The Road Not Taken

by Svynakee

Summary

When Dunwall's court rejects Serkonan Royal Protector candidate Corvo Attano, another notices his talents - Daud, the infamous Knife of Dunwall. But if there is one thing about stubborn, fascinating Corvo, it's that he is not the to type compromise... and neither is Daud.

A Whaler!Corvo AU.
Two Roads Diverged

Chapter Notes

I would totally play this as a DLC or even another game, by the way. Play it so hard. Also The Knife of Dunwall and Brigmore Witches may or may not be excluded from this fic, depending on where it goes. Sorry for any canon mistakes.

Also, Corvo isn’t actually that much younger than Daud in this AU, because I think Daud started his career quite young as well – I’m guessing Corvo to be around 16 when they meet, and Daud in his 20s at the latest. The reason why Daud calls him ‘boy’ is because the guy refuses to acknowledge them as equals, and also because he sort of thinks of all the Whalers as ‘his boys’ (yes even the girls). Corvo just puts up with it because he’s Corvo.

The title is taken from Robert Frost’s "The Road Not Taken", which I believe fits into this story quite nicely. The first chapter is also named after the first line.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

He finds the boy stumbling through the backstreets of the city in the dying sunlight, still wearing his fancy clothes from Dunwall Tower. Daud watches from the rooftops, waiting for word from one of his men. He muses on the fate of the unfortunate former candidate.

He was meant to be a joke.

The one thing no one expected was for him to take it so seriously.

The swordman (swordsboy?) from Serkonos, thrown in with the others vying for the position of Royal Protector. The nobility’s way of saying, “Look, we care about all you lesser peoples across the sea!”

At first, they thought he was perfect. Daud heard the rumours – he makes sure he watches all the potential Royal Protectors the moment they step into Dunwall. The last thing an assassin wants is to be recognised by the supposedly best combatant in the Isles, and they generally pull out when the Protectors are involved. Or they up the price. But this boy had the rumour mill working overtime. Quiet, they said. Passive. Some called him aloof, others just said cold. Even more said plain stupid, possibly mute. An idiot they couldn’t even tolerate on backwater Serkonos. Oh, how they had tittered and laughed.

Then they saw the way used a blade. And a crossbow. And his hands and legs. And finally a chair when that one fight broke out in the dining hall. They wrested the grenade from his hands and the guard got tooth marks that lasted a week. He put out three other candidates. And one with half a chair.

Daud hated nobles, but he’d be damned if he didn’t like this one. The assassin couldn’t remember the last time he’d laughed that hard at a report from the Tower. He’d been meaning to sneak into the final tournament and watch the kid fight. Hopefully with a chair.

Unfortunately, the court hadn’t appreciated this dynamic display of improvisation, and when the young Lady Jessamine started getting too friendly with the foreigner they decided to off him in
case their future Empress made the wrong choice. Daud wouldn’t have picked anyone else, simply for the entertainment value of assassination attempts foiled through furniture.

Daud likes to think that he escaped using a chair, clubbing guards left and right and maybe flipping off the Tower with both hands before fleeing downtown. Now the boy stumbles through the alley, no doubt trailed by some gang or another for his rich clothes. He shouldn’t be in this part of town dressed like some princeling.

An assassin drops lightly down onto the roof where Daud is crouching and beckons to him. A pity to leave a fellow stranded Serkonan in such odds, but a job is a job and gold always has been enough incentive for Daud to leave people dead.

He makes his way away from the soon-to-be murder scene.

Chapter End Notes

So, uh, Daud's voice might be a bit off. Corvo doesn't have a voice, so phew. He talks in this fic though, just not much. The other characters come much, much, much later in the story. If I ever get there.
Chapter Notes

Well, I decided to throw out my carefully-planned schedule and release this in the name of Easter happiness (e.i. chocolate and those cheap multicoloured wire chicks)! So enjoy the second chapter of the sorta-prequel.

I want to thank everyone that left kudos, and everyone that commented - Cyrin, Blackie and Plexus (toitsu), the latter whom we also thank for the small body parts they donated (these were invaluable for our negotiations with the Dead Eels). I really enjoy reading comments, so please feel free to blab away!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

What Daud should have considered, he thinks upon reflection, is the fact that the boy had made it this far into the seedy part of town with his expensive clothes.

It might have something to do with the expensive dagger that gleams in his hand.

He drops lightly into the alleyway, into the orange glow of the fire. He’s not sure who it had belonged to, but the Hatters lying just outside the flickering circle are enough to convince any homeless to stay well away from the bloodied boy holding the dagger.

The youth doesn’t flinch when the masked man appears out of nowhere in a shower of shadows. Doesn’t growl or threaten. He watches. There’s the minutest tensing of muscles and shift of position that allows the assassin to see that the boy has gone from cautiously resting to ready to whack him with a chair.

Beneath the vapour mask, Daud allows himself a smile.

Relaxing his own stance and making sure to keep his wristbow hidden from sight, he reaches into one of the many pouches and throws a couple of bandages and salves to the wounded boy. The kid catches them easily, but winces as the movement strains a gash along his side. After a brief inspection of what he has been given, he goes back to watching Daud like a wary wolfhound.

The assassin grins from beneath the mask. “Welcome to Dunwall, kid.”

Chapter End Notes

Another short chapter, so sorry about that - expect another one soon to make up for it.

Also, I noticed that I wouldn't be able to fit all my ideas and worldbuilding and tidbits in this story (or the next, if I even get to it), so I was wondering how all of you would feel about a tumblr blog called The Raven's Roost or something, to flesh out this Whaler!Corvo AU and post all the things that don't make it. Leave opinions in the comments to let me know what you think!
Saying that the boy had potential was like saying the sea was a tad wet. He excelled not only in combat, but stealth as well. He was also polite and trained in court manners, for all the good it did him in the ‘Whalers’, as they were now called.

