. At least judging by the heavy, black leather bag sitting next to him.

"We have arrived," she muttered.

"Good," Thomas retorted, about to hop out.

Connor's head jerking in disagreement, she stole a glance at Harris before yanking Hickey towards her by the forearms. "McGuire lies dead in the drive," she frantically whispered into his ear, "Harris cannot be allowed to see him."

Hickey blinked a few times before taking the boy by the arm and leading him out the opposite side of the carriage. Leaning out the window, Connor ordered Harris, "Head to the kitchens and have the cook give you a treat for your bravery." Thankfully, he didn't question her, leading Hickey around
the back of the manor. The route allowed him to avoid the front drive entirely.

A few minutes later, Thomas returned. Connor shoving the door open, he essentially dragged her out. She initially pulled herself out of his grip once her feet hit the ground. Then again, finding her gait and balance nearly causing her to tumble, she didn't push him away when he tossed an arm around her shoulders and hauled her flush against him.

"The water pump," she panted, "Around the house. I need to clean my weapons."

"Ya need a surgeon"

"I need to clear my thoughts," she insisted, shooting him a harried expression.

"Have it be ya way 'en," he nodded making his way there.

Their trudge to the pump allowed him to take in the magnificent home of Grand-Prix. The fop was a fucking wealthy one, of that, there was zero doubt. The mansion consisted of three stories. Built in the square, Palladian style and containing a sloped, triangular roof currently popular back in England, it was the height of architectural style. Of bold, red brick with double chimneys and black painted shutters along every glass window, white trim separated each floor. The trim matched the Doric-style columns of the front portico wrapping around the entire front of the house.

While it lent the structure an open-air atmosphere, Thomas immediately noted that the long drive up from the street sat behind a massive, black, ten foot tall, wrought iron fence. Also, unlike most fine homes, there was no over-grown grove of trees lending the front lawn any sort of shade. Instead, various plants and shrubs lay the neat, organized rows along either side of the drive, no higher than knee height. It made a colorful litany. And likely served a dual purpose; essentially, no one could approach the house without immediately being spotted, while the crunch of gravel drive ensured that they couldn't silently do so either.

As Thomas moved Connor along the side of the house, he snorted in disbelief at how far back the structure bled into property's acreage. It was easily the equivalent of a half-block of townhomes down in the city. Along with the stables, smoke house, and greenhouse tucked away in the gardens at the rear, it seemed more palace than home.

"All this for one bloke?" he said aloud in awe.

Connor dipped her head in his direction as he unhanded her next to the water pump near the kitchen entrance, at the rear of the manor. "He is engaged to be married," she shrugged.

"Oh, that be so?" Thomas leaned against the brick wall of the house, "Anyone I know?"

"I doubt you have been to France," Connor dismissively replied as she washed her weapons, "So, no."

"It be arranged then?"

Connor didn't reply. After a few more moments of her silence, Thomas knew that would be the only information he'd get out of her. Especially as she finished her task and holstered her sword, dagger and throwing knives.

"Your hands be bloody," he pointed at them.

"What?" she distractedly replied, having pulled her bow from her back and re-tightening its string.
"Go 'n clean your hands," he reiterated.

Bringing them up to her face, Connor slowly nodded. Distantly watching as the water turned pink upon hitting her skin, Thomas remained silent. Eventually, he handed her the towel slung over the lip of the gate that separated the stables from the main house.

"Use to havin' blood on yer hands?" he murmured as she dried them.

"And you are not?" she quietly replied, fiery gaze finally meeting his eyes.

Leaning back against the brick wall of the stable, he cast her a sideways glance. "Point taken."

Staring at him for a long moment, she briskly said, "The less we speak in general, the better this will be. For the both of us."

"So ya rather go actin' like everything's peachy?" he gave a mirthless chuckle. Seeing her confusion flash across her face in spite of her attempt to look placid, he clarified. "'Peachy' huh? It be meanin' everything's…normal. Which it sure in the fuck ain't-"

"To the contrary, I believe it is," she cut him off before turning her back on him. "Well, save the fact McGuire lost his life despite having nothing to do with this predicament."

"Man got caught in the crossfire," Hickey shrugged. "It ain't no surprise in our line 'o business."

"We always stay our blade from the flesh of the innocent!" she hissed. Despite clumsily spinning around to face him, the heated scowl and deep flush of her face proved enough to make Hickey begin backing up as she archly added, "Nor do we ever seek to pull them into our war with your kind. Then again," she poked her finger into his chest, "You are a Templar. So I am not surprised that you do not care for anyone outside of your wretched host." Sidestepping him, she started limping towards the house.

Stunned at her outburst, Hickey marched after her. "Now ya just wait one fuckin' minut-"

"Why?!" she sneered, whirling towards him again. Fists balled at her sides, her shoulders heaved with effort. "So that I may bend my ear to yet another one of your attempts to mitigate how the loss of one means nothing in the grand aim of your schemes? Perhaps I should have a seat for that, yes?" she tersely waved around the yard. "No doubt your explanations will take the better part of day in your vain attempt to justify them!"

"Sod off!" he scoffed, stepping in so close she was forced to rock back on her heel to meet his incensed gaze. Grabbing her by the upper arms, he demanded, "Listen, girlie, I ain't never said any 'o whatever insanity be fillin' ya head-"

"Spare me your empty platitudes, Hickey," she spat, shoving him away and again retreating towards the other gate separating the house from the yard. Dusting off her coat where he'd touched her, she growled, "Pardon me, but I have exhausted myself more than enough for one day."

Clumsily hauling herself up, she swung her legs over the tall gate. She normally would have lithely dropped down to the grass on its other side. But with her injury momentarily forgotten during their exchange, she suddenly let out an uncharacteristic screech of pain as she hit the ground. Although she didn't completely land on her compromised leg, the pressure was enough to incapacitate. Her breath coming in wheezing, short spurts, her fingers dug into the grass in an attempt to steady herself. She didn't move for a long time before grasping at the gate. It took a couple of more minutes before she awkwardly yanked herself back to her feet with both arms, using the fence as an anchor.
Well familiar with her stubbornness and obvious denial of the extent of her injury, Thomas pretended not to see her wipe at her eyes. Nor did he make any move to assist her. Even as she began half marching, half dragging herself towards the manor house. "Ya know, somethin' Connor?" he finally strolled after her, "Most women always be lookin' to go prattlin' on and on about they feelings and whatnot."

"I am not most people," she called out without bothering to look over her shoulder, "And neither are you, Hickey."

"Yeah. You be touched in the head," he shot back.

"Yet you appear to have the most experience with such."

With that, she disappeared into the manor.

Chapter End Notes

William's house is somewhat based on Drayton Hall, a historic plantation in Charleston built around 1745 in the Palladian/Georgian style popular in England and that was heavily en vogue in the colonies as well. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drayton_Hall for more info.

Translations

_A leanbh na páirte_ – “My dear child” in Irish Gaelic

_Cailleach!_ – “Old hag” or “Witch” in Irish Gaelic

_Go n-ithe an cat thú, is go n-ithe an diabhal an cat!_ – “May the cat eat you, and may the devil eat the cat!” Insult in Irish Gaelic

_Go mbeire an diabhal leis thú!_ – “May the devil take you with him!” Insult in Irish Gaelic

_Niá:wenh ki’ wáhi_ – “Thanks a lot” in Mohawk
Upon entering William de Saint-Prix's home, Thomas immediately took note at the lack of servants. Considering the size of the manor, over the last few days he'd only met the aging housekeeper, stumbled across a couple of young maids and was waited on in the mornings by William's valet. As he wasn't allowed to freely roam about alone and his room sat right next door to Connor's, he saw nothing of the outdoor servants. Well, save already meeting the late McGuire and the coach boy, Harris. The finely manicured the grounds, the existence of the greenhouse and the stables pointed to the assassin maintaining a groundskeeper, a crew of gardeners and stable hands. Despite that, he never saw them.

McGuire's body released to the undertaker, the surgeon swiftly sewed up Connor's leg. Afterwards, the late lunch with the assassin trio swiftly descended into an awkward affair. From her seat directly across the table, Dobby stared daggers at him the entire time. Tearing into on her food, she looked as though she wished it was him her teeth currently ripped to pieces. At his left, Connor half-heartedly shoved her food around her plate. Yawning seemingly every few minutes and thoroughly silent, she appeared half-asleep. Likely, from the draught for the pain the surgeon gave her earlier that afternoon. Not to mention, her pouting from their earlier argument when they arrived to the house. Unlike her usual bouts of quiet, her anger seemed to make the very air itself oppressively heavy. Yet despite his vexation, Thomas wasn't fool enough to engage her.

Admittedly, William continued his pleasantries from his seat at the head of the table. He effortlessly engaged in the type of trivial conversation that gave nothing away of himself. The smooth ebb and flow of his voice could captivate any normal person. His lighthearted witticisms and harmless gossip about a ball he recently attended proved amusing enough as well. Yet Thomas found himself increasingly unnerved at how easily the banal string of sentences flowed from the Frenchman's mouth. Frankly, he'd only witness such calculated charisma from, well, Haytham.

What a crazy bunch of fuckin' loonies.

After dessert, William directed them all to the front parlor to retire. However, he disappeared for the moment. Dobby didn't stay around much after dinner either. Some cryptic blathering about needing to deal with things down in the city proper.

Meanwhile, Connor lay asleep in a plush, purple and gold upholstered chair. Her injured leg remained braced on the matching ottoman in front of it. Thomas splayed himself across the matching sofa positioned opposite her and on the other side of the cherry-wood coffee table. He thought her dead for a split second, as her breathing was deep and nearly inaudible. Then again, the other three remained awake and on guard for their enemy, so she had the luxury of a few hours rest. A mottled black, white and ginger calico cat that insisted on following her around as soon as they set foot in the house also sat sleeping on her lap. It looked no older than a couple of years. It also didn't appear to take much of a liking to Thomas. Evading all his attempts at petting, it either ignored him or swatted
at his ankles with extended claws. While it didn't avoid William or Dobby entirely, it mostly remained at Connor's heels.

*She'd better not fuckin' die on yer watch, boy-o,* Dobby suddenly warned him. They'd only settled in for roughly ten minutes or so before she jumped to her feet and buckled on her bracer. Releasing its blade with a flick of her wrist, she held it up to inspect it. The fading sunset reflecting though the windows, the light sliced across its glinting steel in warm reds and golds.

Thomas knocked back a long chug of gin directly from the crystal decanter he'd liberated from the liquor cabinet behind them. Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he shrugged, *I ain't her bloody keeper*

*She trusts you 'nough to bring you around us,* the Irishwoman cocked her head to the side. *That girl's had plenty 'nough ugliness in her life to never go puttin' her faith in a single soul. But here ya be. Hell, here we all be.*

*Like I be knowin' fuck-all 'bout that,* he darkly chuckled. *Maybe she got shitty judgment.*

'O maybe you do, mate,* she curled her lip in the beginning of a snarl. *Hopefully, it'll stop short of making me have to go rippin' your balls off before I run you through. You know, should ya decide to screw her over any.* With that, Dobby gave him a sarcastic salute from her temple and marched out of the room. He could only hope she left the manor entirely, considering he hadn't seen her since then.

"You are thinking too hard."

"Wot?" Thomas retorted, mind reeling back to the present.

Awake at an ungodly, early hour on the third morning of their stay, Connor added copious amounts of sugar to her tea. Sipping it, she sluggishly muttered, "I can discern it from your expression."

Her chair across the table from him sat far enough away that he could barely hear her. Since the manor was more mansion than house, they took their morning meal in the breakfast room. Significantly smaller than the dinning room, it still allowed for a table seating six and a full size china cabinet against the wall. The opposite wall held a large, silver-framed mirror that reflected the candlelight from bronze chandelier hanging overhead.

While on the road, Thomas assumed Connor insisted on waking up at the arse-crack of dawn for sake of sheer belligerence. Along with a pathological need to piss him off. But since staying at the manor, it looked as though all assassins enjoyed popping out of bed at an insane hour. The sun barely up, it was now just after seven or so in the morning. Then again, the decadent breakfast laid out in front of them was a sight to behold: multiple types of both fresh and dry fruits, a steaming, silver serving bowl of porridge with plenty of butter, soft boiled eggs, slices of cheese, toast, bacon and sausage, chocolate pastry tarts from last night's dessert, a carafe each of coffee and two types of tea (lemon and some new concoction of tasting of orange and bergamot he'd never had in his life. Eh, it wasn't half bad), cream and sugar. The spread almost made up for everything else.

*Almost.* His hangover from partaking in a few bottles of fine wine at last night's dinner and in the parlor afterwards still pounded at his head. It sure in fuck didn't help that breakfast was always over by eight am. So he had no choice but to drag himself out of bed hours before he was used to. Well, at least when on leave from the army.

Thomas tiredly blinked against the watery, yellow hue of dawn's sunlight falling through the window behind Connor. Admittedly, he appreciated how it made her freckles stand out in stark contrast to her
bronzed skin. It also cast her eyes strangely golden as she narrowed them.

Picking at her plate for a long moment, she palmed a piece of sausage. The calico cat lounged in the chair next to her, appearing askep. But seeing her extended hand, it perked up. Nosing at her fingertips, the feline let out a small, pleased meow before eagerly swallowing down the offered food. Thomas snorted back a huff of surprise when Connor followed up with a few scratches behind its ears. His eyes widened even more as the animal purred and then leapt into her lap. Using one hand to eat, Connor continued petting the little mouser.

"You are plotting…something," she curtly said.

"Right in front 'o ya face?" Thomas sniffed at her accusation, "Gimme a break, love." For once, it wasn't a lie. Nevertheless, she didn't buy it. Not judging by her jaundiced look over the rim of her bone china teacup. Like everything else in the house, it screamed expensive. Its interior pale blue, the outside matched its saucer. Swirling gold bordered the lip, a spray of pink flowers painted along the outside. The set of them on the table was easily worth a quarter year of his army salary.


Ever since she'd been taking the surgeon's proscribed medicine, her usual, deliberate speech pattern sounded even more measured. It annoyed Thomas that her present state preoccupied his thoughts. He refused to entertain the notion that it hinged on anything other than his own mercenary concern. Frankly, he preferred not getting his arse killed as a result of her reduced reflexes when the Hessian finally decided to make his appearance. He certainly didn't give a rat's ass at how she constantly appeared half-asleep. Or painfully hobbling about. Nor did he pay any sort of attention to the way her expression fluctuated between sedate and utterly blank. Nope, he didn't find it unsettling in the slightest. It wasn't as though she painted a hypnotizing picture of lethal grace whenever they found themselves in yet another round of fisticuffs.

Nah, nothing like any of that at fucking all.

"I suggest you cease staring at me as well," her husky voice interrupted his thoughts again.

"'Cause ya be lookin' a right mess this mornin'?" Thomas groused.

"Pardon me for not measuring up to your arbitrary expectations," she dismissively waved. Without further ado, she wolfed down more toast and sausage.

In truth, she appeared as neat as ever. Save a few shorter, loose strands framing her face, she'd tightly plaited back her dark locks in two braids. Wrapped around her head in a crown-like fashion, it made her appear like some young, stern, German fraulein. For now, she forwent her coat and waistcoat. It left her in a double set of loose tunics, her trousers and scarlet sash with the fancy, silver "A" clasping it closed, the animal skin wrappings around her legs and her moccasins. Nevertheless, she wore her hidden blades around each wrist. Her holster also hung on the back of her chair. It held her pistol, French cutlass, a brace of throwing knives and a pouch of smoke bombs. She likely also had some weapons hidden away on her person. Yet without her foreboding hood, she appeared bizarrely innocuous.

Sitting at the head of the table in between them, William casually read the morning newspaper. Legs crossed at the knee, save a smirk, he didn't respond to their bickering. Although he attended only a casual breakfast, the assassin still dressed in full livery. His goatee freshly trimmed against tanned skin, he'd swept back his straight, black hair into a tight ponytail. The yellow ribbon binding it matched his golden colored waistcoat. Embroidered with red vines sprouting dark blue flowers, it was buttoned over a crisp, white tunic. White breeches and tall, brown dragoon boots completed the
ensemble. Sheathed about his waist sat his cutlass and dagger. On his right arm, one of those bracer blades so similar to the ones Connor, Dobby and that frontier wench, Emily Burke, bore. After all, they were all on high alert for the Hessian to attack them any hour now.

Regardless of being only a couple years older than Connor and well over a decade younger than Thomas, William appeared a prince holding court. His distant laugh as the other two continued exchanging barbs kept him occupied. It gave Thomas the distinct impression that as long as he and Connor didn't come to blows, the Frenchman could entertain himself all day with watching them.

What a bizarre little trio they made. Well, all four of them, if you included the cat. Which was currently staring at him across the table with haughty, emerald green eyes. Yawning after a while, it turned its nose up at him and dropped its head onto its front paws to settle back down into Connor's lap.

It appeared that assassin cats, much like their owners, were condescending 'lil bastards.
"Despite that you ain't doin' no such thing?" Thomas challenged, even as he kept his gaze glued to the newspaper.

"Come now, of course I don't trust you," William smirked. "I however hold Connor in the highest esteem," he nodded at where she lay dozing next to him on the couch. Stretched out and head resting on the sofa's opposite arm, her injured leg sat propped up on a couple of pillows next to his thigh. Arms crossed over her chest, she appeared a soldier in the field taking a quick nap. Well, save the way the calico cat lay resting on her belly. Barely awake, it purred and flicked the end of its tail every so often. "So if she finds a reason to place her faith in you, I am not one to question her decision," William continued. "Otherwise, I know nothing of you, save my instincts."

"And what do those be tellin' ya?" Thomas grinned, eyes flitting upwards to take in the other man.

"That if not for Connor, you would not be alive in my presence at the moment," William titled his chin upwards.

"Wot's that then?" Thomas grunted, pouring himself a second cup of tea, "You mean ya would've gone 'n killed me?"

"Likely, Templar," William smoothly replied, "Unless you happened to end my life first."

Thomas shot him a predatory grin around the teacup. Taking a long sip, he couldn't help savoring the explosion of orange and bergamot signaling its high quality. "Sooooo," he purposely drew out the word, "How exactly did you be surmisin' who I be?" he arched a brow, setting down the cup on the gold gilded, oval shaped table between them.

"I am not at liberty to reveal conversations told to me in confidence," William waved at Connor.

"Well'en," Thomas shrugged, "I ain't gonna deny it."

William let out a brittle laugh at that. However, his suddenly icy, sapphire gaze caused to Thomas freeze for a second or so before he reached out and snatched a sandwich from a plate within the tea service. "At least you make no attempt to justify yourself," William inclined his head.

"I ain't so florid 'n fancy with me words as the others be."

"Despite that you convinced Connor not to slit your throat at the first opportunity?"

"That don't mean she didn't go tryin'," Thomas muttered, "A whole damn lotta times, mind ya."

"If she was determined to do so, it would have been done," William briefly grinned, "Likely without you realizing it. Well, not until she'd already opened up your neck from ear to ear and you were choking on your own blood."

Swallowing as he smothered the bread of his sandwich with butter, Thomas huffed, "Ain't gotta go tellin' me twice." Quickly letting the knife harmlessly clatter to the table as William's gaze darted to it, he stuffed the sandwich in his mouth. Hickey contemplatively chewed for a few moments before shrugging again. "Good thing it ain't come to that."

"Not yet," William declared with aplomb, gracefully shifting in his seat as Connor stirred. Sleepily blinking, she rubbed at her eyes with the backs of her hands. Thomas snickered at how she appeared more child than adult for the moment. Messy strands of hair escaped her braid while she loudly yawned and stretched with a tired groan. The cat stirred as well, meowing a bit before walking up her chest. Nuzzling at her shoulder for quick scratch behind the ears, it leapt to the floor.
and pranced out of the room to attend to its own business. For once without a cautious glance around for impending danger, Connor accepted the steaming cup of tea William handed her. He also set a plate piled with a couple of scones and a handful of sugar cookies on her lap as she sat up straighter. As Thomas witnessed since they arrived, she hungrily tore into it. He figured the only explanation for how she was able to scarf down so much was her constant expenditure of energy. Evidently, viciously murdering folks took work.

"This is delicious," she sighed. Her eyes fluttering closed, she let out a surprising moan of pleasure. Combined with how her cheeks lightly flushed and the way her tongue darted out lick at a bit of tea along the corner of her mouth, Thomas found his eyes going wide. Along with the tell-tale carnal itch along his skin and the heat whipping through his gut. "Darjeeling?" she thoughtfully said to William while balancing the plate of treats in her lap.

"Your favorite, of course," William easily replied, "With enough sugar added to incapacitate a small child."

Connor smirked at that before downing most of the tea. William poured her another as she shot a glance to Thomas. Brows furrowing at his flushed face and bright eyes, she murmured, "You appear peaked-"

"That be like your fifth cup 'o the day, considerin' breakfast," he babbled. He forced himself to look away as she licked the sugar off of a cookie before popping it into her mouth. The fact that she was in no way purposely being seductive only made it worse. He needed to get a hold of himself…

"Hmph, that's odd," William shook his head in dismay, his eyes flitting across the entire tea service, "It seems that the kitchen staff forgot to include the cream for the scones-"

"That be 'cause he murdered the milkman to break in," a terrified, high pitched voice said from across the room.

Thomas spun around in his chair, only to widen his eyes and snarl, "Jesus fuckin' Christ!" as he scrambled to his feet.

Hand snapping to his pistol, he had only the blink of an eye to jerk himself in the opposite direction. Dodging the hurled shortblade aimed at his heart, a combination of sheer luck and his unexpected speed resulted in it scraping past his upper arm. Unfortunately, it slashed close enough to rip through the cloth of his coat before thudding in the polished wood panel of the wall behind him. At the same time, the thunderous clap of a shot rang out. Had not William thrown himself off the sofa and rolled to floor from his seat, his chest would have taken the fatal shot. Roughly snatching Connor with him caused her to pitch to the floor right as the bullet ricocheted off upholstery less than an inch from her hobbled leg. Unfortunately, her movements proved sluggish and she didn't have time to save her teacup and plate of desserts from shattering on the floor. Left on her knees and leaning an elbow on the table, her fingers weren't fast enough to snatch her own flintlock out of its holster from where it hung on the arm of the couch. A flick of her hand did manage to unsheathe her hidden blade. Trouble was, it would do no good from her position across the room from their assailant and his hostage.

Harris looked utterly terrified. Then again, no one blamed him, considering the Hessian's second flintlock pressed to the boy's temple. A fresh bruise also bloomed across his cheek. Blood trailing down his split lip, it stained his ripped collar where the Hessian had it twisted in his meaty fingers against his neck.

"He will not hesitate to kill him," Connor hissed behind to the other two men.
"No shit!" Thomas sneered. Glancing back at her, he flinched at her expression of unadulterated hatred directed toward the mercenary.

"Oui," William tersely replied, gazed darting between their enemy and Harris.

"H-he got me on the stoop of the kitchen house. I just…I just wanted some milk with me tea," Harris' lip quivered. Big, brown eyes wide and rapidly blinking, he stammered, "But the milkman…he…he went 'n bloody sliced open the milkman!"

"Shut your mouth, boy," the Hessian coldly commanded, shoving him further forward into the parlor.

"F-forgive me," Harris babbled on. Voice rising with hysteria, he hiccuped, "I didn't wanna tell 'im where you was. Didn't even go saying anythin' when he went hurtin' me. Then he…he said he'd go killin' anyone in his sights if I kept it up! I-"

"Do not worry yourself, Harris," William soothed, voice light despite that his raised hands of surrender. "It is not as though anyone expects a grown man to terrorize a child."

"A traitorous drunk, a crippled half-breed and a decadent Frenchman?" the Hessian's thick accent disdainfully curled his mouth. Eyes clinically sweeping over them, he spat, "Barely worthy of my troubles to kill you all."

"An endeavor that you will fail in," Connor promised.

"Wretched woman," the Hessian glowered. "You are nothing but a mere thorn in my side that I will enjoy wrenching apart limb by limb before you draw your last breath. After I kill the other ones in front of you, ja?"

"I waste no time for such theatrics," she methodically replied, expression now sparing nothing in way of emotion. It made Thomas inwardly shudder as she continued, "For all I require is my blade within your throat."

The Hessian gave a grim smile. However, his weapon was no longer pressed to the boy's skin. Nor was his finger still on the trigger. His looser grip on his collar also allowed Harris to slump forward, the balls of his feet dragging along the floorboards. A dangerously small opening, Thomas mused. Then again, nothing of that sort ever seemed to daunt the assassin. After all, the most lethal and unpredictable adversaries were always those defending their pack. He witnessed the grisly results of it time and time again when facing off against their shared enemies out on frontier…

It took Hickey a few seconds to process the inexplicable hiss of air racing past his ear. So he couldn't help but wince as the largest porcelain plate of the tea service narrowly avoided slicing his cheek open and instead smashed into the Hessian's lower arm. Mercifully, it did so with enough force to cause the mercenary to wildly fire in their direction versus at Harris. A ring of metal on metal met them rather than the bloody thud of contact with flesh. For the bullet glanced harmlessly off the silver tray William snatched in front of himself when Connor hurled her improvised weapon. Thankfully, Henry smartly fled the room, the blur of his dark blue livery disappearing out the door the only remnant of his presence.

"Nuh-uh, mate," Thomas tsked while training his pistol on the Hessian's chest. The soldier's hand froze only a few inches from his back where his third flintlock remained holstered. "Don't even fuckin' try it," he barked, "Not 'specially after that there slimy-arsed stunt with the kid."

"I'm afraid that dinnerware was one of a set that is no longer manufactured," William grinned,
palming his pistol from his belt and unsheathing his double hook-blade.

"It was ruined when I broke the cup and plate," Connor said with exasperation. "But it is good to see you care for the most critical concerns at hand," she continued, eliciting William's droll laughter. On her feet now, she drew her pistol from her holster. Her other hand clutched her tomahawk.

"A discussion saved for after this settled," William shrugged.

"Right-o," Thomas retorted, eyes never moving from the Hessian, "'Cause I sure in the fuck ain't dyin' today."

His gaze burning with loathing, the Hessian flatly countered, "Proof that your faith is firmly placed on the wrong end of your situation."

"'Cept I got the pistol now, mate," Thomas jeered. "And fancy that, there ain't no more kids hangin' around that you can go murderin', neither."

The shot of both Hickey's and William's flintlocks echoed in the cavern of the room. But both bullets only harmlessly ricocheted off the Hessian's chest with a tinny clank. One bounced off the polished floorboards while the other rebounded and nearly struck Hickey in the stomach.

"De tout ce qui est saint!"

"Wot in the fuckin' bloody hell-?!"

"Armor, you imbeciles," the Hessian dangerously smirked, rapping a fist on the apparent metal plate beneath his clothing on his chest.

"Regardless, your head is not impervious," Connor scowled as Thomas snatched out his second flintlock and aimed dead-on.

Unfortunately, he wasn't fast enough as the Templar snarled and lunged forward, his meaty hands clamping around his throat.

Vision already darkening, Thomas landed a solid punch to the mercenary's jaw. In spite of the tell-tale crack of bone that signaled he'd broken it, his foe's fingers continued to tighten. Never mind being strangled, the horrid burn and compression of his windpipe made him swiftly realize that his neck was about to be snapped. Especially as the Hessian suddenly used one hand to snatch him by the chin and twist his head in the opposite direction.

Ugh, what a shitacular way to go.

Well, fuck that.

Using one hand, he raked his nails down the Hessian's face. At the same time, he drove his other palm upwards, breaking the man's nose.

All at once, the pressure disappeared from his neck and he tumbled to the ground. Head slamming into the wooden floorboards, his vision swam with flashing dark spots. Meaning he suffered more damage to his hard head than he'd prefer. He would've cursed at his ill luck if he could just catch his fucking breath. Shakily rolling to his side, Thomas hacked and coughed, eyes wet with pain. But even as he wrestled to get air back into his lungs, his hand flew to the spare blade in his boot. Yanking it out and frantically scooting backwards, he willed himself to focus. For in front of him, Connor managed to leap on the Hessian's back. Driving her stiletto into upper arm just above his collarbone, she hacked at his other one with her tomahawk. Well, that certainly explained why the
mad German so quickly unheaded him.

Yanking her knife out at the Templar's roar of disbelief, she attempted to slash her ax across his neck. Regrettably, his goret flung around it as he yawed backwards and spun, vainly trying to dislodge her. Gritting her teeth against the blaze of pain from her injured leg, she securely locked her ankles around his waist. Regardless, the metal of the name plate still prevented her from landing a clean cut. Ever the improviser, she braced her arm across his throat and forced his chin into the crook of her elbow. Effectively immobilizing him, she then plunged her weapon into where his shoulder met his neck.

Seizing and howling like a feral animal, the Hessian floundered into the wall with a thud. Had he not been so powerfully built, his unconscious action of driving Connor into marble mantle of the fireplace probably wouldn't have hurt her much. However, her injured leg fell from around his waist, causing her body shift. It resulted in her taking the full impact of collision between a hefty foe and unyielding stone. Head lurching back, it collided into the corner of the mantle with a sickening impact. Only by Providence did she not fall directly into the flames as she slumped to the ground with a rasped groan.

Spinning around, the Hessian ripped her dagger out of himself with a vile squelch. Flipping the weapon about, he braced it reverse grip while advancing on William.

Slashing out, his strikes arced far too swiftly for Thomas to see. Anyone else would be sliced to ribbons. But William elegantly ducked, dipped and twisted out of every reach. Thomas thought him insane as he purposely backed closer into the corner of the room. Then, he abruptly launched himself off the wall, a vicious knee connecting with the Hessian's crotch. Scrapping and brawling in the back alleys of London's Whitechapel in his youth, Thomas learned long ago that no man, no matter how much he boasted of his prowess, could take a solid whack the family jewels. Such was the case for the Hessian, who doubled over and clutched at his groin. William's immediate roundhouse kick then hurled their enemy across the room.

The Hessian vainly attempted to regain his footing, but it was to no avail. Toppling backwards, he smashed into the table in the middle of the parlor. His weight and the sheer force of the impact split its glazed glass into dozens of razor sharp shards. Letting out a stunned grunt, he attempted to twist out of the fall. It only caused him to over-spin and slam into the floor, face first.

Thick, jagged lumps of glass ripped his uniform, waistcoat and tunics beneath it to shreds. He should have bled in nearly a dozen place from the damage. But he wore another metal plate on his back. Eyes wide and head lolling to side in stunned disbelief, he shakily propped himself up one arm.

"C-connor!" Thomas rasped, stumbling to his feet. She remained lying adjacent to the fireplace, still as stone. And less than arm's distance away from where the Hessian clawed at the floor. Despite his other arm limply hanging at his side and one of his legs appearing unable to move, the mercenary wheezed and dragged himself towards her with morbid determination.

From out of nowhere, a dark form hissed and seemed to drop out of the air, landing on the Hessian's arm. The German roared as sharp little teeth pierced the soft flesh between his index finger and thumb. Claws latching on to his wrist, the cat scratched deep lacerations into his skin. Even as the Templar flung his arm back and forth, the animal fearlessly refused to budge. That was until he reached over with his other hand and snatched the cat by its scruff. With a gargle of annoyance, he tugged and yanked, finally ripping it from the meat of his arm. Hurling the calico into the opposite wall, he ignored its yelp as it connected with the hard surface.

"Merde!" William grit at their enemy's relentless press forward. But as the Hessian's grasping fingers snatched Connor's ankle, the Frenchman surged forward and dove for his legs to avoid the shards on
his back. Grabbing Connor's stiletto from where it'd landed on the floor, he heaved the Hessian over to his back. Surely, slicing open his throat would do him in once and for all.

With nary a warning, Connor sprung back to life. Heaving herself upward, she planted her back against the pillar of the hearth while at the same time maneuvering her body to clutch the Hessian's head between her knees. A flurry of red found her yanking her crimson sash from about her waist. Abruptly knotting it around the mercenary's neck promptly made it into a primitive noose. She then wrapped her hands around either end of it, her fatal intent as clear as day. Yanking upwards while planting her feet on the Templar's shoulders, she viciously thrust him down to slide along the polished floor. The effect used his own weight against him as she put her makeshift garrote to its grisly use.

The bastard didn't even give them a satisfaction of a scream as the unmistakable, grotesque shriek of his neck snapping finally echoed in the air. An eternity seemed to pass before the Hessian's legs finally stopped flailing and jerking. Combined with his sightless stare at the ceiling and rigid form, he had to be dead. Not to mention getting stabbed multiple times, having his spine rearranged and then being strangled.

"Fucker's got nine bloody lives!" Thomas breathed, collapsing to sit on the floor. "Bloody fuckin' hell," he raggedly coughed. Closing his eyes and throwing his head back, he drew his knees up to rest his bloodied hands on them.

"So it would seem," William replied with surprising alacrity. Chest heaving, he wiped his brow and took in Connor. Seeing her eyes fluttering open, he let out snorted chuckle that was more akin to relief. "And Connor has ten." Dropping to sit next to her, he grabbed her hand and gave a light squeeze for emphasis.

"Ain't gotta go tellin' me twice," Thomas painfully nodded in agreement. Gingerly touching his neck, he winced at the feel of the bruises forming. "Hell, we all do."

"For the better," Connor rasped, her expression lacking its usual irritation.

"Or worse, in your case," William smirked at Hickey.

"Frenchmen's got fuckin' jokes," Thomas groused. It took longer than he liked to pull himself to his feet. However, he crossed the room in a few strides to meet the other two.

At the same time, the cat stumbled out of the corner. Save shaking its head a few times, the animal didn't appear worse for wear as he moved forward and lightly nosed at William's hand with a loud meow. Feeling along the back of her head, he slightly recoiled at Connor's groaned exasperation when he hit a tender spot. Bringing his fingers up to find them bloodied, he started murmuring various questions to test the extent of her injuries. Things such as her age, the current year and day, who he was and so on.

The duo's distraction allowed Thomas to toe at the Hessian's shoulder before he crouched down and unwound the makeshift garrote from around his neck. He couldn't stop from wrinkling his nose at how its edges actually cut into the arsehole's skin, Connor's strength evident. The blighter was as dead as a door nail though. About fuckin' time, he thought to himself. Glancing back to William and Connor still babbling, he surreptitiously removed the Hessian's Templar ring and pocketed it before inquiring, "So who be gettin' the fun job 'o dumpin' this mongrel's body?"

"We shall sort that out after attending to her first," William insisted, shooting Thomas a look of admonishment as he opened his mouth again.
"Suits me," Thomas shrugged. Glancing downwards, he took in the cat twining around his legs. "Wot?" he asked the feline. Shockingly, the animal didn't reach out and swat at him. Instead, it settled for rubbing its cheek against his ankles. Taking it as a sign of an unspoken truce, Thomas leaned down and cautiously ran a hand along its back. Arching into his touch for a few moments, it strolled away. Though not before turning tail to hiss at the Hessian's corpse. "Yeah," he tiredly smiled, "He be a right proper bastard, boy-o."

Meanwhile, William slowly drew Connor to her feet. She could already feel her thoughts swimming, her limbs becoming heavy and her speech beginning to slur as she repeated herself. "Do not…do not trust," she trailed off. Her tongue felt like cotton, loose and dry in her sandy mouth. Hand flailing, she reached out to grab William by the collar. Though on account of near passing out again, it came off more as lamely pawing at his shirt. "You cannot trust him," she droned. "He…is…a liar. Deceiver. Save for my threats, he would betray us. No hesitation-

"I know, mon Cherie," William worriedly grinned. "I know," he clasped her hand in both of his. "Now, stop struggling against the sleep. You need your rest."

"Hmph," she drowsily exhaled. After a while though, it was impossible to stay awake. And so Connor finally allowed the darkness to claim her.

Chapter End Notes

"Oui" - "Yes" in French

"Ja?" - "Yes" in German

"De tout ce qui est saint!" – "Of all that is holy!" in French

"Merde!" - "Shit!" in French

"tea…some new concoction of tasting or orange and bergamot he’d never had in his life…it wasn't half bad” - Basically, this is a description of Earl Grey tea. While it existed, it wasn’t specifically known as that blend until about 50 years later. Named after the 2nd Earl Grey, the British Prime Minister in the 1830s, Lord Grey received the special blend of tea as a gift. It became hugely popular afterwards and the rest is history. In this case, I like to think the ever-refined William is ahead of his time.
“You’ve been out for quite some time, ma bichette,” William’s accented voice pulled Connor from her deep sleep. “Just a bump on the head, thankfully. Save a few cuts and bruises, nothing else too serious. Well, outside of that bullet you took in your leg.”

Muttering to herself in her native language, Connor winced as she blinked her eyes open. Her body ached from her earlier scuffle, an all too familiar feeling. Frankly, she was extraordinarily fortunate she’d hit only the mantle of the fireplace. It ended up far better than falling into its flames. Reaching up, she felt that her head was wrapped in a thick bandage around her temples. The back of it crusted with dried blood, the welt underneath and on the left side of her skull dully ached. With a deep sigh, she shifted on the comfortably firm bed she slept on. It was a struggle to sit upright. Nevertheless, she pulled herself up to lean back against the intricately carved wooden headboard.