Daud watched the boy, the same way he’d watched that fierce slum girl who’d tailed him and the others that came before her – a Tyvian boy who’d fight with hounds barehanded for coin, the thief who gathered river krust poison along with the pearls and slicked it on his blades. The boy didn’t make friends, but unlike Billie was willing to help out others if asked. He’d do so quietly, efficiently, never asking for anything in return. It was worrying that an assassin would be so instinctively trusting, and the rumours started again. Stupid. Mute. Empty.

Well, the first two weren’t true, and Daud could do something about the last. Corvo Attano (he refused to change his name, even disgraced and dishonored as he was) followed all orders the master assassin gave him, whether they were to complete a mere training exercise or to run the unsavoury errand of rat clean-up. His patrol reports were concise but included of all the details Daud wanted, always delivered punctually – even earlier than expected, sometimes. It was also a boon that he could read and write, unlike many of the street kids that made up their ranks.

What an excellent Lord Protector he would have been.

The problem arises when Daud himself decides to oversee combat training, pairing up the newest recruits (there were many more now, and they threatened to overspill from the warehouse that was their base) and watching them duel with blunted blades, taken from guardsmen unlucky enough to cross the assassins. There were brief, subdued scuffles and grumbles due to partners – nobody wanted to fight Billie, Thomas would beat you black and blue but give helpful pointers, Matthias likes headbutting you like an enraged blood ox – but people were oddly dismissive of Corvo. Daud continued to watch from above, as the young assassins spread out across the deserted courtyard, blocked from the prying eyes of the City Watch and Overseers by vine-tangled walls.

Nobody won against Corvo. That was not a surprise – even Thomas was bested once by him, but Billie was preoccupied with a couple of Morley twins and never got around to the ‘little crow’, as they now called him. Corvo was still unused to the vapour mask, and Daud was lenient with him. He shouldn’t be.

As he was making a mental note to never assign Hobson and Ishmael together on a mission (unless he wanted a pileup of flailing limbs and leather), his interest was captured by Corvo being
circled by three wary recruits. Daud grunted in approval as two charged together, from different
directions – no need for honor here, at least not during fights. Victory was much sweeter than
pride. Corvo dodged, rolling across the dirt and swiping out a leg. One of his assailants fell,
receiving a quick punch to the mask before he hit the ground. Their ally was already up and
swinging (Daud recognises the style, too wild, too much force – Verne should remember that he’s
an assassin now, no longer a thug) but Corvo turns to block the blow, his gloved hand shoving
against the flat of the blade and pushing the larger boy back. Verne stumbles, obviously unused to
dealing with someone who had received more training than your average Watch Lower Guard. A
hilt to the stomach brings him down. But Corvo’s third opponent had been waiting and seizes the
chance, running lightly up from behind (that stance… Yuri, maybe?) and grabbing the Serkonan
around the waist. Unfazed, he elbows him and knocks him in the head with the hilt of his sword.
Satisfied, he sheathes his blade.

And gets tackled by Verne, who happens to be twice his size.

The thud makes everyone but Billie pause (she uses this chance to deliver a vicious kick to the
remaining twin, leaving them unconscious). Even Daud winces.

If there’s one thing a street thug has over any tutored noble though…

Daud sits at his desk, staring at the boy before him.

“Corvo, you’re not a Lord Protector. You’re not guarding any Empress. You’re an assassin,”
Daud says from behind his desk back at their base, glaring at the boy whose face was obscured by
dark brown hair. He should cut it – it’s not practical. But that’s not the problem. Neither is the
limp, which will heal. The problem was: “You don’t have any more codes of honor or noble rules,
you got that? When you fight, you fight to kill. Doesn’t matter if they never did you any wrong.
Doesn’t matter why. What matters is the money, Corvo. Not the means, not the reasons, not how
innocent that person may or may not be. It’s the money, kid.”

The boy is silent. Meek, acknowledging his every word and accusation with quiet acceptance.
Thomas would have been gushing with promises to do better; Billie would be glaring at him with
the promise in her eyes. Corvo is silent.

Most of the assassins feared Daud’s anger the most. But Corvo Attano was not fazed by anger any
more than the prospect of being sent to a cold place across the seas to be jeered at in a competition
he had no right to win. No, what Corvo Attano can’t stand is disappointment. He sends the boy
slinking back to the dining room with his head bowed.

Chapter End Notes

I am horrible at writing action sequences, and prone to violating 'show don't tell'. This
story is practically all tell. Whoops.

I will be using Australian English for most of my writing, but 'dishonored' will
always be spelled that way because of the game. So there. Until next time!
Ill Omen

Chapter Notes

Another short chapter, for which I apologise. But rest assured that more is on the way... slowly. So, this chapter has a sort-of focus on an OC. There's a reason why he's an OC. But still.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Despite Daud’s best efforts at sharpening not only the skills of his assassins but also their minds, there were still a few idiots who decided that despite evidence to the contrary, it would be a great idea to make an enemy of Corvo Attano.

The good thing was that it helped him weed out those not fit for command. He just wonders whether they’re fit for handling anything more complex than a knife.


He taunts the boy about Dunwall Tower, about what could have been. The ox against the crow. That’s probably a metaphor for something, but Daud’s not going to puzzle out the poetic aspects of an imbecile who wanted to talk himself to an early grave.

Corvo still refuses to take his fights seriously, the master assassin has observed. No, that wasn’t true – the lean brunet took everything seriously, grey-blue eyes always watching, his silence one of quiet observance instead of vapid witlessness. He was too unwilling to harm those he felt didn’t deserve it. Young Corvo was hardly ever on the offensive, preferring to block and Transverse (he was one of the earliest to show an affinity – yet another edge he had over the others) around his opponents before delivering a precise blow that rendered them unconscious as quickly and painlessly as possible.