She recognized the room immediately. It proved the same quarters on the second floor she stayed in when William first arrived in the colonies and purchased the manor. She lay in the large, four-postered bed with thick, dark blue curtains for privacy. On account the room being so warm, they were drawn and tied back to the bedposts. Upholstered in silk, white wallpaper with white crown molding, the walls obviously cost a fortune. A lovely cherry wood desk and chair sat at the opposite wall of the foot of the bed. Next to it was the stone hearth, which crackled with a freshly banked fire. The black shutters of the window behind her were closed to keep out the cold. A still-life detailing various breads, meats and fruits scattered across a table hung on the wall to her right.

Also to her right and against the wall sat a pristine, black and white striped divan. Harris slept curled up on it, beneath a heavy woven blanket. His head resting on feather stuffed pillows, his hand remained on her bed only a few inches from hers.

Reaching out, Connor’s fingertips carefully grazed his bruised cheek. “How does he fare?” she tentatively asked.

“He needed a sleeping draught to calm him,” William tiredly replied. “He’s understandably frightened. Which is why I ensured he rest in here, surrounded by other people. A few days away from work should do him some good,” he asserted, “If that is not sufficient, he may take all the time he needs.”

“A pity he was witness to this ordeal,” she frowned.

“At least the threat is dead,” William soothed, “Still, I worry that our duties have begun bleeding over into civilian life.”

“McGuire,” Connor sadly hummed, tucking the blanket around Harris before withdrawing.

“Precisely. He was a good man, one of my most trusted,” William clasped his hands in front of him. “Though not a member of our Brotherhood, he was fully aware of my duties, He will be buried with the highest respects in the plot down in the cemetery I’ve set aside for myself.”

“It is the least he deserves,” Connor bowed her head.

Leaning back, she suddenly realized the chaise lounge usually in the corner now sat to her left. Sitting flush against her bed, it matched the pattern of the divan. However, she didn’t expect to find
Hickey laying sprawled out upon it. On his back, his arms were crossed over his chest. Without his stockings or boots but still in his trousers, his waistcoat was unbuttoned over his pale, ruffled tunic. His tricorne covering his face, it muffled his light snores.

Her grogginess dissipated within seconds at the sight of him. “What is he doing here?” she incredulously whispered while covering herself with the feather filled duvet. Even despite that she remained dressed, William leaving her in her trousers, chemise and the smallclothes beneath them.

“He insisted,” William lightly shrugged from his chair on the other side of the bed.

“No doubt to murder me in my bed.”

“Considering you are still alive, most likely not,” William fleetingly grinned. “You are feeling better, no?”

“Skennenko:wa. Because you remain here-”

“Actually, I just stopped in to ensure you weren’t any worse for wear,” he interrupted. “Also, to keep a close eye on Harris. He’s been here all night,” he lifted his chin at Hickey.

“He lacks any sort of altruistic motivations,” she sniffed. “Anything resembling them does not extend beyond enriching himself. Or base carnality. He is an unapologetic lech.”

“Who sleeps at your bedside,” William casually pointed out, “Instead of in it.”

“I am lucky he did not slit my throat in the night,” Connor retorted.

“Nor my neck either, ma chérie”

“And now you prefer to call me by affectionate names as well?” she glanced around the room, taking inventory again.

William would’ve laughed out loud at her furrowed brow. An obvious hint of her mood. So he settled for airily asking, ‘I take it that he does so?”

“It is without end,” she wrinkled her nose, “But only in an attempt to drive me to insanity rather than fondness. If you were aware of the numerous, bodily threats I have made without fulfilling them? I believe you would call me what the colonists refer to as ‘a saint.’ In spite of it, he still persists.”

“I can see how he hates you so,” William breezily replied.

Mouth curling with confusion, Connor searched his countenance for any sign of mocking. Yet the other assassin appeared the very picture of innocence. This was precisely why she felt the itching need to return to the Homestead; life in the city was relentlessly full of double meanings and strange, hidden signals beneath deceptively simple words. Not that William would ever betray her. Their friendship unbreakable, they would gladly give their lives for each other without question. It almost came to pass tonight, after all. But she yearned to set out for the wilderness. Not that she would admit out loud how much she missed the homestead, her growing number of neighbors and the Old Man.

Her stomach abruptly growled, causing William to laugh. “I am in need of food,” she hemmed.

“I figured as much,” he rose to his feet. “Come,” he gestured, “Let’s head to the kitchens and fetch you something to eat, yes?”

Shoving back the duvet, she gingerly slid out of bed. Grabbing her tunic from where it lay neatly
folded on the desk chair with her other clothes, she tugged it over her head. She gave Hickey a long
stare before letting William take her by the arm. Leading her out, he silently shut the door behind
them. It was a welcome relief to lean on her him as he guided her down a floor to the kitchens. From
the clocks they passed, she saw it was halfway past two in the morning. She’d slept for hours.

The servants retired for the night, William lit the lanterns scattered throughout the kitchen. From food
in the pantry, he quickly put together a meal of bread, cheese, various slices of meat and dried fruit.
A covered pot of chicken soup sat on the hook in hearth over the flickering embers. Banking the fire,
he stirred it up to heat the rest of their meal. He then poured each of them a goblet of wine. Taking in
how Connor slowly took a seat at the cook’s table in the center of the room, he brought a third chair
and helped her set her injured leg on it.

She slouched low and closed her eyes as he slid into the seat next to her. “How do you fare?” he set
their plates and bowls of soup in front of them. Her eyes snapped open to see him raise a calm hand
near her head. She nodded, giving him permission to move closer to inspect her wound. When he
cautiously ran his fingers along it, he easily heard her sharp intake of breath. “It is wholly dry,” he
felt the stiff bandage, “A good a sign as any the bleeding stopped.”

“Did it require stitching to close the wound?” she inquired.

“A handful,” he softly replied, “Done myself. I made sure to clean the wound before and after.”

“The better to stave off infection,” she swallowed. “I am grateful for your care,”

“Do not worry yourself, bien sûr,” he slid her a glass of wine, “We shall change the bandages once
you get some food into you. Then you can use your herbs and poultices to dress your wound as you
wish. Otherwise, no permanent malady, eh?”

“Luck is with us,” she started eating, “I keep my leg, you remain alive and another Templar threat is
at an end.”

“With the help of your little ally, no less,” William slyly replied, “Who seems willing to come and go
at your beck and call, no matter who he works for.”

Connor grunted at that, flicking her fingers in dismissal. “You have not been privy to his stream of
complaints, curses and unrelenting chatter. Thomas Hickey is most certainly not the means to a
lasting agreement between Templar and Assassin, I promise you.”

He gave her a long look of appraisal before taking a deep drink. Finishing it off in a single swig, he
poured himself another serving. He then swirled it around in his goblet while picking at his
food. “You know,” he sighed after a long while, “My mentor back home, Monsiuer Dorian, often
voiced his regrets that the two sides refuse a truce. Then again, ‘Mais comment peut un côté
confiance à l’autre quand compromis pourrait coûter leurs deux vies?’ he swore.”

“This war has continued for over a thousand years,” Connor sleepily rubbed her eyes with her palms,
“Peace escapes us, but nothing is completely…implausible.”

Arching a brow, he replied, “Your hope of such despite your utter loyalty to the Brotherhood speaks
of impressive optimism.”

“Well,” she shyly dipped her head, “Mr. Dorian sounds a sensible man. He must be, considering he
is a master assassin and your trained expertise. I hope to sail to France to meet him someday.”

“I am afraid that is impossible now,” William’s mouth tightened with anger. Knocking back another
gulp, he thumped the glass back down to the table. “In his constant correspondence, my father
informed me that he was murdered last year,” he clenched his fist. “Within the very home of the
king, the great, royal palace of Versailles!”

She narrowed her eyes. “Templars?” she growled.

“There is little reason to suspect anyone else, for a valuable artifact in his possession is now missing,”
William threw his hands up in frustration. “Unfortunately, we have also lost account of his orphaned
son, though various means are being employed to find him.”

Shaking her head in disbelief, Connor muttered, “Perhaps peace between enemies is further away
than we assume.”

“Nonetheless, we currently have a sleeping Templar in one of my guest quarters,” William pointed
upwards. “Who’s to say we’re not one step closer to achieving it?”

“Apparently, I am not the only one overflowing with optimism,” she took in his measured
expression. “As the colonists say, I do not trust him as far as I may throw him.”

“Should I be surprised if he’s simply waiting for the opportune time to kill us and then rob my home
of its valuables?” he shrugged.

“I cannot deny the latter. Count your silverware and search his pockets for trinkets,” she snorted
before taking a large forkful of food. Thoughtfully chewing for a bit and sipping her wine, she
added, “His coarse language and abrasive ways hide a savvy mind. He also has no qualms with
using violence if someone gets in his way. At the same time, he does not employ it for enjoyment.”


“Hardly,” Connor scoffed. “Hickey is a dissolute liar and smuggler on the hunt for debauchery of all
kind. Those endeavors cost coin. So if his orders allow him those pursuits, he follows them. But he
does no more and no less than what is asked of him. That is why he did not kill me during the
mission. Nor when we were imprisoned.”

“So he doesn’t contain a hunger for blood like our dead Hessian. We should be relieved, I suppose,”
William drawled.

“After my attempted execution when I caught up with Hickey in the crowd, he assumed I would kill
him,” she drumed her fingers on the table. “Even so, he contained no regrets. He freely confessed he
uses the Templars to gather wealth and the privileges it buys. Besides that, he cares little for their
ideology. Yet he remains within their inner circle.”

“Their known numbers dwindle due to our efforts,” William assured her, “That he is among them
makes it quite obvious they cannot afford to be so discerning in their ranks.”

Finishing rest of their meal, William helped Connor into the wood-paneled sitting room a few doors
down from the parlor where they’d fought the Hessian. Lying back on the neoclassical, cabriole
style sofa, she slid into a more comfortable position. “No more stairs for you for a good long bit,”
William joked and settled her wounded leg on a pile of the couch’s pillows. “It’s easier for you to
sleep down here. Let me start a fire in the hearth and fetch some bedding.” After tending to and
banking up the fireplace, he left for a moment. Despite the cold of the cavernous, high-ceilinged
room, she was half-asleep when he returned a few minutes later, also carrying her remaining clothes
and weapons. “For once, there’s no need for you to wake up with the sun,” William tossed a heavy
fur over her before neatly arranging her other things on the floor next to her. “Enjoy your well-
earned rest for once, eh?”
Allowing sleep to claim her, she found herself barely able to reply, “Niá:wen ki’ wáhi,” before she drifted off.

Connor jerked awake at the sound of someone repeating her name. The snap of panic at not instantly finding a weapon within her grasp swiftly passed when she blearily recognized she remained at the manor.

“Forgive me,” William frowned, holding a folded piece of paper in front of her, “But considering the remarkable circumstances of the last few days, I assume you’d want to be aware of any missives from Dobby.”

Slowly blinking, she mumbled her thanks and took it. The other assassin’s recognizable scrawl across the page ensured it was no trap. It also caused her to nearly jump to her feet before she remembered how useless her leg remained.

“I must go-”

“You need to convalesce,” William challenged. “Better to fully cure everything now than sabotage any progress and risk it getting worse overtime.”

“I would usually agree,” she yawned and leaned against the arm of the sofa to button up her coat. Buckling on her swordbelt and baldric, she glanced out the window and noted the sun cresting the horizon. “However, Mallow has disappeared. She cannot be located in any morgue or with any doctor,” she held up the message before tossing it in the fire. “Also, Clipper returned with serious wounds from his mission in Trenton and stays with Duncan to heal. Dobby will meet me there.”

“All of us are currently free of missions and would gladly share your duties, you know that,” he crossed his arms. “Recovering yourself is a priority above all.”

“Better to put an end to the Templar’s schemes then allow any opportunity to slip through our fingers,” she countered.

Closing his eyes and rubbing the bridge of his nose, William let out of groan of disagreement. “Fine, fine,” he rolled his eyes. He continued shaking his head to the contrary while retreating to the kitchen. “I’ve known you long enough to be fully aware of when you’ve absolutely made up your mind,” he called out over his shoulder. Lowering herself into an armchair, Connor tightened the bandage around her leg before adjusting her trousers and lacing up her moccasins and leg wrappings over it.

“All I’ve have you know, ma louve féroce, that obstinacy isn’t always a virtue,” William gave a long exhale as he helped her to her feet and handed her the duo of burlap sacks he brought back with him. Digging around inside them, Connor gave him a pleased expression at what he'd packed. The first one contained rolls of bandages, a can of ointment and glass bottles of various herbs and plants. The second held a bottle of fine wine and plenty of food wrapped in brown paper and twine. “Sent with my regards to everyone,” he smiled at her reaction, “Especially Clipper. I’m sure he could use some quality spirits considering his current state.”

“I cannot disagree with that,” she replied, slipping her weapons into place. However, she paused as she checked a knife in the holster she’d tied around her thigh. Withdrawing it and inspecting its elaborately filigreed grip, she took in its silver handle and pommel. Their grooves were carefully inlaid with flecks of gold and black onyx. Deftly twirling it along her palm, the blue steel of the blade glinted in the low candlelight of the room. The dagger’s impeccable balance obviously belied expert construction and care.
“You are surprisingly generous with your second favorite arm of choice,” William arched a brow when she unexpectedly handed it to him.

“It belonged to Eleanor Mallow,” Connor insisted. “Hickey…liberated it from her when we searched her after she failed to kill you on our way here.”

William let out an impressed whistle. “It’s a fine prize,” he nimbly tossed the blade from hand to hand. Holding it at eye level, he looked down its fuller while rolling it back and forth. “He didn’t keep this for himself?” his gaze met hers over the edge of the dagger.

“It was sheathed in my belt. So I assume he did not.”

“Interesting,” William drawled.

Shooting him an incredulous look for a few seconds, she declared, “It should go to one in need of it. Harris would do well with a fine weapon to protect himself. Especially after what he has endured.”

“I agree,” he thoughtfully replied. “He excels at climbing about, adores the books I recommend him from my library and his reflexes are far beyond most young men of his age.”

“That explains how he was able to flee the Hessian at the first chance we gave him,” Connor breathed.

“Oui,” William agreed. “Nonetheless, I don’t believe he suspects how the little tests and tasks I assign drive him towards the Brotherhood. It is better that way; when he reaches adulthood, he will have the choice of whether or not to join our ranks.”

“He will be a remarkable addition if he desires to pursue it,” Connor approved.

They made their way out to the front drive, which was now covered in a light layer of snow. Connor didn’t balk as William assisted her into a plain, black carriage that wouldn’t be noticed on the road.

As he slammed the door shut, she suddenly leaned out of the coach window. “Swear to me something,” she quietly asked.

“Anything, ma Cherie,” he gave a brief bow.

“Should Hickey compromise anything of you or the Brotherhood.”

“His life is forfeit,” William smoothly replied, “Such are always the rules, no matter your previous agreement. With the Hessian dead, every Templar is fair game again.”

“Though he is afforded safe passage from here,” Connor clarified.

“Unless he becomes a direct threat, yes,” William carefully said. “He will be blindfolded again when he leaves, for security’s sake.”


“Always,” William clasped both of his hands around hers. She didn’t shirk away, thoroughly used to her friend’s tactile nature and sincerity. “Now go and rest up,” he chuckled, “We all prefer you back in one piece.”

“O:nen ki’ wahi’,” she let out a exhausted sigh.

“I hope not for long,” William smirked. Knocking against the coach to signal he was done, he
watched as it rumbled down the drive. Waiting until it exited the front gate, he jogged back to the house. He had a Templar to evict, after all.

Duncan’s modest home in the North End neighborhood of Boston consisted of the rented upper floor of a printer’s shop. Owned by a member of the Masons recommended by Sam Adams, the landlord was steadfast supporter of the Revolution. He also highly valued the need for privacy. So long as Duncan paid his rent on time and didn’t bring the law to their doorstep, he had no complaints. More importantly, he never questioned the assassins’ clandestine comings and goings. No matter that they occurred at all hours of the day and night. That it was next door to the Light-House and Anchor tavern made it all the more ideal; most of the time, Connor and her recruits simply leaped across the printer’s roof to the tavern and entered it from one of the open windows on the second floor.

This time, Connor limped into the first floor of the shop. Save a worried look from the printer’s apprentice (which was promptly wiped off his face by the printer’s smack to the back of his head and bellow of “Pay attention, boy!” as he reset the type of some pamphlet or other), she slowly hobbled up the stairs. She reflexively flicked out her hidden blade when Duncan’s door flew open while she was still at the opposite end of the hallway. However, she quickly sheathed it at the sight of the former priest. Racing to her and throwing an arm around her shoulders, he took William's bags of supplies and hustled her inside.

“I could hear you from outside, lass,” he quickly explained. “Considering you’re always movin’ about so silently, Dobby wasn’t exaggerating on how you got shot through the limb there,” he nodded at her leg.

“Does she remain here?” Connor asked. She bit back a wince as he maneuvered her to sit on the settee in front of the hearth.

“She’s out grabbin’ more food and supplies as a favor to me before she heads back to her place and her usual patrols,” he informed her. "Milly and Caleb are stayin' in town a few days to take over watching me and Clipper's sections of town."

"How kind of them," she replied with relief, "And Clipper?"

“He's mendin’ up,” he jerked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the bedroom, “So his appetite has returned in earnest.”

“It is good that he will be whole again.”

“You don’t say?” Duncan chortled. Carefully propping up her injured leg on a folded blanket, he added another log to the fireplace in front of her. “He’s out of the woods now,” he pulled another heavy, woolen blanket over her. “I mean, his injuries from his mission in Trenton shouldn’t be so worryin' for much longer,” he explained the colloquialism as she cracked an eye open, “But he completed the operation as assigned.”

“Even if he did not, I value his survival above all,” Connor reassured him.

“Of course,” Duncan agreed, flashing her a soft smile as he crouched down next to her. “Your priorities have always been in the right place. And we thank you for it, Connor. In the meantime, do you need anything else? Are you comfortable ‘nough to sleep?”

Stretching a bit, she replied, "I have everything I require. Go attend to Clipper."

“Sleep well,” he moved to his feet. On his way to one of the bedrooms, he closed the shutters to keep the room free of early dawn sunlight.
Even as she as she dozed off, it was easy to hear Duncan and Clipper chattering away in the spare rom. Voices ebbing and flowing, they were every so often punctuated by either Clipper’s bawdy hoot or Duncan’s deep chuckle.

A bout of particularly loud laughter suddenly woke her. She sat up, clumsily maneuvering herself to get a clear view of the room where Clipper convalesced. The door still open, he lay on his back with his head and shoulders propped on a pile of pillows. Duncan remained in a chair next to the bed. Despite his back being to her, she could tell by the relaxed set of his shoulders and how his head dipped forward, he sat comfortable and unperturbed. From the window behind the bed, the watery morning sunlight filtered through the opened slats of the wooden shutters. Combined with the flickering reflection of the fireplace against the pale walls, the room appeared bathed in gold.