He seeks to protect, but Daud can’t imagine he has anything left worth protecting.

“Fight like a man, hagfish!” he hears as he has a quick smoke on the roof of the hideout. Daud watches as ‘Blood Ox’ Matthias runs around the impromptu duelling ground behind the warehouse like the animal after which he has been named, as the little (not so little anymore, after the past year) crow flits around in a trail of light and shadows. Daud waits. “You never would have made Protector, you son of a hagfish – you can’t protect shit!”

Even Daud winces at the impact, delivered expertly with the speed and precision and force of all of Corvo’s blows. He supposed the ‘honor’ lecture didn’t fall on deaf ears after all. Although he needn’t have worried – Corvo was always listening. He likes to eavesdrop, Daud knows, but the older man finds it a good skill in an assassin and pretends he hasn’t noticed, and to Corvo’s credit nobody else has. He Transverses back into his office after snuffing out the cigarette, leaving the ‘Blood Ox’ whimpering in the yard with his hands covering his groin.

Chapter End Notes
Corvo, you're growing up to be a vicious bastard aren't you? Daud's influence I suppose.

No matter how Low Chaos Corvo is, he can still be a little shit.
By Your Command

Chapter Notes

So, I'm not sure how the game mechanics work in the in-game universe. Everything in this fic is pure headcanon.

Also it's been a few years since Corvo first joined the Whalers, he's about 20 in this chapter. I'm also not that sure when Holger's Device was first invented? I mean its present in The Surge, but the note found during The High Overseer implies that it's a relatively new model? I'm just gonna go with 'sometime during Corvo's stint in prison'.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Daud resists the urge to growl in frustration. No amount of gold is worth this kind of patience – and the Knife of Dunwall is a very patient man, given the right incentive.

And yet here he remains, in this dingy top-floor studio with the boarded-up window just off Holger Square, because he currently has two solid gold ingots packed away in one of his pouches and there’s promise of more. It’s all about the money; wealth and violence is the currency of survival in Dunwall, and Daud happily provides one for the other.

The man in front of him looks like a rat in human form, all grey hair and sharp teeth and nervous twitching. He’s dressed in a threadbare coat and the stink of cheap alcohol, and it’s a wonder he ever got the kind of money he has handed over ‘on good faith’. Daud’s dealt with all kinds of disgusting and seedy and greasy over the years in this wretched city, but something just doesn’t click right with this whole scenario. Or maybe he just feels bad about their proximity to the Abbey’s headquarters. He’d usually have a guard or seven across the roofs, but the risk of being spotted by some trigger-happy zealot is just too much. Daud wonders when he got so Void-damned sentimental.

Perhaps it has something to do with Clyde’s passing – the way Corvo had hesitated and glanced back as Daud left him on the grimy street, the Watch rounded the corner. The way he had almost grabbed Daud’s red coat, stained with the blood of a man who had served him for years, and even with the mask on Daud could sense Corvo’s disbelief and guilt at the fact that they just left someone behind. He needs a new second in command, now. The choice is obvious, of course, but every time Daud thinks to announce his decision (there is no need, everyone knows who it’s going to be), he sees that broken body on the filthy street and Clyde’s cropped black hair is somehow long and brown and his body is not that of a Morley sailor but young and lithe …and Daud decides to wait another day (it has almost been a month, now).

The meeting place itself another oddity. While the plague has been creeping ever closer, this is one district that has been relatively untouched so far. Desirable, even, with its shops and services and nice gardens; as long as you could tolerate the fact that Overseers might drag off passerby on the off chance they turned out to be a witch. And yet this building is abandoned – not merely empty, but with that definite unlived-in look that took a few years of vacancy to achieve. Dust, cobwebs, peeling wallpaper – you name it, it was here. Dark Vision had revealed that the buildings on either side were also devoid of life. It was strangely unsettling, and this was coming from the man who had travelled across the Isles to the shrines of a god that lives in the swirling abyss.
That’s when he hears it – the faintest creak of stairs outside the locked door. He closes his eyes and sees the harsh outline of yellow figures, swords drawn and heading up the stairs. The surrounding buildings were also teeming with men. Daud recognises the silhouettes. Overseers.

“He’s off,” he tells the ‘client’, before he draws his sword and stabs him. Too late – the first masked man had already burst into the room, charging at the assassin. Daud Transverses up into the rafters, already planning an escape route while the Overseers are wondering where he’s disappear to and-

He hears the snap of the tripwire too late, and gives a shout of pain and surprise as the bolt digs into his side. Poisoned; he knows from the way the Void surges in his veins to counteract or at least lessen its affects. Strong enough to make his vision swim for a brief second, and send fire throughout his body as blurry golden faces turn towards the assassin perched above them. He’s going to need a new plan. Or better yet, a distraction.

Daud raises his hand to summon an assassin near the door to distract the horde of golden-masked men who now crowd the room, so that he can break the planks over the window and make his escape. He knows that his assassin will not be here long, and that even with the adrenaline and focus that comes from being thrown into a middle of an unexpected fight the Void will only allow his summoned reinforcement to stay for a short while before whisking the man back to wherever he was plucked from. But a short while will be more than enough respite for the Knife of Dunwall.

He tenses his body in preparation for the sprint to his exit, only to swear loudly as the newly-arrived assassin takes in his surroundings and then immediately Transverses to the overturned table. Daud wonders for all of one second just who could be so incredibly moronic when the man picks up a chair and swings it at the surprised Overseers.

Of course it is Corvo. Why had Daud not realised it was Corvo? The thought brings an uneasy feeling to his stomach, where it mixes with the adrenaline and that guilt he tries to ignore every time he uses his powers to drag one of his men into a mess like this.