Clipper chortled again, slapping a bandaged hand across his chest. Momentarily forgetting his injuries, he yelped at the contact. Duncan immediately took his wrist in his hands, inspecting it with gentle fingers. While Connor made no effort to eavesdrop on their conversation, she couldn’t miss how he then leaned over and pressed a kiss to Clipper’s brow. Yet as he withdrew, Clipper’s other hand grasped him by the front of his tunic. He must have said something amusing, for Duncan gave a hearty laugh as the frontiersman pulled him back down. Mouth hungrily capturing his, Clipper steered him forward until Duncan eagerly fell onto the bed next to him.

Connor looked away to leave the two to their privacy. At the sound of the door swiftly closing she couldn’t help her brief grin. Contemplatively staring into the flames of the hearth while she wrapped herself in the heavy blanket, her thoughts drifted to the Homestead.

Of course, Achilles would scold her for her injuries. Even as he carefully redressed her leg, he’d brusquely shake his head in disbelief at her brazen actions. Couldn’t she see how her obvious disregard for her own welfare would end in her dead on some snow-covered field or in some back alley of the cities? Naturally, their squabble would continue as they cooked dinner together. However, he’d eventually acknowledge her elimination of another enemy. *Any chink in their armor loosens their grip on this land, girl. For as each one falls, another of your Assassins fill their place. But take heed to not and try to get yourself killed every time the opportunity arises, hmm?*

His gravelly words washing over her as they ate now proved so utterly familiar, she’d could admit to their comfort. Along with how easily he’d beat her at their usual game of fanorona in the study afterwards. The next few days after her return would be spent reviewing and balancing the accounts. Once she gained back her mobility, then would come the visits with the homesteaders. A trip to Mariam’s cottage to buy more winter pelts. Assisting Norris with loading his mine materials into a new convoy. Chopping down logs into wooden slats with Godfrey and Terry to help Mr. Faulkner patch the back wall of his cabin down by the shore. There was never a shortage of work or diversions.

The sooner she returned home, the better.

Thomas was roused from a warm and comfortable slumber. Sunlight streaming on his face, he stretched his arms above his head. With a roll his shoulders and the crack of his knuckles, he let out a loud yawn. The chaise he lay on was overstuffed and upholstered with exceptionally fine silk. It proved miles better than a shitty, flea-ridden bed at some backwater inn. Or the cold, frozen ground of the wild. Frankly, it was the best sleep he’d had since, well, that licentious night back at the cabin in the wilderness.

“I’m assumin’ ya didn’t go ‘n fuckin’ die on me, yeah?” he chuckled. Met by silence, he snorted, “Christ, you ain’t gotta get all pouty ‘bout it, she-wolf.” But there was no reply.
Swinging his legs over the lip of the chaise to sit up, Hickey froze at finding Connor was nowhere to be found. Harris no longer slept in the room either, the divan he previously occupied also empty and bare of blankets and pillows. Before he could jump to his feet, there was a light knock on the door.

“Gimme a sec-”

Not waiting for him to finish, one of the maids unlocked it and pushed it open. An older woman this time, tufts of her salt and pepper hair curled around her ears and the nape of her neck beneath her starched, white bonnet. Like all the other servants, her clothes were dark blue and edged in white lace embroidered with gold thread. He hadn’t seen her before either. Pleasantly plump with a bright smile, she chirped, “Good morning, sir-!”

“Where do Connor be?” he stood and demanded.

“The young miss is safe, sir.” She barely spared him a glance, occupied with eagerly waving in two burly young men who each held a bucket of steaming water.

Pointing at the divan, he questioned, “And what ‘bout the boy? He got all sorts ‘o banged up, ya see-”

“Our Harris is recovering,” she jauntily proclaimed.

“But where’n seven hells do he-?!”

"You should wash up, sir,” she brightly interrupted, her jovial disposition unphased by his irritation.

"Wot?” he crossed his arms while leaning against one of the bedposts, "I don't get no privilege of Willie's valet helpin' me get all classed up this mornin' like usual?"

Without missing a beat, the maid lightly shook her head in disagreement and demurred, "I'm afraid he's indisposed, sir."

At a clap of her hands, the two men set their buckets on the floor. One of them left, only to quickly return carrying a porcelain basin. When he set it on the desk, Hickey made out a towel, some massively expensive soap that smelled of sandalwood and a scrub brush arranged inside it. Behind him, the maid announced that once he was done she’d lead him downstairs.

He couldn’t get in another word before the trio left and shut the door behind them. After it clicked closed, he attempted to yank it back open. Of course, it was locked from the outside. His movements restricted again, he had no choice but to do as asked.

Finishing his morning routine, his knock on the door was greeted by the same maid. Her continued cheery expression gave nothing away as she gestured for him to follow her. He also took note that the two who brought up the water tailed them as well. All in all, there was no chance for him to go exploring. Not especially with how she took a straight path downstairs to one of the smaller dining rooms on the ground floor. By now, it was no surprise to find William settled in across the table and halfway done with breakfast. Clothing neat and coordinated with fastidious precision (today’s color palette was crimson and brown, apparently), he appeared as foppish as ever. The illusion appeared complete, except for the bandage wrapped the knuckles of his right hand the bruise along his jaw.

“I’m afraid Connor’s been called away on other business,” the Frenchman announced. Thomas shot him a look of confusion as he yanked out a chair and took a seat. According to the clock sitting on the mantle behind him, it was around ten in the morning. Later than the familiar routine, but he wasn’t going to bitch about it.
Frowning for a few seconds, Hickey steeled a careless smile to his face and shrugged, “Apparently, the girl ain’t one for tearful goodbyes.”

“It has never been a strength of hers,” William cast him a knowing look over the edge of the newspaper he perused. “However, she sends her apologies.”

“Somehow,” Hickey filled his teacup and starting piling his plate high with food, “I be highly doubtin’ that.”

“Now why ever would you assume such?” William sing-songed before wetting a finger and flipping the paper to the next page.

“Tosser,” Thomas sniffed before digging into his food.

“In the meantime, I must go into town for errands,” William continued, pretending not to hear the insult. “Where shall I drop you, mon ami?”

Thomas nodded with supposed ease, “Don’t go troublin’ yourself. I got two feet ‘n can go findin’ me way back.”

“Oh, we cannot have that,” William casually replied in spite of his fleeting but narrowed gaze over the newspaper. “Besides, secrets must remain so. Though it was a worthy attempt in order to figure out exactly where you are at the moment.” Grimacing, Thomas silently continued eating as William declared, “Enjoy your brunch. We leave within a half-hour.”

As promised, Saint-Prix dropped Thomas off back at the tavern they met at some days ago. Relieving him of the blindfold when the carriage stopped, the Assassin exited it behind him.

“Well now, Mousier Hickey,” William held out a hand, “I appreciate what you have done for me.”

“It wasn’t for ya,” Hickey shrugged, though he returned William’s firm shake, “Just a means to an end. And I ain’t guaranteein’ I’ll go bein’ so accomodatin’ the next time we be seein’ each other.”

“What makes you think I shall be, Templar?” William flashed him a predatory smile. Hickey’s other hand immediately flew to his belt for a weapon. “No need for that,” William breezily continued despite tightening his grip around the other man’s hand in warning. “Besides, it would be in particularly poor taste to take your life right here and now. In front of all of these lovely people? How gauche,” he carelessly waved around the bustling town square.

“And what makes ya think I be givin’ a damn ‘bout the proper time to go killin’ an Assassin?” Thomas sharply retorted, yanking out of the younger man’s grasp.

“I’ve never been under any such illusions,” William lightly shrugged as Thomas flexed his fingers. “Truly you cannot think me so remiss as to not always have other plans in place?” he jerked his head upwards.

Hastily glancing over his shoulder, Hickey examined the roofs. Though she was half-hidden by the shadows, he could just make out Dobby crouched above them. Not to mention, the tell-tale glint of her flintlock pointed square at him. He shook his head in disbelief as she gave him a languid salute from her temple.

“Always one bloody step ahead,” Thomas muttered.

“As it should be,” William steadily replied. “Then again, you should know better, considering how
much time you’ve spent with Connor.”

“Ya don’t say?” Hickey cocked his head to the side.

“Precisely,” the young noble agreed. Crossing his arms and rubbing his chin, he added, “It is such a pity that you’ve chosen the wrong side of our ancient conflict. We could use someone as, how shall I put this?” he smirked with a flutter of his hand in the air, “Ah, as spontaneously efficient as you.”

“Ya don’t say?” Thomas repeated in exasperation.

Laughing, William gracefully leapt back into the carriage. “While I shall not falter should it come to pass, it will be a true shame to have to kill you when I next have you in my sights.”

Lip curling upward, Thomas replied, “The feelin’ be mutual.”

“And so it shall be when we meet again,” William reached out and knocked on the door, causing the driver to pull forward. “Adieu,” he waved in goodbye. With that, Thomas was left to contemplate the strange twists and turns of his alliance with Assassins. As well as the glaring fact that he hadn’t spilled any of their blood. Nor had they done the same to him return.

Interesting, that.

Chapter End Notes

"Ma bichette" – “My little doe.” A French term of friendly endearment.

"Skennenko:wa" – “I am fine” in Mohawk

“bien sûr” – “Of course” in French

“Mais comment peut un côté confiance à l'autre quand compromis pourrait coûter leurs deux vies?” - “But how may one side trust the other when compromise could cost both their lives?

"Niá:wen ki’ wáh” – “Thanks a lot” in Mohawk

“Ma louve féroce” - “My ferocious (female) wolf” in French

"O:nen ki’ wahi’" – “Good bye then” in Mohawk

Per canon, Duncan hangs out around in the North End section of Boston. So I assume he lives there and frequents its taverns. My fanon is that he lives very close to the real, historical tavern called Light-House and Anchor, which was located near the Old North Meeting House. Unfortunately, during the Siege of Boston (April 19, 1775 – March 17, 1776), the meeting house was torn down by British soldiers to use its wood as firewood.
Out of the Pan and Into the Flames

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After getting the boot from the Frenchman’s manor, Thomas spent the next day or so ensuring his meeting with the ‘ole Grandmaster went off without a hitch. Putting his ear to ground, he sent out his usual spies to track down the Redcoat and her bastard pops, General Matthew Davenport. Unfortunately, no one could locate Mallow. Well, that could spell a hell of a lot of trouble for him. Then again, without a hide or hair of her whereabouts, he had a window of opportunity to get his story straight. Plus, they located the General. There were no indications that Haytham already met with him. So it’d be best for Thomas to have his say as soon as possible. After all, he who sang first was always heard the loudest. Without a body, he had no choice but to assume Mallow survived long enough to go smacking her gums about seeing him with an Assassin. She and her old man would be desperate to get back in everyone’s good graces. And pointing their perfidious fingers at him would be the perfect way for them to succeed.

He wasn’t too keen on getting his throat ripped out for someone else’s shitty life choices. No fucking way.

As a result, Thomas sent an innocuous message to the General to meet him at The Green Dragon. He studiously left out that Haytham would be there as well. Playing it safe, he posted one of his spies within sight of Haytham’s townhome. Now, he was assured news of any visitors or couriers coming and going. None did over that 24-hour period, allowing him to breathe a small sigh of relief.

The next night, The Green Dragon was as crowded as ever. Its noise proved loud and boisterous when Thomas whipped open the front door. The drunks felt up the servers, the girls swatting their hands away. When they didn’t get the message, the barmaids viciously slapped them across the face to the other patrons’ hoots and hollers. The game sharks posted up at their tables, ripping off the usual lot at their bets on Morris, Fanorona, Faro and a host of other diversions. In another corner, the band’s fiddles, flutes and drum pounded out a stirring rendition of the Ballad of the Green Mountain Boys.

Despite the British siege, which only ended a few months ago, this section of town always remained free of redcoats. All due to the Templars requiring a secure area to undertake their dealings. Consequently, more than enough lobsterbacks returned to their barracks robbed, beaten blind or dead on a stretcher without a witness to be found. Hence their men refused to set foot in this part of the North End, save when on official business. Even then, they marched about as a group. Conspicuous enough to give everyone plenty of warning of their presence, the Patriots around here treated them with equal parts disdain and apathy until they won back the city.

Ambling up the stairs to the second floor, Thomas found Haytham in his usual place. The Grandmaster sat at the table with various papers stacked in tidy piles. An inkpot and quills lay lined up neatly front of him. To his right, the fire crackled with freshly added logs in the brick hearth. Along with the iron-wrought chandelier hanging above, it leant their private space a cozy glow. It was miles better than the bitter wind frosting up the windows outside.

Haytham spared him a cursory glance and signaled for him to take a seat. Hickey obliged by unceremoniously plopping down into the chair across the table from him. He flirted with the old tavern owner, Catherine, before ordering a tankard of ale and food. “Keep ‘em comin’ sweetness,” he smacked her bottom before pulling her into his lap. His sloppy kisses along her neck finally sent her giggling away. As always, Haytham’s large amount of coin guaranteed no one would intrude on
their meeting. The boarding rooms immediately adjacent to them were also empty and reserved in case they decided to work through the rest of the night.

Thomas drew the Hessian’s Templar ring from his inner pocket and boldly slammed it down on the table in between them. “It is done?” Haytham inquired, arching a brow. He briefly inspected it before rolling it along his palm.

“What, you want me go hackin’ off ‘is fuckin’ hand to bring back for a trophy?” Thomas snorted. Slouching down in his seat and crossing his legs, he balanced his ankle on a knee. A flick of his wrist unsheathed his dragger to cut into an apple he snatched from the bowl of fruit in the center of the table. “Last I went to checkin’,” he stuffed a piece into his mouth, “Carryin’ ‘round dead body parts goes lookin’ plenty suspicious, eh?” The opened letter he’d sent to Haytham via one of his smuggling couriers earlier that day sat in between them on the table. Thomas emphatically tapped his finger to it, causing the Grandmaster to slightly tilt his head in inquiry. “The murderous bastard be dead,” he swallowed another apple slice, “The Kraut’s body be disposed of ‘n his ring be sittin’ right ‘ere in front of ya, plain as the days be long.”

Never mind that he had absolutely no idea of the location of the corpse. With Connor gone when he woke up, Saint-Prix insisted he took care of that little detail. At the same time, it wasn’t like the Frenchman could afford to get caught with a dead body either. Logically, it would be in his best interest to ensure it’d never be found.

Of course, Charles Lee picked exactly that moment to trudge up the stairs. Much like fleas constantly crawled out of the devil’s arsehole, as far as Thomas was concerned. “So you claim the mercenary is no more, Hickey?” he sniffed from where he came to stop behind Thomas.

Craning his head to look back at him, Hickey gave him a patronizing once over. Judging by the dark, heavy circles under his eyes, Lee appeared harried and exhausted. His tan longcoat sloppily hung from his stiff shoulders. His frockcoat and waistcoat beneath were mismatched shades of blue despite being from a Continentals uniform. The mud caked on his russet colored dragoon boots signaled he was fresh from the field. The smell of horse lingered on him as well. Yet his obnoxious sneer appeared the most repellent part of him at the moment.

“Don’t believe I be talkin’ to you, Charlie boy,” Thomas drawled before turning his back to him. Lee rolled his eyes in response. Nevertheless, he greeted Haytham with a simpering smile. At the Grandmaster’s preoccupied nod of acknowledgement, he silently balked. Hickey’s chuckle made the supposed slight even worse. So he marched over to the wall nearest the head of the table. Bracing himself up against it, he crossed his arms and impatiently tapped his foot on the floorboards. “Because you could ever begin to comprehend the civilized concept of ‘conversation,’” he hurled in Thomas’ direction.

“Oh, I’d say I be doin’ pretty well for meself,” Thomas shrugged.

Right on cue, Catherine returned with his drink and a steaming bowl of chicken stew. “Here ya go, hun,” she chirped.

“Much obliged, poppet,” Thomas winked. Looking over at Lee, he broadened his smile before grabbing her hand with a flourish as she passed him his bowl. While looking up at her through his lashes, he smoothly pressed his mouth to her palm. “Ya always be knowin’ best how to go takin’ care ‘o me needs, Kitty,” he grinned.

Tittering, Catherine swiveled her hips and purred, “Perhaps if you ain’t too deep in your cups by the end ’o the night, you can go ‘n attend to me like usual?”
Startled, Thomas rapidly blinked at the inexplicable deluge of images clawing at his mind. The taste of Connor on his tongue as he explored every part of her. Those flowing words of her language breathlessly swirling around his ears. The eager arch of her hips into his. The feel of her cotton shift sliding along his calloused palms as he pulled it from her flushed skin. The Assassin naked and panting beneath him...

The color rising to his cheeks didn’t help things either. Thankfully, it wasn’t enough for anyone else to notice.

“Mayhaps, love,” he plastered on a distracted smile. Patting her hand, he avowed, “Keep your porchlight on for me and we’ll go seein’ what the evening gets to spinnin’, yeah?”

“Fair ‘nough,” Catherine smirked. Snatching up the healthy tip he left on the table, she stuffed it down her bosom. After Haytham ordered more wine, Lee waved her off with a withering reply that he had no intention of staying at the tavern for much longer. Catherine shook her head in annoyance but disappeared back down the stairs.

Lee curled his lip in disgust. He still refused to take the remaining seat at the table next to Thomas. “Do you ever think with the fat head on your shoulders versus the infinitesimally little one between your legs?” he scoffed.

“Jealous, boy-o?” Thomas lewdly jerked his groin in Lee’s direction. “I mean, I ain’t too picky ‘bout who I go takin’ to bed,” his gaze lingered up and down Lee, causing the other man to make a choked noise, “But you don’t be strikin’ me as a bag ‘o laughs, catch me drift?”

“Perhaps because I have standards,” Lee’s voice dripped with derision.

Thomas let out a loud guffaw while wiping at his eyes. “If that be code for havin’ a stick lodgin’ so far up your arse that you be tastin’ the wood at the back ‘o your throat, then may haps it be time to rethink them high falutin’ rules ‘o yours.”

Charles dug his nails into his arm, his other hand balling into a fist. Flushing nearly scarlet, he grit, “You are a vile miscreant of the highest order.”

“Christ almighty, I ain’t got no time for your bloody whinin’,” Thomas dismissively flicked his fingers at him. “I mean, c’mon mate, did you crawl up in here for shits ‘n giggles? Or we gonna get to discussin’ this?” he wildly gestured at Hessian’s ring now sitting in the center of the table.

“You should have brought him back to Haytham for questioning,” Charles berated him, “And to be handled by all of us.”