He should move. Corvo is providing the perfect distraction. It turns out that while the Warfare Overseers are skilled in battle, they are rather unused to fighting a teleporting man bludgeoning them with a chair. After they have gotten over the initial shock, Corvo has already pulled out his sword and wristbow, planting blade and metal bolts in his opponents in a whirlwind dance of death. He’s fighting like it means something – like every Overseer in the room has done him a deep and terrible personal wrong, and that the debt will be paid in blood with interest. Daud finds himself mesmerised by this display, emotions a bizarre mixture of awe and worry. The feeling itself is unsettling, something strange and wrong and all-consuming that rises from Daud’s chest. The man tries to ignore it.

Corvo tenses in surprise as someone kills the Overseer that was attempting to gut him. Glaring, Daud fires a bolt into the eyehole of a scowling golden face over the assassin’s shoulder and growls, “Get to work, Corvo!”

Corvo obeys.
Chapter End Notes

Oh Daud, you of all people I would expect to remember to look *up*. Good thing Corvo was there to bail you out, eh?

The chair returns! It's probably symbolic or something.
So... I got this theory that Daud steals various equipment from the Watch and Overseers. Like not break in and challenge them to a duel for supplies, but since they have that Tether ability I guess someone as pragmatic and money-minded as Daud, whose childhood was probably spent in poverty, would see the advantage in sending sneaky assassins to both get free gear and deprive the enemy of their weaponry. Coin's probably spent on custom work for the crossbows, bribes, etc.

Anyway, enjoy the chapter!

They managed to get an abandoned slaughterhouse along the river. The stink is bad and the company’s worse, but the thing is the Watch is about as interested in it as most people are into rat shit. Rothwild’s slaughterhouse is attracting some attention, but it’s far enough that any law around Daud’s newest hideout is enforced by either him or some other equally criminal boss. Any guards unlucky enough to be sent here are affectionately named ‘ratfood’ by the locals.

The rats themselves have helpfully cleared out most of the gunk in the sewers and underbelly of the slaughterhouse and the hagfish devoured anything even remotely edible the moment it touched the water, so all that was left was to send a few grenades down and clear out the vermin. He sent Corvo, now already a master assassin, to acquire the goods.

Again, the brunet proved to be full of surprises.

He sits at the desk with a candle, looking over papers and plans. Billie Transverses into his new office, mask off and a grin on her face. “Guess what the little crow’s been up to?”

Daud keeps his face impassive, and wonders if Billie knows – and of course she does. Billie is always attentive, and Daud knows that she has seen him keeping a closer eye on Corvo than the rest. He tells himself that it is because Corvo has potential, because Corvo is strong and smart and growing into something fascinatingly dangerous.

And when his thoughts reach that point, he stops prowling the crow from the rooftops, and makes his way back to the office to sit and stare at nothing in a stupor that is a horribly inefficient waste of time, and if he was a lesser man he would be reaching for the whiskey.

But in the present, in his office where Billie Lurk is standing and watching with that faint sly smile on her dark face, he waits to hear what the woman will say. He’s certain that anything he can imagine will be blown out of the water by the reality. He is not disappointed. “He got the grenades?”

“Plucked ‘em right out of the lockers in the Abbey’s base, I heard, then tethered the rest. Intercepted the new shipment, too. He could blow up Dunwall Tower if you threw him hard enough right now – that’s why he’s still tottering his way back slower than a blood ox. Thomas said we’d have to organise a chain from John Clavering Boulevard to here to get them all before sunrise. I wish he’d taken their masks too, just so I could see their faces when they found out.”
Daud takes a moment to process this. He thinks it over again, in case he missed something. When
he speaks, his usual gruffness has been chased clean away by disbelief. “He took… all of them?”

“Looks like it. He also got a few confiscated runes and bone charms, about six hundred coin’s
worth of funds, two tins of whale meat and nine City Watch pistols. Got some of that Elixir too, in
case the plague gets any worse.”

…what.

Daud blinks, slowly, and checks the room for floating objects in case the Outsider is feeling bored
today.

Billie waits a few more moments before adding helpfully, “He made multiple trips back.”

Right. That explains everything. Absolutely.

He gets Corvo in his office at around midday, after organising the careful storage of enough
explosives to render the surrounding area a barren, pockmarked wasteland. From his estimates, a
mere ten percent was used to clear the rats in the tunnels.

All of the tunnels. For a ten mile radius. They had to do it in shifts.

Corvo himself looks no worse for wear, and Daud isn’t sure if it’s youth or just because he’s
Corvo and Corvo does crazy shit. Corvo does crazy shit has become something of a Whaler
memo in the past few years, ever since that time he threw a Tethered roast at Lord Prismall’s face
so Thomas could drag away his sleep-darted guard.

“So I don’t believe that you got all the grenades in the Office of the High Overseer while avoiding
the patrols,” Daud says, staring at the boy before him. “But nobody wants to tell me how you did
it. You had the command on this mission. So tell me, Corvo. How. Did. You. Do. It.”

He gave the order for grenades. He wasn’t going to move the assassins again because some idiot
had decided that this meant all the grenades, especially if he went in there and slaughtered most of
the city’s religious order while he was at it and brought the Watch down on them all.

Corvo tells him how he did it.

He listens, then dismisses the assassin with a curt, “Don’t get too cocky, kid.” Watches Corvo
walk out the door, not with an assassin’s stalk but a Lord Protector’s stride.

He tries to hide his shock through brusquely going through the papers on his desk, and when the
footsteps fade, he simply sinks into his chair. He’s not sure how long he sits there.

He turns over Corvo’s story in his mind, checking for cracks. Checks his outside sources. Lays
awake at night, thinking about that decision all those years ago to make this abandoned Serkonan
brat an assassin, and thinking, what have I done…

Daud pushes away the thought that whatever it is, it was worth it. That even if every Overseer in
Dunwall is to storm their base right now, it would be worth it. That Corvo is worth it. Dangerous
thoughts are to be locked away, like criminals in Coldridge. Thoughts of Corvo belong in the
Coldridge of his mind.

The Overseers that were on patrol the night Corvo made the grenade run wake up on various
rooftops and in dumpsters, and one on an air vent. But nobody has as bad a week as the guy who
had been smothered with drugged wolfhounds while he slept.
The High Overseer's reaction to the missing grenades was described as ‘explosive’ by Dunwall's gossip, and for once the various writers of sensationalist nonsense did not have to exaggerate at all.

Of course, they did it anyway.

Chapter End Notes

Aw Corvo you're already growing into the kleptomaniac I play you as. Daud, what have you done indeed. Also, Dunwall's sensationalist writers - probably this guy: http://dishonored.wikia.com/wiki/The_Knife_of_Dunwall,_A_Survivor%27s_Tale

For such a dark game Dishonored does have it's little laughs tucked away here and there!
Matthias returns!

Matthias ‘Bloody Stupid’ Ox was at it again. Apparently the grenade affair had reawakened the smouldering embers of his hate for Corvo Attano. There comes a day when Daud feels an air of fear and trepidation in the slaughterhouse that doesn’t come from all the leviathans butchered over the years.

The hushed whispers get on his nerves, and in the end he grabs Yuri as he attempts to flit past and demands answers. There is only one.

Somebody put a hagfish in Corvo Attano’s bed. It was still alive.

Death is nothing new or unusual amongst the assassins, and they have lost many friends over the years. Faces come and go, covered as they are by the vapour masks. No, death is not what they fear – it is Corvo. Corvo does not kill. Corvo does not discuss. Corvo takes action. Corvo is worse than death.

Reports that Matthias is missing arrive at noon. Daud lets Thomas deal with the search, and it is a half-hearted attempt despite the man’s best efforts.

The splash is heard at around one o’clock.

They find Matthias ‘Bloody Stupid’ Ox. He drags himself out of the river in a shower of river muck and gore (blood ox offal, from one of the nearby slaughterhouses, Daud assumes). His clothing is in tatters. They find a hagfish in his boot, and they throw it back to join its well-fed brethren.

Daud notes that while Corvo may have discarded his honor, he has retained his pride. Daud should be angry at this petty retaliation – Matthias’ uniform is ruined, the man has a cold, there are bandages and salves and those things cost money…

But nobody mentions the incident to Daud, for fear of Corvo’s wrath. And for some reason, Daud is convinced that this means that Corvo need not be punished, because if no one reports it to him then he would not know why he sees one of the assassins is sopping wet and covered in hagfish bites.

Daud isn’t sure why he’s completely eschewed logic. It might be the fumes from the whale oil that the butchers and thugs throw onto the fires. That, Daud concludes, is definitely the reason, because whales (well, one whale) have always been the cause of chaos and uncertainty in his life.

Corvo does things his own way, and for some reason Daud sees no problem with that (he sees all the problems, but he pushes them to the back of his mind and seals them tight).

Corvo has a certain way of dealing with things. Guards are left sleeping, civilians untouched. And the targets… when they are found dead, it is a mercy. When they are missing, they are never
found.

Slowly, the whispers start. The Raven of Dunwall. The shadow that put people to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Looks like Corvo is already turning into the troll I play him as. And Daud is still in denial.
Trick or Treat

Chapter Notes

So, the more I read this chapter the more I feel like it could have been written ten times better. I guess it's because this is actually the first chapter I wrote in the entire fic. Oh well.

Thank you to everyone that left kudos and also special thanks those who commented on the last few chapters - I never expected the story to reach 1000+ hits, and the comments really help motivate me (Er, to do my exams. But exams are over now, so they'll motivate me to work on this instead).

Corvo is loyal to a fault. Daud finds himself musing on this fact, and wonders just how far his little crow is willing to go on orders (but are not Thomas and Billie and so many others also loyal? Why focus on the little crow? Daud pushes the question out of his mind – he knows the answer, but he dares not acknowledge it). So he arranges for the boy to meet him one evening in his office. Makes sure nobody dares to interrupt. Instead of staying at his desk, he climbs to the loft that is his bedroom and pours himself half a glass of golden whiskey, nicked from yet another corrupt noble.

Corvo arrives early, just before sunset despite his mission. Always full of surprises. Daud takes a sip of the whiskey, swirling it around his mouth and making sure he can smell the alcohol on his breath. Then he waits. The boy is smart – he would notice the lack of other assassins in the room, the fact that the desk is clear of paperwork. Daud’s gear safe in its box. The half-empty bottle of whiskey that Daud poured down the sink. The assassin makes his way into the office and across to the stairs, his footsteps heard clearly on the wooden floor. Daud knows for a fact that this is deliberate – Corvo can be quieter than a shadow when he wants to be; Daud knows that he learned from the best.

The boy ascends to the landing, and takes in the scene before him. Watches as Daud lounges on the bed, clothing undone just enough to be scandalous and not enough to make it look like the Outsider himself had possessed him. He’s not sure what reaction his men would take to seeing him half-naked unless Dunwall suddenly got hit with a heat wave that made Serkonos look chilly, but the master assassin suspects that it would have something to do with the sharp needles of sleep darts in his flesh. They’re a suspicious bunch, for good reason. Daud hasn’t done seduction in a long time since his scars made him go from ‘dangerously alluring’ to ‘seen the inside of a meat processor’. That was left to the younger assassins these days. But he’s not aiming for seductive – he’s aiming for dead drunk.