“That ain’t me mission,” Thomas cavalierly replied, downing another spoonful of stew. “‘Sides, if you wanted to go ‘n have this ‘ere situation end how you be wantin’, you should’ve sussed out the General’s betrayal months back. Ain’t you been in the field fightin’ against his troops for most ‘o the year?”

“Because an accursed traitor will just waltz into my camp tent and reveal himself as such, yes?” Charles flung back, gaze blazing with icy reproach. “Pity that most of us are not so obvious in our faults as you.”

“And yet the ‘old Grandmaster here went givin’ me this ‘ere top secret undertakin’,” Hickey snickered at Haytham. He actively ignored them, continuing to write as though he couldn’t hear their conversation. His only tell was a loud sigh as Thomas giggled, “Yep, looks like he still goes
preferrin’ me with missions of this sort ‘o delicate nature. You ain’t questionin’ our fearless leader, is you?”

Slitting his eyes, Charles sarcastically said, “For it proved so Herculean a task—”

“What the fuck you mean Herc-lan?!” Thomas rumbled, pointing his spoon in his direction. Slapping the table so hard it caused the dishes to rattle, he didn’t miss how Charles’ gaze briefly widened as he growled, “You ain’t the one who up ‘n had a god-damned assassin attemptin’ to plunge her ‘lil tomahawk between ya ribs a near dozen times!”

Haytham’s head jerked up at the same time his quill scraped his paper so hard that it almost ripped right through it. Instead, its tip snapped. Bleeding black ink across the parchment, it rolled down the page in thin rivulets.

Hickey’s eyes slid to his superior. Curious, he didn’t predict that sort of reaction to mention of the Assassin. If not for Charles’ endless scorn, he would’ve waited a bit longer to reveal her involvement. Preferably after Lee left. Especially considering Lee’s bizarre fixation on the woman. Sure, she’d been a pain all their arses for the last few years. But not enough to have the blighter go frothing at mouth like some rabid hound. Honestly, he was fuck-all done with Lee’s perpetual contempt.

“You came across an assassin woman during your mission?” Haytham tersely asked despite the same time measuredly sprinkling blotting powder across his parchment. It was a vain attempt, the sheet ruined. “You say the tomahawk was her preferred weapon?” he folded up the stained parchment along precise lines, still not meeting Thomas’ deliberately blank expression. “I take it that she was a native, considering her ease with it?”

Clearing his throat and rolling his shoulders, Thomas cagily replied, “Yep, she be one, ‘n that ‘lil axe be her dodgy weapon ‘o choice. Per usual, boss-man, you be keepin’ all abreast ‘o everythin’.”

Haytham dropped the parchment into the fireplace. Watching its edges curl, blacken and then disentegrate into little embers of bloodied orange, he carefully pulled another one from the bottom of the stack of papers in front of him. An uneasy silence fell as he slowly ran his fingertips along its edges to flatten it to the table. Finally looking up, he intoned, “One cannot operate without field intelligence if one expects success.”

“I can’t disagree with that notion,” Charles slithered. “So tell us Hickey,” he crossed his arms again, “What of your latest interaction that wretched little native? I take it that she is the same one we framed and had served up on a platter to the hangman? Yet on that day, you neither killed her nor followed through on eliminating Washington.”

Emphatically pointing at his left shoulder, Thomas retorted, “Why in the hell do everybody be forgetting she fuckin’ nailed me in me back with a throwin’ dagger, yeah? I nearly bled to ruttin’ death! And that shit be after she went and beat me arse to hell ‘n back up in Bridewell. All after you,” he jabbed a finger at Lee, “Tossed ‘er inna me cell, ya dipshit!”

“I did nothing of the sort!” Charles lied. This ‘ere two-faced piece ‘o horseshit! Thomas seethed to himself. “Haytham!” Lee continued with a certifiable whine, “How can you sit here and not question such odious accusations? I implore you-!”

“For now, the past is not the subject of the current discussion,” Haytham raised a hand, silencing them both. “Thomas,” he turned towards him, “You must relay everything that happened between you and that woman during your mission. Do not leave out any detail, no matter how minor it seems.”
“Wouldn’t dream ‘o doing no less,” Thomas resolutely declared.

Of course, he lied his arse off. In his many years of muscling his way to the top of the food chain, Thomas mastered various methods of spinning an elaborate charade. First off, it was imperative to fill the tale with plenty of verifiable truths. Particularly if they made sense within the context of the overall deception. He started with how the assassin tracked him to his battalion and their first confrontation. Except he claimed an initial victory in their fisticuffs. In fact, he was about to stab her clear through. That was until she blurted out that she was also after the monstrous Hessian. His hesitation at that surprising bit of information allowed her to regain the upper hand and escape.

Which led to the second lesson in verbal deceit. In order to make the lie sound legit, find ways to make yourself appear a little incompetent in order to warrant as little praise as possible. The less you stood out in the midst of the falsehood, the less likely anyone would remember the specifics of your story later. That’s why he had no idea how she knew the Templars were after the same target as her little group of scoundrels. It wasn’t as though he made deep conversation with the chit every time they stumbled into each other’s path after the first time. How could he? After all, wasn’t his duty to the Grandmaster to attempt to kill her at every turn? Whether it was at the tavern out in the wilderness. Or at an abandoned cabin in the woods a few days after that. Or along the icy roads of the frontier that led back into the city. Or when he made it into Boston proper.

“For god sake, get on with your blathering, Hickey,” Charles barked.

“Best go ‘n settle yerself down right proper, son,” Hickey flexed his fingers in aggravation, “Last I checked, I ain’t addressing you, ya pisspot.”

“I find I agree with that sentiment,” Haytham sent Charles a look of warning. “Please, go on,” he gestured to Thomas.

Now came the third and last part of weaving all the disparate pieces into a plausible tale; complete and absolute conviction driven by recounting numerous but trivial details. For example? The Hessian’s target was some wealthy, foppish git with a fancy accent. Where he came from, Thomas allegedly couldn’t recall. But judging by his skills with his fists and weapons when the Hessian caught up with him in the back alleys of Beacon Hill, the target was most likely an Assassin as well. Had to be, considering how he was able to fight off that fiend’s first strikes. But it took the efforts of him, Thomas and the Assassin woman to finally fell the Hessian.

“You…aided them?!” Charles stammered in angry disbelief. “Why in the bloody hell didn’t you kill the woman and Assassin target? Two birds with one stone, Hickey! Two birds-!”

Hickey snarled, wrenching off his cravat and yanking the collar of his tunic to the side. “The bastard Kraut tried to fuckin’ strangle me too, ya blighter!” he waved at the ring of ghastly, purple bruises circling his neck. “Woulda snapped me neck like a dry-arsed twig if the woman hadn’t jumped all up on ‘is back like some rabid wolf!”

“She assisted you in your mission?” Haytham quietly demanded, gaze locked on Thomas’ neck.

“See ‘ere now,” Thomas exhaled, “I ain’t gonna call it any sort ‘o charity.”

“No?” Haytham questioned.

“Not on your life, boss-man,” Thomas sighed, “More like the Hessian went tryin’ to kill us all. So it fell into ev’ry man…and woman bein’ for they selves.”

Charles ran an annoyed hand through his loosely tied back hair. “So afterwards, you somehow failed
to either shoot her or the other apparent Assassin? You’re *slipping*, Hickey,” he mocked.

“To the contrary, Charles,” Haytham gave Thomas a long look of appraisal, “It is through his efforts that he has stopped one of our most dangerous foes. Before his treachery, the Hessian was only used for the most difficult of…eliminations.”

Hickey smirked and finished off his stew. Dropping his spoon into the bowl, he shoved it to the end of the table. “And that right there, Lee,” he waved, “Be the only opinion that’s goes to matterin’.”

The seemed to shut the greasy ‘lil arsehole right the fuck up for a bit.

“So,” Thomas sluggishly said before taking a long sip of ale from his tankard. Normally, Haytham wouldn’t bother paying attention to how long he attempted to drown himself in drink. But a couple of minutes passed before Thomas stopped. Haytham paused his writing and looked up in question as the other man finished off the entire thing in one chug. Thomas then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Even went so far as sitting up straighter rather than lolling all over his seat. Leaning forward on his elbows, Thomas contemplatively steepled his fingers in front him. Silently staring into the flickering fire of the hearth, he remained still.

“Are you…ill?” Haytham eyes faintly widened in genuine confusion.

“Huh?” Thomas exhaled.

“You’re not nattering on and on, as per usual,” Lee taunted.

“Sod off!” Thomas retorted.

“You are far closer to sober than drunk,” Haytham’s eyes flit over him, “And you’ve been here for well over an hour. In addition, there isn’t some woman perched on your lap…come now, did someone poison you on the road?” he rapped his knuckles on the table for emphasis.

“Like I said ‘afore, I came ‘cross that bloody troublesome ‘lil assassin while out on me mission,” Thomas replied in calculated apathy, “Kinda threw off me some.”

Most people would be wholly oblivious to how Haytham’s fingers immediately tightened around his quill. Or the way the chest subtly heaved. None one would take note that his face went ashen for mere seconds before he calmly tucked a loose strand of hair behind his ear. However, Thomas worked with him for over two decades. There also lay the smuggler’s uncanny situational awareness. A necessary habit born of his youth in the murderous rookeries of London’s East End. It’d been put to excellent use in his current line of work.

Well’en, fancy that, Thomas mused. Filing away the reaction to think on later, he focused on the present.

Attention snapping back to his paperwork, Haytham stilled the hollow side of his quill on the parchment for so long that it leaked ink yet again. Rather than sprinkling blotting powder across it to soak up its spill, he flatly asked, “Am I to assume she is dead?”

“Oh, ho, trust me, boss-man, I went tryin’ to gut her eight different ways to Sunday,” Thomas insisted. His usual drunken smirk was absent from his rosy visage. Haytham could not see it, for he still stared down at his letter. “All I got for it be a busted nose, a mess ‘o slashes, punches, bruises ‘n me wounded pride.”

“And the woman?” Haytham nonchalantly replied.
“Yes, what of the little cur?” Lee spat, “She needs to be put down, ideally as soon as damn possible. A thorn in all of our sides,” he threw up his hands in exasperation. “For a mere savage to be so destructive in her delusions proves a stain of shame upon our entire Order.”

At Haytham’s head whipping around and his accompanying glower, Lee speedily shut his mouth. He immediately dropped his eyes to the floor. It would’ve cause Hickey to let out a loud guffaw any other time. “Please, continue recalling what you observed,” Haytham insisted.

Thomas quietly replied, “She be fuckin’ fast on the draw.”

“So I take it she made off with barely a scratch to her?” Haytham firmly asked.

“Not for lack ‘o me tryin’, but yeah,” Thomas twisted his mouth in alleged reproach. It wasn’t technically a lie. He hadn’t exactly been the one to shoot her in the leg or go knocking her into the fireplace.

“She is a liability,” Haytham’s adamant voice interrupted his thoughts, “One that we shall have to neutralize. Sooner rather than later.”

“I’d say her end should be the Order’s primary objection,” Lee growled, voice apparently back in his mouth. “Otherwise, as altogether fascinating as your dithering continues to be, Hickey,” Charles snit while checking his pocket watch, “What time is that lying turncoat General to show himself?”

“Nine o’clockish,” Thomas lazily replied.

“It is a quarter to,” Charles clasped his watch closed and stuck it in his fob pocket. “No doubt he will arrive early. I shall go fetch him,” he brusquely excused himself and clomped downstairs.

Tipping his chair to balance on its back two legs, Thomas locked his fingers behind his head. “Good luck with that ‘en.”

“Luck has nothing to do with skill, Thomas,” Haytham wearily said, haphazardly dropping his quill. He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. For far too long, as far as Thomas was concerned. Upon opening them again, Thomas shirked back at their suddenly haunted stare at some spot behind him. The younger Templar realized he’d never seen his master look so obviously, well, aged. His hair bore far more grey than the rich dark brown he recalled. While noble in bearing, the refined, carved lines of his visage formed deepening grooves. His breaths long and tired, his shoulders were hunched. “Skill,” Haytham finally exhaled, “That is what wins wars. It seems the girl wishes one against us. So who are we to deny her?”

Swallowing, Thomas forced on what he hoped was a careless smile and raised his tankard. “No truer words be spoken, gov’ner.”

Haytham’s attention swiftly flicked back to him. Shadowed and inexplicably ominous, he never looked away while Thomas drank. In fact, he continued staring so fixated that Thomas gingerly set down his jug.

“Erhm, somethin’ got you all worried, mate?”

Haytham’s gaze narrowing, he raggedly whispered, “You never saw it within her, did you?”

Thomas halted at the sight of the older man’s left hand gripping the edge of the table. His other fingers dug so hard into the wood that their sharp scrape caused the hairs along the back of Thomas’ neck to prick up. Rocking his chair back down to the floor, he slowly began, “I, ehrm, don’t ‘xactly go gettin’ your meanin’.”
“My daughter may attempt deceive those who hunt for her by going by that ridiculous male name of ‘Connor…”’

Wait…what?

What??

WHAT?!

WAIT ONE GOD-DAMNED MINUTE-?!

“But make no mistake; she bears the Kenway nose, jawline and turn of the chin and brow,” Haytham morosely confirmed, “As well as the propensity for revealing all that she thinks within her expression. It obviously hasn’t rightfully been trained out of her.”

Owlishly blinking, Thomas clearly heard the revelation. But he could not comprehend it. Not with the horrific buzzing beginning to fill his ears.

Haytham’s words continued flying from his lips, stilted and hoarse. “She also wears her mother’s distinctive beads about her right wrist. For there was no mistaking them when I laid my eyes upon her in Bridewell.”

Silence. It was all Thomas could muster. Silence and balls to the mother-fucking wall raw, unadulterated terror.

He slept with Haytham’s daughter.

Whether a few seconds or an eternity passed before he realized the roaring in his ears was indeed the result of his frantic heartbeat, he’d never be able to say.

He slept with Haytham’s daughter.

He gleefully watched as she gambled, downed a bottle of whiskey and then deliberately kissed him.

He slept with Haytham’s daughter.

He eagerly allowed himself to be seduced and encouraged her to have her way with him.

He slept with Haytham’s daughter.

He reveled in the feel and taste her beneath him, his mouth tracing the curve of her dusky skin, her nails clawing down his back as…

HE.

FUCKED.

HAYTHAM’S.

DAUGHTER.

It took every ounce of Thomas’ strength to stay his trembling hands and drop his sweaty palms to rest on his knees. But it didn’t stop him from bobbing his head in stunned panic. His only relief lay in that Charles remained downstairs.

“W…w…why would you ev’er go sayin’ that sort ‘o madness?!” he hissed, “Who else be knowin’
‘o her parentage?! I ain’t tellin’ a soul ‘bout it…fuck, fuck, fuckity fuck!’ Wiping a hand over his face did nothing for his pallid, fraught complexion. His stomach roiled as his vision blurred far beyond simple drunkenness.

Without warning, everything he’d imbibed rushed back upwards. The only solace was the bucket of logs near the fireplace. Stumbling from his seat, Thomas snatched it up, dumped its contents and wretched into it. The stench curling up into his nose had nothing on the nightmarish images of Connor’s old man doling out dozens of ways to torture him before finally cutting out his heart with his god-damned hidden blade. With his increasingly shitty luck, Lee would be standing by and clapping his hands in perverse delight at the sight of it all.

“You appear wholly put out by this revelation,” Haytham deadpanned.

How in the fuck-all didn’t he see it?! No wonder his instincts constantly flared up at her little ticks and random mannerisms. Except they weren’t so fucking random. Not considering he’d seen them for god-damned decades in her father.

“Apparently you find this troublesome-”

“Maybe ‘cause I…cause I…near fuckin’ killed ‘er?!” Thomas strangled out. He despised how his rising hysteria dripped all over his words. As well as how he took a terrified step back when Haytham purposefully rose from his seat.

God damn the wall at his back. He should’ve angled himself closer to the stairs…

“Are you quite finished?” Haytham archly asked, reaching into his frock coat. Thomas smothered a choked grunt at the hasty appearance of the lace-edged handkerchief in front of him. Frozen for a few seconds, he tentatively reached out and snatched it from his fingertips. “For your mouth,” Haytham insisted before removing the bucket from Thomas’ other hand and covering it with a cloth napkin. He set it on the other side of the room and retook his chair. “The smell is rather opposite of pleasant.”

Thomas’ hyperventilating echoed in the air. He shakily wiped his mouth with the handkerchief followed by the back of his hand. Now, there was nothing to do but collapse into his chair.

“Do she…do she be, uh, knowin’ that you be her…” he jaggedly trailed off, making a weak flapping gesture in Haytham’s direction.

Haytham closed his eyes again and gave a barely perceptible nod of disagreement. “I do not know. You have my word on that,” he swiftly added at Thomas’ dumbfounded expression. “Did she relay such to you?”

Bloody Christ, the disappointed, downward turn of their mouths were identical.

“Not a cockin’ word,” Thomas ground his teeth. Shoving the handkerchief across the table, he barely stopped himself from dropping his head into his hands. Instead, he settled for slouching back and taking a wobbly, long sip of his ale. It tasted like ash on his tongue, scalding his throat on the way down.

Why in fuck’s sake would you go settin’ me up like some dumb monkey, lass? If you wanted me dead ‘n buried, you woulda done it. It be too fuckin’ easy for ya to go getting’ the drop on me.

Unless she be playin’ at the long con?

He gave the thought little credence as soon as it crossed his mind. While far from dense, Connor
contained a vehement distaste for that sort of cunning. It was her biggest disadvantage, frankly. Her iron willed determination left little patience for it, firmly pushing her on the side of rash versus calculating. Why draw out anything when you could end the problem with a simple knife across the throat?

He abruptly recalled their conversation the morning after she saved him from freezing to death. At the end of their war of words, they both admitted they had one thing in common. “Like me, you’ve had to go splittin’ yer self in two to go movin’ about them that ‘as the power. And like me, I doubt you ever gonna forget where ya really came from.”

Either she had no knowledge of that side of her heritage or refused to reveal it outright. But whether or not it’d get him killed? Well, that was unfortunately yet to be seen.

Chapter End Notes

Ballad of the Green Mountain Boys – Can be heard here, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4KcJTP8nW8, and is a real Revolutionary War song celebrating the Green Mountain Boys militia. They were created in the late 1760s in the territory between the British provinces of New York and New Hampshire, which is now the state of Vermont.

When the war started, Ethan Allen led them to capture Fort Ticonderoga for the Patriots on May 10, 1775. From there, they invaded present-day Canada. However, the Green Mountain Boys disbanded in 1776, their soldiers sent to other Patriot battalions since Vermont did not join in the independence movement until 1777. Upon Vermont’s official entry into the war, the Continental Congress reformed them into the Green Mountain Continental Rangers. They disbanded again in 1779, but were reformed to fight in the War of 1812. They also fought in the American Civil War and the Spanish-American War. In modern times, “Green Mountain Boys” is an informal name for the Vermont National Guard.