Corvo gives him a salute and stiff bow with a curt “Master”, as if the older man was simply standing by his desk and poring over the latest requests. There’s few he’s seen quite as unruffled as Corvo, and Daud wonders if it has something to do with being prepared for the position of Lord Protector. Failed candidates often became bodyguards of some sort or another and the things that would go on at the wilder parties of the nobility meant they had to have all the libido of a rock. But he’s not the Lord Protector – he’s one of Daud’s, and the older assassin relishes this fact more than he would admit.

“C’mere,” the master assassin slurs, gesturing with a gloved hand. Corvo obeys. “Undress.”
Thomas would be stuttering right now. Billie would be looking for a knife – in either his hands or one for herself. Several of the newer recruits would probably break into nervous laughter, wishing that it was some obscene joke.

Corvo obeys.

He’s blossomed into manhood, if that was even a proper expression. A steady diet of strictly rationed meals with the occasional tidbit nabbed during jobs over the years means that he’s lean, but maturity has turned that leaness into something attractively dangerous – like a wolfhound, all muscle and sharp-edged grace. Daud’s favouritism, if it can even be called that, has meant that his physique is honed as perfectly as humanly possible through rigorous training in various arts of stealth and combat. His hair is still kept long despite Daud’s repeated insistence to cut it short for practical purposes, falling in waves of dark brown. The keen eyes take in every detail with the gaze of a proper assassin – and a damn good one at that, able to make a wristbow shot from the tallest of Dunwall’s rooftops. He places the vapour mask carefully on the box at the foot of Daud’s bed, taking off belts and boots and weapons with equal care. He’s not hasty and he’s not teasing. Interesting.

Daud wonders how long he should keep the game up, but then decides that to go further would be moot point – he’s got all the information he needs for now. Throwing off the pretence of drunkenness (had Corvo fallen for it, or was he just playing along?), he commands briskly, “Alright Attano, that’s enough. Mission report and then get outta here.”

The boy looks up from his half-unbuttoned shirt. The look is more loaded than his grenade pouch after an Overseer run.

Corvo slips into the bed, slender but muscled arms pinning the older assassin to the bed. Daud’s mind is torn between wondering when the boy became so strong or when he became so fast. A knee slides between his splayed legs as brown hair tickles his face. And as he looks into that blue-grey gaze and cocky grin, he remembers something.

Corvo plays by his own set of rules.

Any chances of further pursuing that line of thought are cut short as Corvo kisses him.

Chapter End Notes

Um... so that's pretty much the extent of any mansex you're going to get. Sorry. I haven't grasped the intricacies of writing decent sex, so this is all I can offer.

Well Daud, I suppose the proper expression here is 'biting off more than you can chew'. Can I just point out how frustrating it is to be limited to Daud's POV? But it's needed, so I guess I have to stick to it. Corvo remains a mystery! And a hot one, at that. Until next time, readers!
I never expected to reach over 100 kudos. I never expected much at all. Thank you, to everyone who's read this and found it worthy of such praise. Thank you. I am also grateful to all who commented, and all who found this story enjoyable!

Now for some pointless fluff!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Corvo was much more open after that. The quiet, pensive boy became a curious young man who had constant questions that rivalled Billie in their quantity and Thomas in their absurdity ("What’s a ‘gaffer’, master?"). His Serkonan accent has all but disappeared, and Daud found himself thinking the word ‘lithe’ less and ‘graceful’ more as he watches him train. Stops likening him to a crow, more a dancer. And now he knows when that cocky smile flits across the assassin’s face, when his head tilts just so after he’s done a particularly difficult shot or Transversed mid-jump to avoid a thrown rock during training. Daud suspects that the reason why he only knows the smile is that it is meant for him.

Especially at night.

Corvo begins bringing him gifts after missions. A black-feathered quill. A cigarette case. A bunch of Serkonan grapes, green and juicy and perfect for sharing. He hunts for runes and one day Daud finds his desk heaped with them, whispering and humming. Daud begins to notice a strange feeling in a heart he had thought long since shrivelled, and angrily tells Corvo to never let him see this kind of behaviour again.

Corvo obeys.

He does it in secret after that. He’s smart, and subtle. Daud begins to find extra cigarettes in his pack when he is certain that there was only one left. The runes are stashed around the base, in places where they could have washed up by themselves, had they not been so carefully placed in the older assassin’s path. Elixirs and Remedies would appear in his belt just before he left for missions, and when he turned there would be nothing but wind and empty air.

Daud knows when he’s beaten, though he’ll never admit it. Years pass.

They move to the Flooded District, long since abandoned by inhabitants and looters alike. Their powers and skills as assassins mean that the collapsed buildings and flooded streets are no challenge for them, providing a fortress hidden from all but Weeping eyes. Their masks protect them from the plague. It seems perfect, and for the first time in a long while Daud feels safe. The Chamber of Commerce and the surrounding area is more than enough for all their needs, and with the plague steadily getting worse more desperate men and women join his band of heretical killers as the city is taken by the rats.

They never find any more Corvos. All of his best are seemingly unique in their own way, but Corvo is the best of them all – he has Billie’s skill and attentiveness, Thomas’s loyalty. (Daud’s cunning and foresight as well, the master assassin suspects). Perhaps he is even better than them all. Corvo is a one many army. Daud even finds himself discussing assignments with him,
planning out jobs and meetings and what to do to those few that were stupid enough to refuse payment. Corvo’s creative – for him, death is a mercy, and the alternatives he suggests sometimes make even Daud flinch. He asks Corvo’s preference on which missions he undertook, letting refusal slide without the slightest of glares. He avoids mentioning those near Dunwall Tower, and Corvo never reveals anything about the palace’s defences or inner workings. The days pass like this.

The area above his office has enough space for two beds, and after a brief internal debate that should have lasted much longer, he buys two. Were it any other two men but the Knife of Dunwall and the Raven, there would have been whispers. But the assassins are trained to be silent. There are two beds in the area above his office.