Rookeries – Plural of “rookery” which is a 18th and 19th century slang term for city slums. It was generally used to point out the similarity between the overcrowded, multiple-story tenant buildings of the slums and how rook birds nest in extended family groups of loud, messy nests in treetops. Additionally, “to rook” was also slang for stealing and cheating.
Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

Chapter Summary

Wow, it's been forever since I've updated. Thank you all so much for sticking around. One more chapter to go and then I'm done, I swear.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Master Kenway, your guest be here,” the tavern mistress Catherine startled Thomas from behind. His thoughts still whirling with panicked fear at Haytham’s revelation concerning Connor being his daughter, he barely took in her curtsy as she continued, “I informed ya soon as he came in, just like you went askin’-

“I see I impose upon your usual inebriated misdeeds, Hickey,” a resonant, aggravated voice interrupted her. Hickey mindlessly threw General Matthew Davenport a rude gesture. Anything to distract from how his other hand obsessively rubbed at his knee beneath the table. Or how his eyes flit back and forth to Haytham. Luckily, the Grandmaster appeared to pay him no mind as Lee escorted their special guest the top of the stairs. Thankfully Lee didn’t bother to spare a glance at Hickey as he retook his previous position to lean against the wall to Haytham’s left.

Haytham’s expression hardened for a few seconds before it slid to supposedly pleased. He stood and straightened out his waistcoat before bobbing his head in acknowledgement. “General Davenport,” he held out a hand of greeting, “A pleasure to see you. It has been too long. I take it your journey from the field was filled with little in the way of trouble?”

His eyes darting from where Thomas blankly stared at him to Charles inspecting his nails, the General looked back to Haytham. Clicking his heels together, he bowed in formal greet before shaking Haytham's gloved hand. “It is never an inconvenience to answer a summons from our Grandmaster,” he boldly replied.

“That is always good to hear,” Haytham flashed a grin. “Please, have a seat,” he raised a hand at the empty one next to Thomas. “Make yourself comfortable. I am sure you are in need of sustenance after such a long ride from Fort St. Mathieu?”

“I am afraid it has fallen to the Patriots,” the General glowered. Thomas snorted out barely contained laughter. It earned him a look of reproach from the general as he sniffed, “A minor setback, I am sure of it.”

“Let us hope so, for all of our sakes,” Haytham curtly replied.

Much like his daughter, General Matthew Davenport dressed in a meticulously immaculate manner. Despite being out of uniform (with Boston firmly in Patriot hands now, he’d be a fool to wander around like the redcoat he was), his livery was of the latest fashion. He deftly removed his black, kidskin leather gloves one finger at a time and tucked them into the inner pocket of his hunter green longcoat. He wore a matching green silk frock coat and breeches tucked into black, Stovepipe riding boots. Their cuffs were stitched of contrasting oxblood colored leather. Obviously, newly imported from England.
A flick of his arm tossed his longcoat back to Catherine without a single glance of acknowledgment. Hickey shook his head in disbelief. “Ya be a fuckin’ charmer, mate,” he mumbled as Catherine was forced to duck the General’s black, gold-trimmed tricorne that he also carelessly threw at her.

“How rude!” she exorted. She promptly dumped the General’s coat on the floor and began to stomp away. Even Charles frowned and tersely shook his head in agreement.

“So this is what passes for service around here?” the General huffed, “Why am I not surprised?” Digging into his frock coat pocket, he flipped Catherine a heavy gold coin. She spun around and went still as it hit the floorboards at her feet. Narrowing her eyes, she finally snatched it up along with his coat and hat.

“Still ain’t no reason to be such a ‘lil shit, sir,” she muttered, “No matter how much coin ya got.”

“Bring me a bottle of port,’ he dismissively waved, “Assuming this place,” he looked around in disgust, “Carries such a refined thing.”

Gritting her teeth, Catherine shot a long look at Haytham. After staring at the General with a neutral expression, the tilt of his head sent her suddenly beaming and traipsing off back downstairs. Thomas swiftly looked between them before tearing through the last of his food. Distracted with adjusting the starched, lace ruffles of his tunic, the General couldn’t see the Haytham and Lee’s exchange of looks as he took the empty chair next to Thomas.

Hastily raising his empty tankard and shaking out the last of its drops, Hickey slurred, “Looks like I be needin’ me a refill.” Loping up from his seat, he let out a loud burp. It caused both Lee and the General to roll their eyes. “See you all inna bit.”

“I have other business to attend to this night,” Lee pushed himself up from the wall. “Always a pleasure, Haytham,” he dropped a hand to the Grandmaster’s shoulder.

“Same to you,” he steadily replied, “Goodnight Charles.”

“Naturally, sir,” Lee nodded with a bright smile. He didn’t exchange a single word with the General as he followed Thomas down the stairs. Paying his tab at the bar, he hailed a coach and headed home.

Nose wrinkling at Thomas’ back, the General drawled, “How ever do you tolerate such a vulgar, indolent lout as Hickey? Surely, he has worn out his welcome? Years ago, most would say.”

“You underestimate his talents,” Haytham smoothly retorted. Setting down his quill, he neatly stacked the papers he worked on before corking the inkpot and placing it on them to keep them in their place.

Thomas soon meandered back up the stairs and dropped into his seat. Catherine followed behind him with an unopened bottle of port and wineglasses. She carefully set each of them down in front of the three men. “I hope it be to your likin’,” she sarcastically declared.

Wrinkling his nose, the General waved her away, “More than likely, it will not be.” Mumbling curses, Catherine sauntered away.

“Please,” Haytham raised a magnanimous hand at the bottle, “Do the honors.”

Flipping open his pocket knife, Matthew sliced off the label and uncorked it. He poured them each a full glass before setting it down. He admittedly cocked a suspicious eyebrow at the bottle until Thomas immediately downed his entire serving.
“One is supposed to allow the draught to breathe,” Matthew smirked.

“I got no fucks to go givin’ ‘bout your snobbity concerns, mate,” Thomas slurred while pouring himself another drink. “It be liquor. So?” he jeerily clasped the stem of the glass between two fingers, “Good for drinkin’.”

“Come now, Thomas,” Haytham clucked his tongue, “No need to rile our guest.”

Gaze sliding between the other two before flitting to their glasses, Thomas shrugged, “Fine ‘en. Ain’t no skin off me back.”

“Like water off of a duck,” Matthew sniffed. Turning to Haytham, he continued, “No wonder he proves ever so useful in the Order’s seedier endeavors? He’s right at home among them.”

Taking a long, slow sip of his drink, Haytham swirled it around in its goblet. “Without his efforts, I’m afraid that we’d constantly find ourselves insolvent.”

Waving a finger at the General, Thomas slowly said, “Damned straight! We’d get to bein’ in…in…whatever he went to sayin’.”

“Such an intellectual heavyweight you are,” Matthew derided before taking a short drink of his port. Features slightly brightening, he said, “Surprisingly, it does not taste like pisswater even with,” he took another sip, swirling it around his mouth before he swallowed, “It erring on the side of too sweet.”

“Looks can be quite deceiving,” Haytham intoned, topping off the other men’s glass. “For example?” he continued, “Thomas has gone far above and beyond in his duties for me.”

“The Order has always been about you, of course,” Matthew distantly replied. He boldly stared at Haytham's raised over the rim of his glass as he slowly finished off its contents.

Haytham and Matthew continued with polite conversation about nothing while Thomas finished off another glass. Admittedly, he was beginning to get impatient. As far as he was concerned, it was high time he point out the General's treachery so he could get the hell home alreadly. He checked his pocket watch with a huff. Nearly half an hour had passed.

“‘Ow much longer?” he sniffed at Haytham.

Haytham only shrugged and stole a glance at the General.

The General frowned at the sudden numbness that came over his hands. As well along the soles of his feet. Odd, the room was unusually chilly despite the roaring fire in the hearth to their right. Not to mention the crush of people downstairs. Hickey was down to his waistcoat and tunic. His longcoat was also tossed on a peg on the wall while his frockcoat remained haphazardly slung across the back of his chair. While Haytham would never appear so casual, he was without his hat, a few beads of sweat breaking out along his brow. Yet the General found himself pulling his frockcoat tighter around himself. He also flexed his fingers to get the feeling back in them.

“Is something wrong, Matthew?” Haytham demurred.

“A slight chill, ‘tis all,” The General shakily waved despite his best efforts to keep his hand steady. “I rode through a near…blizzard to arrive here as soon I received his summons,” he stiltedly nodded at Haytham. His neck throbbing, he swallowed back a painful cough. "Most especially since," he stammered, "Since you mentioned you have word of my...Eleanor?"
“Understandable,” Haytham lifted his glass in his direction before finishing off his serving. He poured himself another one, followed by topping of Thomas’ glass.

“So,” the General coughed, “What exactly d-did you wish…wish of m-me-?”

Without warning, he collapsed to the table so hard that his head slammed into its wooden surface cheek first. His legs jerking and hands spasmimg, they clenched and unclenched into shaky fists. Choked, shallow wheezes bubbled up from his throat and filled the air. Sweat slid down his brow as drool fell from his slackened mouth to begin pooling on the table. He wildly blinked as his legs slackened and his fingers twitched out of their fists. Yet his chest still rose and fell with labored breathing. Slouched and unable to move, only his eyes appeared able to blink.

“Whelp,” Thomas reached into the inner pocket of his waistcoat. Withdrawing a small, glass vial of clear liquid, he tossed it to Haytham. “Guess this stuff works like it be sayin’ it do.”

Haytham nodded, “Thank you, Thomas.”

“Ain’t no problem.”

“The *chironex fleckeri*, or Sea Wasp, is type of rather large jellyfish,” Haytham smoothly said to General Davenport. "Enough of its venom can kill a fully grown man," he held up the vial to the light of the chandelier above them. Swirling around its liquid for a moment, he tucked it away into his pocket. "The thing is, before it eats its victims, it paralyses them. As it prefers to feed on living prey."

“Costs a fuckin’ fortune and a few months to go gettin' me hands on since it be comin' all the way from Siam,” Thomas smirked, “But with me connections? No biggie a’tall.”

“Though this is the first time I've used it. Perhaps you’re wondering how I managed to administer the venom that’s currently paralyzing you, yes?” Haytham steepled his fingers on front of himself. “Don’t worry, it shall not kill you. Thomas didn’t use nearly enough to do such. Or else you would have been dead in the matter of five minutes.”

Thomas smirked and flicked a finger against the General’s empty glass. “I went swabbin’ it ‘round the inside of your fancy goblet when I went downstairs after Kitty,” he barked out a laugh. “ Took only a few minutes to go dryin’. So long as I wasn’t no knobhead and switched the glasses up, it worked all fine ’n good. Which be why me and the ‘ole Grandmaster ’ere,” he lazily waved at Haytham, “Had no problem with takin’ a drink from our own glasses. ’Cause they be clean as a whistle.”

Haytham gave Thomas a reassuring nod. “Now, General, is it evident as to why I, as you say it, *keep him around*?”

“Well’en mate,” Thomas lurched out of his chair, “Sorry to deprive you all of me lovely company, but I gotta get the fuck home. Surely, you ain’t minding that much considerin’ your current situation, eh?” He slapped Matthew on the back. Chuckling at the fact that he could only rapidly blink in reply, Thomas sneered, “Didn’t think so. See ya, Haytham!” he sloppily saluted from his temple.

“Same to you, Thomas,” the Grandmaster nodded, “You have earned a bit of rest for your efforts.”

“I ain’t arguing with that, gov’nor!” he guffawed while glancing over his shoulder to cover his unease.

It took him a long bit to steady himself enough to trundle down the stairs. His vision still swam from the liquor he’d imbibed. He was also forced to clutch at the bannister to ensure he didn’t slip and
break his neck. None of it was helped along by the furious turning of his thoughts concerning Connor’s newly revealed father.

Again, Jesus. Fucking. CHRIST.

Yep, it was definitely time for him to take his arse home.

Looking over to Thomas’ exit, Haytham moved his tricorne from the empty chair next to him. He carefully set it down at the end of the table and folded his arms across his chest. “Now that I have your undivided attention, General Davenport,” he drawled and drummed his fingers on his upper arm, “The question of the night is, whatever shall I do with you?”

Matthew could only continue to blink as a hitched whine fell from his slackened lips. Rolling his eyes, Haytham shrugged and stood. Ambling over to his longcoat, he removed it from the peg on the wall to reveal his swordbelt. A flick of his hands unsheathed his weapons.

“Let’s see where we stand then, shall we?” Haytham retook his seat. He slowly lined up his flintlock next to his golden pommel, sharpened dagger of glinting steel. He then unhurriedly placed a handful of poison darts next to it. Leaning back, he leisurely unclasped his hidden blade and set it alongside the darts.

“As much as the Order attempts to deny it, the reality of the world is that it would not exist if we did not allow for choice. Or,” he clasped his hands together before leaning his elbows on the table, “At least the illusion of such.” He rolled his Templar ring around his ringfinger, staring at it for a moment. “For example, when I inducted you into our inner circle, I left the decision to join us entirely up to you. I never forced nor blackmailed you. I made no threat against you. Nor against your family should you reject the offer. I simply made a request of your membership due to your talents and drive. And yet? You have betrayed me.”

Letting out a deep sigh, Haytham took a long sip of port. He swirled it around in its goblet for a bit before checking his pocket watch. He had plenty of time before the effects of the paralysis wore off.

Standing again, he strolled around to the other side of the table. Without warning, his hand lashed out to back of Matthew’s shirt collar and he began to tightly twist it. Only bit more pressure would start to strangle the General completely. Crouching to Davenport's eye level, Haytham growled, “What would you have me do, Matthew? Perhaps I should follow your merciful example and end your life quickly? As you had the Hessian do with our own Templar agents?”

The General could do nothing at the heaviness abruptly upon his back and just above his kidneys. His gaze widened at the absence of the dagger on the table. Haytham must have palmed it and was currently pressing it to his flesh.

“Oh course, I expect you to plead, beg and utterly insist that you have changed,” Haytham snarled. “People change, yes. But people don’t change other people. Rather, circumstances cause people to evolve. So unfortunately for you, I won’t believe a single word that falls from treacherous mouth of yours,” he shrugged, voice falling back to neutral. “Which is why I decided to save us both the waste of time and explain how things shall be going forward.”

Haytham moved back to his side of the table and re-took his seat. Rolling his shoulders, he carefully began gathering back up his weapons.

“I have your precious daughter under the best of care, so do not worry yourself on that,” Haytham calmly began. “She’s being attended to by the most worthy surgeons in all of Boston. Though they have very clear instructions to answer only to me. Considering how precariously her life hangs in the
At the General’s widening eyes, Haytham let out a low chuckle as he once again rose from his seat.

“It seems than an assassin gravely injured Eleanor. As for once, that wretched Brotherhood contained some sense and was also after the Hessian. Not that I blame your child for familial loyalty. I perfectly understand why she chose to side with her father in attempting to betray us. Which explains why she's been running orders from you directly to the Hessian for the last eight months or so. A pity she was caught.”

“So now,” Haytham sighed, sheathing his weapons, “She will remain under my care. Alas,” he patted the General on his cool cheek, “No more errands are to be carried out for her father from now until, well, whenever I see fit to return her to you. That's assuming I ever decide for such a day to come.”

Haytham wiped his hands down his waistcoat and straightened his sleeves. Turning toward the mirror hanging in the corner, he arranged his hat on his head. A flurry of his fingers buckled on his holster. Wandering back over to his frockcoat, he slid it on.

“I’m sure it will be quite easy from here on out to remember were your loyalties lie, Matthew,” Haytham breezily said, “Especially with your daughter in my custody. We wouldn’t want, well, anything to happen to her, now would we?” he dropped a hand to the General’s shoulder. “After all,” his voice fell to a dangerous hiss, “No parent ever wishes to bury their child. Particularly, their only flesh and blood remaining.”

The General remained helpless on the table as Haytham hummed and pulled on his longcoat. Wrapping a scarf about his neck, he pulled on his leather gloves and headed towards the stairs. However, he suddenly turned around.

“Forgive me, I’ve nearly forgotten,” Haytham dug into his pocket. Setting a piece of paper with his handwriting on it under Matthew’s goblet, he said, “Here is the name of what I used on you. You may wish to see a surgeon. For I’ve heard it can have some rather nasty side effects. Good night General.”

Tipping his hat, he made way down the stairs. Settling his tab and bribing Catherine a few more pounds to keep an eye on their guest, he headed out.

Haytham distractedly mounted his horse and tipped the stableboy for his efforts before slowly making his way to the street. For his thoughts continued unwinding along the new developments concerning his daughter. As well as her decision to repeatedly spare Thomas’ life.

Everyone back in the tavern, including the unusually cantankerous Charles, damn well knew how effortlessly she could’ve killed him if she so desired. Particularly in light of a lack of any sort of hindrances. Which was very much unlike circumstances of her detention in Bridewell Prison last time their paths crossed. She’d also come dangerously close to ending him at the gallows. Even back then, Thomas freely admitted that it was again her choice to not deal the death blow.

She ended John Pitcairn’s and William Johnson’s lives with nary a second consideration. She nearly killed Mallow. She assisted in the elimination of the Hessian. His agents in the field increasingly ended up grievously injured or in coffins at the hands of her suspected cronies. The Assassin flagship, the alleged “Ghost of the North Seas,” was spotted more often than not by Cormac and Biddle. Not to mention the numerous sinkings of British ships attributed to it. It was even rumored to have successfully fired on the British fort on Goat Island, resulting in it falling into the hands of the
Patriots. In spite of his own attempts to wipe it out once again, the Brotherhood continued expanding almost exponentially in the last five years.

Nevertheless, Hickey remained in one piece. Regardless of her personal vendetta against him. It was all Haytham could assume she felt against Thomas, considering her actions in prison (there were still unanswered questions regarding how they were in such close proximity in the first place…). Thomas of course found every opportunity to bring it up. But the man had a point concerning how poorly he ended up on the other side of her lethal hands.

Yet she still had not killed him.

Haytham reached his home and turned in for the night. Yet his mind still fixated on how best to play the proverbial chess board as he drifted off to sleep.

He learned at an early age to never underestimate his enemies. So he despised that he couldn’t make head or tails of the woman’s motivations. He could no longer blame her continued existence on sheer luck. In the face of her naiveté, she didn’t lack for intellect. She excelled at levels of adaptability that put most men to shame. And that was only with rudimentary training. With a proper hand of discipline and education to guide her, it was an easy leap from the raw idiocy of youth into the extraordinary.