The nights pass like this: Corvo usually slips into Daud’s bed anyway, and claims that it is because it is closer to the stairs. Daud grunts in reply, and pulls the younger man closer. They are too big for the bed, and have to squeeze in lest one of them tumbles to the floor. Somehow, Daud does not mind, feeling soft hair underneath his chin and the quiet breaths ghosting across his chest. Sometimes as the younger man sleeps, Daud traces the intricate markings that snake their way up his left arm to the elbow, feeling the low hum of the Void through the bond – even when he is naked and vulnerable (is he ever truly vulnerable? Ever truly naked, with all his secrets and the things Daud knows he never says?), Corvo is still undeniably his. When Daud flings an arm around a toned waist he says that it is to keep the idiot from falling off the small bed and injuring himself and ignores the way the man smiles as he dreams.

For the first time since setting foot in Dunwall, Daud feels like he has a home. For the first time in his memory, Daud feels like his life is worth living.

Corvo sighs happily and snuggles closer, unrepentantly stealing the blankets.

Chapter End Notes

The love is there, no matter how hard Daud tries to deny it. The big question is when he will stop denying it. Maybe never! Will he ever confess to Corvo?

(Corvo doesn't need you to say it - he already knows!)
Regicide

Chapter Notes

Thanks again for everyone reading this, and I hope you continue to enjoy this Whaler!Corvo AU.

When the request to assassinate the Empress arrives, Daud does the usual. Haggles the price up, drafts possible plans, hits his contacts, checks the schedules and supplies. Corvo’s patrolling near Kaldwin’s Bridge, taking it easy after getting caught near an explosion caused by a stray bullet and a tank of whale oil – but he’s fast with his Transversals, and the rest of the assassins joke that it’s his ears that need healing after the way Daud had shouted till his voice was more gravelly than ever, about safety and responsibility and how our group can’t afford to lose you. They’re still getting used to the Void-damned things lying around, glowing unnatural blue and oh so volatile, and Daud doesn’t like the new pistols. They’re killing an ocean’s worth of whales now, and Daud wonders if the Leviathan is angered. It has been a long time since that cocky Serkonan brat with the ‘witch’ for a mother had heard the black-eyed god’s voice. Daud finds himself thinking of another cocky Serkonan brat, and wonders if such a visit would be a blessing or a curse.

Either way, he has Thomas tailing the brown-haired idiot. His little crow has a favourite perch high on Kaldwin’s Bridge, and it’s just Daud’s luck to lose him to a strong breeze instead of any number of City Watch Officers.

He chuckles. Corvo is peerless. And Corvo is his.

And, as he becomes aware of the reflection of a vapour mask in the metal surface of his desk, Corvo should stop reading things over his shoulder.

“Master,” the assassin says with a bow. Daud used to think that they were formalities picked up from years in preparation as Lord Protector, but now he recognises the differences between each angle and pause. Corvo is almost silent, but he still speaks volumes to those who listen.

“Something wrong at the Bridge, Corvo?”

“No, sir.”

Daud gauges what he’s supposed to say next. There are times when Corvo abruptly shuts people out, and times when he will say nothing until prompted. Very specifically. “I don’t expect you to participate in this mission.”

There is a pause. “Then you should refuse.”

This comes out of left field, and leaves Daud raising an eyebrow at his protégé. Even after all these years, was the kid still a Lord Protector at heart? “Corvo, I’m going myself. I plan to take Billie and Thomas. You know I don’t do half-measures. We’re taking the best.”

“You’re never careful enough, old man,” Corvo answers, his head tilted to the right. But the angle is wrong. He’s bluffing, and Daud is going to get to the bottom of this cheerful façade and rip out whatever is troubling the assassin. He’s about to retort when Corvo throws his coin pouch at him.
Daud pats his belt and curses. “Not everyone’s as good as you, Corvo.” Not even me.

Corvo considers this, and finds his answer insufficient. “Don’t go.”

Daud wonders just what the assassin is playing at. Were they lovers? He doubts it – he treats Corvo twice as harshly than any other under his command with any mistake the young man makes, and Corvo always rises to the challenge. Was it fear? Surely those grey eyes would have picked out the note promising the absence of the guards and Lady Protector. Daud didn’t know. Perhaps he would never know.

“Some people deserve more than a mask and a blade,” the younger man says before Transversing away. Daud is left staring at empty space, and he’s not sure if it refers to the silence in his office or that place he refuses to acknowledge in his heart.

Corvo was an enigma, and while sometimes it proved interesting – even fascinating – right now it was giving the older man a headache. He’ll kill the Empress, and that is his final decision. Daud sends out the word with Billie and Thomas and forces himself not to talk to Corvo, who spends the rest of the evening sparring with the newest recruits and then sleeps – for what seems like the first time Daud can remember – in his own bed. Daud ignores him.

He regrets it later.

Corvo is gone by morning. He finds his mask and uniform folded carefully on top of the box at the foot of his bed. His sword lies cushioned on the coat. There is a rune there as well, whispering accusingly – a final parting gift.

Daud can read the message this time, loud and clear.

He tries to block it out anyway, and plans for the death of an Empress.

And the silence is all the more deafening without quiet Corvo by his side.
The Protector

Chapter Notes

Well, sorry for the lateness. I decided to take my time and put up some quality instead of just throwing something half-baked out there and beating myself up over it later - it’s the last chapter of Road Not Taken, so I might as well make it good.

I sincerely thank everyone who's read this fic and comments, left kudos or just plain enjoyed it. I've never written anything this popular, and I'm honoured to be part of such an immensely talented fandom that nevertheless finds my fic worthy of such praise. So, thanks to all of you, and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He goes without his mask. He doesn’t know why. He tells himself he doesn’t know why – pushes the name Corvo out of his mind, like pushing his blade through a heart.

He’s killed before. Why should an Empress be any different?