Perhaps her growing connection with Hickey could be the lynchpin? His daughter held a stormy sort of grace and rough-hewn allure. Thomas certainly wasn’t particular in his tastes. He didn’t seem to disapprove of interactions with the Natives either. Mostly on account of Johnson’s influence and his widow, who herself was a Native. Hickey’s lecherous tendencies could be curbed for the right amount of coin. Most importantly, he never showed a hint of disloyalty to the Order.

Of course, disaster could strike at any time. Connor held an obvious disdain for colonial society. She rarely remained within the cities, escaping into the wilderness without a trace for weeks to months at a time. Conversely, Hickey thrived in their taverns, gambling halls and cathouses. Money slipped through his fingers like water. Frankly, it was the only reason he proved so successful at his black market endeavors since they supported his lifestyle without fail.

Whereas Hickey burned white hot with a flare for the hedonistic, Connor appeared to prefer an ascetic lifestyle. Everything about her screamed of an existence devoid of luxury or personal indulgence and tempered with austere detachment. Well, somewhat; the woman retained a simmering ire crawling beneath the surface of her solemn facade. It was obvious in the way she viciously killed her targets. Along with the path of destruction she’d left in her wake so far.

A potential partnership would not be without its trials. Then again, Haytham Kenway had always been one to defy expectations. Especially when the future of the Colonial Rite of the Templar Order dangled so precariously close to the precipice.

Thomas’ head hurt something fierce. Which sure in the fuck wasn’t helped along by the snowballing dread gnawing at his stomach. Let Haytham deal with General Davenport and his duplicitous bitching. For Thomas, it was high time he headed to his townhome on the other side the fashionable and increasingly wealthy North End neighborhood.

He staggered down the stairs of The Green Dragon in a mad search for Catherine. Finally locating her in the back of the tavern moving more liquor out of the storage room, he draped a shaky arm about her waist. “Go ‘n get me home, lass,” he leaned down and mumbled into her bonnet, “Right nowish be workin’.”
“Need some company, love?” she sing-songed with a meaningful gesture around the large storage area.

“Not with me whiskey dick tonight, poppet,” he slowly blinked. “You be knowin’ I only like givin’ you the best ‘o times,” he swiftly added at her disbelieving look.

“Have it be your way then,” she shrugged.

After closing out his tab, Catherine led him outside. “You be callin’ it an early night, darlin’,” she shot him a sideways glance as he lurched into her. They both stood on the dark, snowy sidewalk in front of the tavern. Raising her arm to hail a public hackney coach, she sniffed, “It be barely past ten o’clock.”

He let out a mirthless chuckle. “Been on the road for near a fortnight, Kitty. I ain’t no spring chicken no more. Gotta go headin’ on home and get me beauty rest, yeah?”

“Sure thing,” she distractedly nodded as a coach finally stopped at the curb. She grabbed him by the arms and jostled him inside. Slamming the door shut, she immediately shoved her hand into its window. Without delay, Thomas doled her out more coin. For they both knew she’d never go doing him such a favor for free.

“See you ‘round, Tommy,” she leered.

“Right-o,” he grunted before calling out his address to the driver. The coach groaned and stuttered forward through the slush filled streets. Its rhythmic clacking along the cobblestones allowed him his first chance at solitude all night. Yet Thomas remained consumed with Haytham’s revelation concerning Connor.

Or rather, his own bloody damn daughter.

Perhaps Connor wasn’t even aware of her parentage? She made absolutely no mention of it. Not even at her most susceptible, when exhausted on the road or drunk off her arse. Then again, if she knew, why in the fuck would she ever bother to tell him? They barely restrained from sending each other to their graves in their first interactions. Let alone the constant insults flung back and forth after their mutual detente. Even a drunken fool could see how their misdeeds back at the cabin only served to cut down on the blistering tension. Apparently, fighting or fucking was all they successfully managed when tossed together.

It undoubtedly would’ve taken him a hell of a lot longer to navigate the wilderness without her. While infiltrating Fort St. Mathieu all by his lonesome wasn’t too big a problem, he sure in the hell couldn’t have driven out every single redcoat. She’d likely have lost the crucial element of surprise against their mutual enemies if not for his dealings with Mallow. Alerted to Connor, the Redcoat could’ve easily sent the Hessian to ambush Saint-Prix far earlier. No doubt, the loss of the Frenchman would be a decisive victory for the Templars. Just as Haytham’s elimination of Connor could effectively wipe out the Assassins once and for all.

The bile rose up in Thomas’ throat at the sheer thought of it. To eliminate your own flesh and blood? For the sake of stubborn ambition? Despite the increasingly evident potential of a truce?!! Maybe it lay in his Irish roots and the centuries-long, slow destruction of his heritage by the English. Or the funds he gladly sent home to raise his sisters and brothers’ lots in life. Or perhaps it was that his family never abandoned their mutual efforts to scrape out their meager existence. Hell, along with his parents, he had every single one of his brothers’ and sisters’ names inked just below his ribs on his right side, two by two.
You picked your friends at your leisure and fought your enemies at their weakest. But blood proved eternal. No way and no how did you go slaying your own kin. And none of that craven bullshit of directing others to do so flew either.

His inebriated mind suddenly dredged up how Haytham orchestrated Connor’s hanging with such nonchalance. His utter dispassion as the bribed judge signed her death warrant with a smug flourish. His lack of a single word of retort of Lee’s elated proclamation of how “the Indian cur’s” death would end all of their troubles. How the Grandmaster personally took him aside and ordered that he relay to Connor that Templar power ensured her no trial and no mercy.

*Her final moments shall be spent in unequivocal defeat,* Haytham insisted. *An example to whatever dregs remain of her Brotherhood. That they may never again so much as send out a whisper hindering our goals.*

*Jesus fucking Christ!*  

It all left a bitter taste in his mouth and a vile weight clawing at his chest.  

“We be ‘ere, sir!” the coachman chirped.  

“Aye, mate,” Thomas groggily replied, knocking on the roof, “Good’en.”  

He stumbled out of the coach and generously tipped the driver to ensure he waited around until after he let himself into his townhome. No need to get hit over the head and robbed if he could avoid it. After struggling to turn the key in the lock of the front door, he finally made his way inside. Shrugging out of his frockcoat, he tossed it on the peg next in the entranceway, along with his tricorn.

The house was dark and empty, as per usual. Cursing to himself, this was one of the few times he wished he employed servants. Having a fire going and food warm and waiting on the table was almost worth it right now. Save a couple of maids borrowed from his neighbors to air and dust out the house the day he rode into town, he had no staff.

It wasn’t that he couldn’t easily afford them. Haytham paid exceedingly well, and he made plenty on his own from his various illegal pursuits. But he was rarely home. Even when on leave from the army, old Kenway kept him plenty busy enough. So a staff lounging around in a house empty of its owner most of the time was an utter waste of funds. Funny how old habits from his early days of being so disgustingly poor never quite died. His mother would’ve laughed out loud at her baby boy’s tendency toward watching his coin, God rest her soul.

The most he’d done was make the place livable. Years ago, before Johnson was killed, his wife Molly recommended some foppish architect to put the finishing touches on the exterior. Always with a weakness for a pretty face, Thomas let her have her way. After that, she took it upon herself to supervise buying all the furniture and décor. Admittedly, it started out with her bribing him with supper while visiting her husband in town. From there, she easily persuaded him into accompanying her to the fancy furniture shops lining Melton Road. Not that he was complaining.

*As long as it ain’t too girly ’n bright,* he snorted. He suspiciously watched her studiously pour over fabric swatches and colors on the store countertop. *I ain’t no dandy sort ’o git.*

*And when have I ever let you down, Tom?* she coyly replied, dark eyes fiery and determined.  

*Never, ma’am,* he rubbed the back of his neck.

He blushed at her easy smile, marveling at how effortlessly she chose colors he was partial to. Mrs.
Molly always treated him as a trusted son, no matter his rough accent or habits. It made her one of the few people he wholly trusted. A flyin’ shame she was a widow now, their eight children without their father.

Thomas let out a ragged sigh while lighting the hearths throughout the house to warm it up. He then grabbed a cold plate of food from the icebox in the kitchen before retreating up the stairs to his quarters. Roomy and wide, his bedroom took up a large section of the entire floor. Banking up the fire, he lit the candles scattered throughout the room. After wolfing down his food, he headed off to bed.

As he stripped down to his smallclothes, he emptied out his trouser pockets. Tossing their contents on the desk tucked into the corner of the room, next came the pockets of his frock coat. Then, the inner pocket of his waistcoat. That’s when his fingers brushed the edge of the eagle feather.

“Wot’s this ‘en?” he said aloud, yanking it out. Holding it up to the flickering lights of the silver candelabra sitting on the fireplace mantle, he sleepily watched its colors dance along its plumes.

Then, he started to laugh.

*Among my people, it is the sign of a binding agreement,* he recalled her words. Along with the unyielding determination etched across her freckled face when they formed their unexpected alliance. *When we have completed our mission, I expect its return, signaling an end to our truce.*

True, he’d never been one for semantics. But a deal was deal. He hadn’t returned her precious feather, nor had she retrieved it. So officially, their truce was still in effect.

Thomas Hickey was never one to close the door on an opportunity. Not when he had a bird in the hand. Or rather, when the feather he currently twirled between his fingers was worth the proverbial two in the bush. No wonder he had the uncanny feeling that this wouldn’t be the last he’d see of the she-wolf. Or those fancy twin blades of her little brotherhood of deadly troublemakers.

Only time would tell as to when their paths would next cross.

Chapter End Notes

*Chironex Fleckeri* is the Latin species term for a Sea Wasp, which is a box jellyfish. They are found in the coastal waters of northern Australia, New Guinea, the Philippines and Vietnam, which would commonly be known as "Siam" back in the day. Sea Wasps do have a pretty horrible sting that can easily kill an adult, though I made up that you can use their venom as a paralyzing poison.
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

All of the scenarios of Connor and Thomas crossing paths over the years are ideas that I have outlines for potential future installments of the series. However, I no longer have the time to write them out fully. So this should hopefully provide some background of how everyone ends up. It's the least I can do for some closure.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*This ain't no place for no hero,*
*This ain't no place for no better man,*
*This ain't no place for no hero to call home.*

-- *Short Change Hero, The Heavy*

Ever since he was a wanton little ragamuffin, Thomas always knew fate had a funny way of working. No matter how much planning, lying, cheating, stealing and murdering you did, it always caught up with you. Though whether that proved for better or worse, no one could ever predict.

Somehow he never ended up, well, ending Connor. And the Assassin never ended up knifing him either. Oh, he had numerous run-ins with her in the ensuing years. Not that they ever came to their brief truces voluntarily. More, it proved far more expedient to refrain from murdering each other on account of their shared ends justifying their opposing means. He also came across the other killers she led. Folks like Dobby, William de Saint-Prix and even once, that sharp-shooting Clipper fellow. Yet unless goaded, they didn’t attempt to kill him. He suspected their reasons for their apparent leniency. But he refused to ask why.

*Ain’t no need to go askin’ stupid fuckin’ questions you don’t be wantin’ the hard answers to,* he told himself over and over again.

It would take a year and a half for Thomas to see Connor again. Not that he was counting or anything ridiculous like that.

The winter of 1778 brought about the hunt for Benjamin Church after his betrayal of the Templars and the Continental Army. It made the most sense for Thomas to accompany Haytham with his daughter on her (fucking impressive, he had to admit) ship to the Bahamas since Church decided to go about fucking over Thomas’ corner of the black market. Not to mention, Thomas had plenty of non-Templar assets to use to draw out Church. Unfortunately, Haytham found out about their previous alliance. His eavesdropping also revealed their little escapade back at that cabin in the woods, when the two of them tracked down the Hessian.

Thomas barely escaped the Grandmaster’s wrath. Not to due his instincts or luck. Rather, due to Connor’s promise to gut her father should he lay a hand on him.
You were nowhere to be found when I was a child. So do not insult either of us by attempting to exert your paternity now, she hissed at the elder Kenway. Dark eyes burning with rage and that fancy hidden blade of hers snapping out of its gauntlet, she drew dagger and snarled, You have no right to me, nor I to you.

To her credit, Thomas had never witnessed the Grandmaster rendered speechless. Which probably explained why he didn’t hear hide or hair of Connor for over two years after they parted ways.

The spring of 1780 found them involved in an espionage operation up at Morven House in New Jersey. The feared Redcoat General Banastre Tarleton nearly destroying the Patriot cause with his ruthless military prowess, something had to be done. So both the Assassins and the Templars undertook their missions to thwart him. Little did they know that their goals intertwined. Well, that was until Connor and Haytham stumbled across each other in the Princeton streets.

It turned out Connor was in town to kill Tarleton and steal his army plans to pass on to the Patriots. Haytham wished to kidnap the General and use him for negotiating a peace for an early end to the war. She and her and old man nearly killed each other before they agreed that they could simply swipe the plans and pass them on to the Patriots. It’d leave Tarleton intact and avoid blowback from the Brits. His black market network once again brimming with information, Thomas tagged along with the Grandmaster.

As Princeton was full of Brit officers and slavering Loyalists looking to prove their allegiance to the crown, Connor would appear especially suspicious in her usual robes and male livery. So she was forced to wear dresses and such to better blend in with the general populace. Thomas had never laid eyes on a prettier sight. Not that he’d ever say it to her face. He preferred not taking a knife to his chest or his balls, thank you very much.

Connor also found herself with an ally as recommended to her by John Adams. Some stodgy Brit fellow loyal to the Patriots’ cause named Ichabod Crane. Neither Thomas nor Haytham trusted the bloke. And it turned out that they had good reason not to. For Crane was actually on a secret mission from General Washington and the Masons to retrieve some map from Morven House that allegedly showed the location of ancient artifact Washington thought would turn the tide of the war. An artifact that was apparently one of those blasted Pieces of Eden. Unfortunately, Ichabod betrayed all of them and stole the map for himself. Which prompted Connor and Haytham to track him down and force him to turn it over. Crane was lucky to slink away with his life. And that was only on account of Connor’s apparent mercy, even as she swore to end him should she ever lay eyes on him again.

At the same time, Haytham and Connor nearly killed each other again until Connor took it upon herself to toss the map into the fireplace of their safe house. I rather no one have it than for it to fall into Templar hands, she smirked as it burned and she held off her father at the end of her flintlock. Haytham was of course livid. Thomas could only chuckle to himself at the Assassin’s sheer obstinacy.

Regardless, the mission was technically a success since they were able to smuggle out Tarleton’s battle plans. Haytham immediately slipped out of town afterwards. It left the Connor and Thomas staying at the same tavern. After plenty of drinks and Thomas hounding Connor into a few dances, they fell into bed again. Of course, she was gone when Thomas awoke with a raging hangover the next morning.

To his astonishment, Thomas saw her again that September. After her falling out with General Washington (to his dying day, Thomas never once pointed out how right he and his ilk were about the man he tried to assassinate all those years ago. No need to repeat something they both knew), she
undertook one last mission for the General at West Point. It happened to be the same place Thomas was stationed with the Connecticut militia. Which was why Haytham ordered him to root out rumors of Benedict Arnold’s potential disloyalty and kill him if necessary; with the war turning, the Templars now threw their support behind the Patriots. All the better for them to wield early influence over what was clearly becoming a burgeoning nation.

As per usual, it was just a nice bit of coin to line Thomas’ pockets. Because he sure in the hell didn’t give a fuck about politics and the bullshit that went along with it.

The mission was technically a failure, considering Arnold escaped. At the same time, West Point was saved and the Patriots avoided complete disaster. It now surprised neither Thomas nor Connor how they ended up sleeping together again. Honestly, it also shouldn’t have surprised him to wake up to a cold bed with her long gone in the morning. Nonetheless and for reasons he wasn’t quite ready to fully question yet, her disappearing act frustrated the hell out of him. Especially since it’d be another year before they crossed paths.

The Templars lost their Grandmaster in September 1781 through a twist of chance Thomas never thought he’d be a part of. For it was he who provided the information of Charles Lee’s hideout in Fort George. Though he swore Dobby to secrecy of him being the source when he passed it on to her to relay to Connor. But instead of Lee, Connor found her father at the fort. Their conflict ended with Haytham’s death at her hands and Connor nearly there herself.

Madness. Dizzying affection grown out of years of their bizarre dance around each other. Being a witless piece of shit. Or perhaps even guilt. Thomas didn’t know what compelled him to visit her during her recovery two days later. Nor why he finally confessed to being there on that fateful day that Charles Lee came to her village and threatened her life.

She nearly killed him for it. He’d certainly bear the physical scar she inflicted on him for the rest of his life.

They didn’t speak to or see each other for a year. The only acknowledgement of how much Thomas missed his ‘lil wolf was his drastic uptick in drinking. And with so few Templars left now, no one apparently noticed his constantly inebriated state. Even if they did, they certainly didn’t give a fuck as to why.

Not until he revealed Lee’s location in Boston in September 1782 did he see her once more. Yet again, that little tidbit of information was passed through Dobby (what could he say? Except that the Irishwoman reminded him of his sisters and didn’t take any shit from him, quite similar to her boss). Except this time, it was a purposeful strike at Lee. Thomas was sick of answering to the increasingly unhinged lickspittle. And he wasn’t the only Templar of that opinion either. The former general’s reckless leadership driven by an absurd combination of rage, hubris and vengeful pettiness sped up the Order’s decline. Taking strategic advantage, the Assassins easily wrecked further havoc.

What better way to apologize for his role in Connor’s loss of innocence then to hand over her greatest enemy on a silver platter?

Except she nearly died of her efforts to kill Lee. Which was why Thomas greeted her at the tavern door when she limped in to finally kill him. He waited outside as the deed was done. His presence told her all she needed to know of him now; he was done with the Templars once and for all.

_I have completed my mission_, she hoarsely declared, stumbling out of the tavern, _Now take me home._

Frankly, he thought her addled in the mind for trusting him with finally revealing where she lived. To
that, she weakly smiled, *You have yet to kill me. I assume you sure as shit will do no such thing later.*

He barked out a laugh at her curse. Along with sending up a prayer that she’d survive long enough for him to prove she had good reason to trust him.

She almost didn’t make it back to the Homestead.

To his credit, the new Grandmaster never pursued either one of them. Her original enemies dead and gone, Ratonhnhaké:ton never questioned it. At least not out loud. Meanwhile, Thomas suspected the new Templar leader had lingering feelings regarding what he’d done to his old mentor before he betrayed the Brotherhood. It was confirmed months later when he made a supply run to Boston.

Deciding to pass by *The Green Dragon* for old times’ sake, Thomas found himself face to face with one Shay Cormac.

*I’ve got no plans to forcefully ‘retire’ a bloke who voluntarily left the Order,* Shay easily declared.

Staring at Cormac over the rim of his tankard of beer, Thomas took a long swig before shrugging, *Yeah.*

*Yet Connor remains a soldier in ‘er cause, his dark gaze met Thomas’. Should she continue to go placin’ herself as a piece on the board? I can’t do anythin’ to prevent ‘er end.*

Thomas swallowed. It was all he could do against such spoken truths. Which is why he found himself stunned by Cormac’s next words.

*Nonetheless, I have never been one to dole out revenge for the sake ‘o sheer belligerence. Nor will I go extendin’ the reach of the Order to inflict collateral damage to one’s spouse and children.*

*Thanks, mate.*

*I deserve none of that now…Achilles would have wanted it that way.*

*Who in the fuck be Achilles?*

Cormac flashed Thomas a pained grin before his expression fell. *Trust me, mate,* he rose from his seat and clapped Thomas on the back, *She’ll know.*

With that, Shay tipped his hat and disappeared into the crowd. Finishing off his beer, Thomas paid and slipped out of the tavern.

It was high time he return to the Homestead and back to Ratonhnhaké:ton's side. It was were he wanted to be now, after all. Preferably for the rest of his life, if she'd have him. Though only time would tell on that one.

They never marry. He asks her twice of it; once, roughly six months after Lee’s demise, the second time, while she heals from the birth of their twins.

The first time, she utterly refuses. He flees the Homestead for Boston that very afternoon, not bothering to stick around for her added rejection. A week later, she hunts him down at the Green Dragon. It’s now a normal, rather boring tavern versus enemy territory. After all, all of her enemies are dead. And he is no longer one of her targets. Not after all they’ve gone through and sacrificed over the years. Not to mention, living in apparent sin with her at the Homestead for the last six
months or so.

Sloppy drunk and livid, he barely comprehends her threat to castrate him for his stupidity. In the end, they take a room for the night. Dried out and hung over the next morning, he sullenly sits on the edge of the bed as Ratonhnhaké:ton locks the door.

Then, they talk. For hours on end. As per usual, while her stubbornness is evident, she explains her motivations in her typical clear and deliberate manner.

She has labored far too long and hard for a marriage certificate to deprive her of what little privileges are left to her. Not only as a woman, but as one of the largest landowners in the county through the Homestead. Not to mention, the homesteaders are under her protection and she will tolerate none who threaten their livelihoods. Most especially, not a husband. She trusts Thomas with her life, of course. Of that, there is no question. Especially after he hustled her back home to heal up after her final encounter with Lee.

Sure, he wasn’t an official house guest. The thing was, he just never left. Not the house. Nor his side of bed he shared with her in the master bedroom. Nevertheless, she refuses to bend to those who create the rule of law that strips a married woman of her right to her own assets.

While he admits he understands her misgivings, he makes it abundantly clear that he must think on it. She leaves him to it, though not without hungrily capturing his mouth with hers before silently walking out the door. She’s never been one for many words, preferring actions to empty prattling.

He returns to the Manor within a few days. Despite that she never says so aloud, her relief at his reappearance is written all over her face when he strolls through the front door. And though it takes around a month or so, they fall back into their usual routine.

The second time he requests her hand, its sheer panic driving him. It is the fifth night of her illness after giving birth to the twins, the boys but six days old. Their older sister, Julia, stays in their room. Already fiercely protective of them despite having only four years to her, she refuses to let them out of her sight while mama is “resting.” Prudence is kind enough to look after the children, moving into house for the time being.

Meanwhile, Thomas sleeps on a cot next to the bed in the master bedroom, attending to Ratonhnhaké:ton as she battles the fever threatening to steal her from him. Though he hasn’t set foot in a church for decades, he swears to God and his angels that he shall make an honest woman of her should she mend.

She does so within a fortnight. At first, he doesn’t think she remembers his ramblings. Begging her to not give up as he pressed cold cloth to her head while helplessly watching Dr. White and Diana work over her. Thus, he never bothers to comment on them aloud.

A couple of months later, one night after she returns from New York on a mission and he gives her a sound beating in a game of fanorona, she distantly says, “I see that you have won…should we make a visit to Father Timothy to perform the marriage, seeing that I am out of danger?”

Admittedly, Ratonhnhaké:ton has never been one for handling difficult questions in a delicate fashion, he’ll give her that. So Thomas finds himself giving a loud guffaw before gulping down a large chug of whiskey. All in spite of his furtive look around the room. Yet, she flashes him a shy smile that lights up her face. All while at the same time pulling back the left sleeve of her tunic. Revealing the green tattoo of a four-leafed clover just above her inner wrist, her skin is pink, still

“Dobby swears that it,” she points to the Gaelic, prettily blushing all the while, “Is accurate.”

He pounces and makes love to her right there on the floor, in front of the warm flames of the fireplace. Beds and supposed decency be damned. Besides, the tykes were tucked in upstairs hours ago.

Upon his return from his next trip to Philadelphia a few weeks later, the first thing he does is kiss her silly on the manor steps for all the world to see. The second is haul her into the house in order to show her the black inking of six eagle feathers fanned out within a circle along his inner right forearm. Beneath them reads, “Ratonhnhaké:ton.” Her real name she’s allowed him to call her ever since he brought her back the Homestead. Though she still goes by "Connor" with their fellow Homesteaders. As it honored the lost son of her mentor that he’d named her for. Especially considering Achilles was the only father she ever loved.

He admits that he almost fucked up and initially asked for only five feathers. That was until Dobbie kindly reminded him that her confederacy consisted of six tribes. All while Jacob and Jaime also threatened to dump his mangled body in the harbor should he ever break their mentor’s heart.

For both of them, no wedding ring or record within the church annals could ever replace such a commitment.

Thomas Hickey, or rather Thomas Dempsey as he now went by in order to protect himself from anyone from his past sniffing around, was still a lot of unsavory things. He loved having his pockets lined with as many pounds (well, dollars now) as possible. He drank a bit too much for his own good. He was a solid cheat at cards and other games. His language remained as coarse as ever. Funny how all those aspects of his old life remained within him. Funnier still was how it’d played out over the years. For as before, his life’s pleasures still directly stemmed from how useful he found those surrounding him to be.

Without Ratonhnhaké:ton? Well, he’d probably be dead. Likely, somewhere in a ditch outside a tavern or torn apart on the battlefield. Another pointless sacrifice to a hypocritical cause that aimed to control all within its sight. Without their children, Julia, Aidan or Achilles, he’d be a sorry excuse for a human being. Deprived of any sense of obligation to his own flesh and blood, he’d meander through life, aimless and thoroughly lacking in purpose. Without the homesteaders and their pride in protecting their swaths of hearth and home, his cynicism would’ve devoured him whole. He’d be left a pathetic husk of man, vainly undertaking an alcohol-fueled search for refuge from his own demons.

His lover, their children, their home and their little community of misfits proved all he bothered to give a damn about. Nothing would ever change that.

As their oldest child Julia matured, devious pragmatism helped temper the rowdy disposition she’d inherited from her father. Markedly, when she followed her mother’s footsteps. On numerous occasions, it certainly not only saved her own life but her recruits’ as well.

Aidan, named for Thomas' younger and favorite brother, was technically their second child since he was the first-born twin. Honed from all those years of sitting at his father’s side and learning how to cheat at a myriad of games, Aidan contained a knack for remembering patterns and numbers. Combined with his mother’s sense of discretion, it made him one of the richest brokers of goods and information along the Eastern Seaboard.
Aidan’s twin Achilles inherited a passionate love of the sea from the stories about his maternal great-grandfather that his mother proudly told. For she learned them from the old mentor she named her son for. And the journal her biological father left her. There were also her own keen skills she directly taught her son. Achilles’ uncanny sixth sense for coming trouble from the authorities matched his father’s instincts through and through as well. Accordingly, he owned a legitimate fleet of ships. He happily let Aidan utilize them to transport his goods in exchange for a fair cut of the profits. That his elder sister had free reign to use them for the Brotherhood’s missions proved an added benefit to all of them to cover for the Assassins operations.

Unknown to most, the trio’s combined talents directly played a hand in securing a victory in the War of 1812. Julia’s astounding skill for putting together solid plans of action for the Assassins allowed them to be executed with frightening efficiency. Aidan’s zealously cultivated connections resulted in him becoming President Madison’s premier spymaster. Achilles’ ships discovered multiple routes to smuggle goods and information to and from the American troops. Mostly in exploiting supposedly impossible shipping lanes that cut through the British armada blockading the coast.

Their parents couldn’t be any prouder of their progeny.

So was Thomas still a selfish sort? Undeniably. But neither Ratonnhaké:ton, Julia, Aidan nor Achilles (who all also went by their Mohawk names as given by their mother reflecting their differing natures. Thomas swiftly learned how to properly pronounce them, of course) could blame him for it. Neither could any of the homesteaders. After all, he’d fight to the bloody death to ensure his sources of continued contentment remained whole and unharmed. And loath to anyone who dared lay a finger on his family. Or his neighbors. Or the acres of land on which they all made their livings. What more could one ask of him? Sure, such an outlook didn’t fall into the childish, naive definition of love, as most people saw it. Yet, he’d never claimed to be a hare-brained optimist. Far from it, in fact.

Good thing he never gave Ratonnhaké:ton back that pretty eagle feather from the first time they worked together. Then again, he doubted she'd ask for it back now.

“You are too quiet, father.”

“All the better for the world to go hearin’ ya usual chatter, sweetheart,” he rasped, reaching out and ruffling Julia’s nearly black locks. While she shared her mother’s dark hair and her olive skin, the rest of her features were solidly her father. Well, save her paternal grandmother’s shrewd, azure gaze. She was named for her after all. ”Besides, I ain't never felt better. So quit worryin' yourself.”

The two stood on the balcony of the master bedroom of Davenport Manor. Watching as the setting sun split the sky in warm rays of golden red and orange, they hung about in companionable silence. Thomas haphazardly leaned on the railing, arms crossed and with his flask loosely clasped in one hand. Dressed in only a tunic and trousers, his floppy, wide-brimmed straw hat was shoved to the back of his head. Revealing a bit of his shorn, white hair, it was well-worn.

“You must be slipping, pop,” she smirked, her mischievous expression a mirror of his own. “It’s obvious you’re lying, ya blaggart.”

Letting out a snort of disagreement, he tossed back a drink and slowly stood up straighter. Wincing and letting out a deep groan as his back creaked and cracked, he cursed his old injuries. A lifetime of running and gunning caught up with him years ago. No matter, it didn’t stop him from throwing an arm about his little girl’s shoulder. Well, she wasn’t so little anymore. Particularly considering the round bump along her midsection under her light green, Indian muslin dress. While she proved just as rambunctious as her mother, Julia preferred gowns when she wasn’t out on her Assassin duties.
“I ain’t admittin’ to nothin’,” he shrugged.

Casting him a doubtful look, Julia leaned and dropped her head to her father’s stooped shoulder. “You’re worried for mother,” she shrugged. “I understand. Regardless, she’s only broken her arm. She’s been through worse.”

“Still don’t make it no better,” Thomas groused, mouth twisting with reproach. “She be gettin’ on in years, ya know?! Too bloody old to keep climbin’ all over the trees and what not ‘round here.”

“Oh, I’d like to see you tell her that to her face!” Julia let out a guffaw of retort. “I swear,” her eyes sparkled, “You hem and haw over her like an old hen. Quit bein’ so silly.” Yet she dropped a hand around his and gave it a light squeeze of comfort.

“The fuckin’ hell else I supposed to be doin’?!?”

“Finding other ways of keeping her occupied since she’s retired?”

“Now that be somethin’ I’d like to see ya try,” Thomas chuckled. “You should damn well know better that your ma ain’t one to be takin’ no orders. Unless you wanna go meetin’ the business end ‘o one of her fancy ‘lil hidden blades.”

Julia shook her head in disagreement and arched a dark brow. “I doubt she’d outright murder you.”

“I be forgettin’ that you wasn’t even a glimmer in me eye when I first crossed paths with the ‘lil hellion,” he snickered. Taking another drink, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “One day, I gotta round up you lot and let y’all know ‘bout the time your mama ambushed and tried to go killin’ me in prison. Almost did me in somethin’ fierce, too.”

Eyes widening in utter disbelief, Julia jerked up from his shoulder, bellowing, “Wait…what the fuck-?!?”

“Yeah, none of you kiddies be knowin’ the half ‘o it,” he chortled. “We didn’t exactly be gettin’ on too well back then. Hell, neither of us really wanted too, neither. At least not without the other one gettin’ Shanked on a blade or shot straight through with a musket ball.”

“You shall have to enlighten us all, then,” Julia snorted in disbelief.

Hearing the ring of the dinner bell from below, Thomas glanced over the balcony. The homesteaders had set up few long tables earlier in the afternoon for the celebration. Now, they were all piled high with food and drink. Most everyone from the community wandered around, chattering and catching up with each other.

Off to the side, Ratonhnhakéton was in deep conversation with Mariam and Norris. Judging by the way she waved about her uninjured arm and how Mariam leaned over and smacked her thigh in laughter, the two women we likely discussing how she’d broken her arm. Already swaying on his feet, Norris was deep into his cups, happily slurring along in a mish-mash of English and Montreal-accented French. Across the yard, Aidan and Achilles engaged Ellen and Big Dave, who were comfortably ensconced in each other. Aidan’s three year-old son, ‘Lil Tom, sat perched on his uncle Achilles’ shoulders. Half-asleep and swaying, the boy would be asleep soon.

“I’m glad we could all make it back for Istá’s birthday,” Julia’s voice cut through Thomas’ thoughts. Retreating to the door, she waved for him to follow her downstairs.

“Ain’t got no argument with that,” Thomas grinned. “She may not be sayin’ or showin’ it much. Still, she be happy as a clam whenever ya brats bother comin’ up for a visit.”
“Hey now!” Julia lightly smacked him across the arm, “You know how busy we are. Especially with all the rebuilding since the war ended.”

“A likely excuse, poppet,” he half-teased, half-admonished.

Taking one last look over the balcony, he caught Ratonhnhaké:ton's eye. Her hair was mostly grey now, streaked with only a few slices of dark brown. Plaited back in a two braids, she’d woven through a few more feathers and ribbons for today’s gathering. Of course, she wasn’t in a gown of any sort. Rather, a finely stitched dark waistcoat with native beading along the pockets and collar over a white tunic. Her red sash looped around the waist of her black trousers, her black boots were freshly polished as well. Around her neck was her usual bear claw collar. Within its center sat the gold and ruby pendant he'd given her years ago, after recovering from the twins’ birth. She never removed it, unless one of her missions required it.

Adamantly waving for him to come down (her expression briefly translating to *Move your ass, you are already late*), she shot him a bright smile as he sloppily blew her a kiss and raised his flask in salute.

"Go get changed, pop," Julia pecked her father on the cheek, "I'll meet you at the top of the stairs, yeah?"

"Works for me, darlin'," he nodded as she left.

Changing into a fresh pair of trousers, Thomas haphazardly tossed on a waistcoat over his tunic without bothering to button it up. He then pulled on his boots and wandered out of his quarters. The trip down the stairs took a while. Though Julia laughingly blamed it on her current condition with child, they both knew that he hadn't been a young man for a long, long time. No matter, for they eventually made it outside.

Thomas greeted Aidan and Achilles with his usual hearty hug and making a loud show of chiding that it'd been too long since they all decided to visit their poor, addled parents. Meanwhile, 'Lil Tom still sat on his uncle Achilles' shoulders. Unable to keep himself from tickling his grandson, Thomas relished the child's gleeful laughter peeling out across the front yard.

Silently appearing behind him, Ratonhnhaké:ton arched a brow. "You will spoil him."

"No more than I went doin' with our own 'lil tykes," Thomas smirked, "But they turned out right as rain, eh?"

"No thanks to you." Ratonhnhaké:ton's brief grin clearly indicated her amusement. Especially as she procured a piece of candy out of seemingly nowhere and slipped it into 'Lil Tom's eager, grabbing hands.

"Akhso!" the boy exclaimed, popping it into his mouth. Smiling around it, he leaned over and pressed his little palms to her cheeks while dropping a kiss to the tip of her nose. Closing her eyes for a long moment, Ratonhnhaké:ton rocked to her toes, smiled and clasped her hands on top of her grandson's. "Tanks...Niá:wen," he slowly translated.

His father Aidan shook his head. "You'll ruin his dinner, istá."

"Someone must do so," she reached up to ruffle Aidan's hair.

Wrapping his arms around Ratonhnhaké:ton from behind, Thomas ducked his head and suggestively murmured against her ear, "And who's that gonna leave to go spoilin' you, love?"
"Perhaps you offer yourself for such?" she interlaced her fingers with his at her waist.

"Yeah," Thomas snickered, "I ain't gonna go fightin' you on that one."

Spinning her around, he hungrily captured her mouth with his. Achilles rolled his eyes and loudly declared that the house was right there if they needed privacy while Aidan let out gagging noises at the display. Julia took her usual route of smacking her younger brothers on the backs of their heads. Her bawdy laughter as they let out a loud, "OW!" had them both grumbling.

"Hmm," Ratonhnhaké:ton gave Thomas a pleased murmur, "And what is this for?" she slightly withdrew with a grin.

Delicately brushing the pad of his thumb across her scarred cheek, Thomas' gaze searched her face. He couldn't help committing it to memory for what seemed the millionth time. Not that he minded in the slightest.

A slow smile coming to him, he nuzzled his nose into her neck while chuckling, "Do I ever go needin' a reason, me lovely?"

"No," she closed her eyes and gently ran a hand through his short locks, "You are aware that you never do."

"Yeah," he nibbled a kiss to her jaw, "That be what I thought."

"Konoronhkwa, Tom."

"Me too, Ratonhnhaké:ton. 'Til me dyin' breath and the end of me days, swee'art."

Yeah, his life couldn't get much better than this.

~THE END~

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
"A chuisle, a chroí" - equivalent of "Pulse of my heart/My heart's beloved" in Irish Gaelic.

"Istá" - "Mother" in Mohawk.

"Akhsno" - "Grandmother" in Mohawk.

"Niá:wen" - "Thanks" in Mohawk.

"Konoronhkwa" - "I love you" in Mohawk.

Otherwise, if you would've told me three years ago that I'd finish a novel-length fic, I would've called you crazy. But here I am, done with this part of the series. Seriously, this was supposed to be a super-simple, one-off of a kink meme request of "Connor doesn't kill Thomas at the gallows, so they constantly run into each other over the years and have lots of hate sex." So I never thought it would've blown up into a full AU. I'm sorry it took so long for me to finish. Thanks for all of your patience, the reviews and
that you’ve stuck with me.

I may one day write more in this series, but likely not for a long time. Especially since this story has also helped sharpen my writing skills and given me the confidence to start writing my own original content. In the meantime, thanks again!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!