Burrows, the miser, made sure the Lady Protector was well away to keep the price low. Well, as low as possible for the assassination of an Empress. Even the guards were led away. Daud would have laughed at how unbelievably easy the job was – an Empress! – except even getting out of bed had been difficult today.

Thomas is by his side. Billie is backup, watching for the slightest sign of things going wrong. Daud trusts the Royal Spymaster about as much as he trusts hagfish, and even then the fish are prettier. He makes his way to the roof, with all of his best behind him.

All except for Corvo.

Keeping focus on the job is the key here. He peers at the target, alone with her daughter, distracted by both her anger at Burrows and the task of entertaining Emily. She’s trying to keep the smile on her face, like how she’s trying to keep the dying city alive – desperately, dutifully, barely. Daud almost wishes to give her the time to muster up one last laugh for her daughter. He’s getting sentimental, he knows it.

Normally, he’d send in his assassins first, just in case. But Corvo is gone and he’s killing an Empress, so he Transverses to the gazebo. Another flash and he’s in front of her – she sees his face, and she tells her daughter to run. He raises his sword to strike her.

The blades meet in a clash of ringing metal.

“You are not Giselle...!” the Empress gasps. Daud knows that she will not return for at least two days. The man that stands there in the gold and navy coat of the Royal Protector is…

“Corvo.” Daud hisses the name between gritted teeth. His former protégé places a gloved hand on the flat of his blade. With a grunt, he pushes the older assassin back.

There are a thousand things Daud could say right now.
He lunges at Corvo with a wordless snarl of rage. They dodge and deflect, Transversing and slashing at empty air each time. Daud trained Corvo. Corvo learned from Daud. Their mirrored dance means that they never touch, and Daud fears that his age may be working against him.

Corvo’s sword, a shoddy blade stolen from some guard, makes a gash along Daud’s side when he leaps too slowly, staining his red uniform with scarlet. Of all the ones he suspected, Corvo had never crossed his mind. “Traitor.”

But then the other assassins arrive.

Thomas grabs Emily, Transversing away from the Empress’s grasping fingers. Billie and two others fight Corvo. The bastard’s gotten a pistol from somewhere. He’s winning against the younger two – and no wonder, he probably had a hand in training them and to him they telegraph each blow as clumsily as a Bottle Street drunk.

But Daud should focus on the job. He grabs the Empress, just as Billie manages to Tether their elusive crow. With one last look at Corvo through a haze of pain, Daud shoves his blade through the target, her royal blood staining his blade like to many others before her.

There are shouts coming from beyond the gazebo. They’ve heard Corvo’s shots. An alarm’s gone off, and people are running. Daud gives the order to leave, and the assassins disappear in flashes of shadow along with the heir to the throne.

And he’s run out of power.

Daud realises this too late, scrabbles for a Remedy. He hadn’t packed one.

Corvo has always given him his Remedies. “You’re never careful enough, old man.”

Damn bastard Corvo. He looks over to the man, with his sword stained by Daud’s blood. He’s listening to the dying words of the Empress, crouched beside her with his dark hair hiding his face. Is this some final slight? Through a haze of blood loss, Daud wonders if the Royal Protector’s uniform the traitor wears is symbolic or something. Defending the Empress. Against Daud. Probably ironic, or something. There’s a throbbing pain pounding at his mind and someone’s pounding up the stairs.

The footsteps are close, somebody’s at the gate and fumbling with the keys. Shouting. Lots of men. Hah, pity, they won’t get to kill Daud today. How anticlimactic, to find a scarred old corpse lying next to their precious empress instead of the legendary band of assassins that haunted the night.

He turns to make sure he gets a look at their disappointed faces as he dies, and sees the red and blue behind the pillar. They glint in the sunlight, vivid and bright.

Sokolov’s Elixir. Pierro’s Spiritual Remedy.

He swears they weren’t there before. But it is to quick actions he owes his life to, not slow pondering, and it is a simple decision to choose life over death and drag himself over to the vials that contain the key to his survival.

He Transverses to the rooftop, where Thomas is engaged in a furiously whispered argument with Billie. Probably about him. Daud glances back at the gazebo one last time, and sees Corvo lay the Empress down gently on the stones.

Then he stabs her.
Well then, must be a habit or something.

Daud makes his way back to the outpost and gets proper treatment for his wounds. Yuri has a bullet in his thigh, Ishmael a light cut across the shoulder. Several of the younger assassins – Desmond, Connor – apologise for retreating at the sight of Corvo. Daud growls something at them, but he knows that deep down, he was an idiot not to do the same.

He was going to die, but apparently there’s somebody out there watching for him.

And he doubts it’s that black-eyed bastard from his dreams.

Chapter End Notes

Unanswered questions, badly written fights, Corvo sneaking into Dunwall Tower! So ends Road Not Taken. Oh Daud, how little you know. The next instalment will come out... sometime? Keep an eye out for the continuation of our little Raven's adventures in Dunwall and his grumpy boyfriend assassin master.
Corvo’s in Coldridge. The new Lord Regent sent Daud a letter, commending him on a job well done. Talks about how perfect it was for Corvo to have been there, standing over the corpse of the Empress with his blade in her belly; two birds with one stone, Burrows says, two traitors gone from their ranks for the good of the city. The Spymaster goes as far as calling it ‘mutually beneficial’, and Daud wants to gag, or punch the bald bastard in the face or both. The letter says Corvo let the guards drag him away – Burrows says that it was an admirable feat that Daud tired the Dunwall Raven out sufficiently, so that the fight had gone from him.

Daud burns the letter. The Corvo the he knew always had fight left in him.

The question is whether the Corvo Daud knew was the real Corvo at all.

And Daud curses the part of him that reasoned gold was incentive enough to leave a man to die.

To be continued...

Right, and there's the final very last actual ending. And now we are done with Daud's grumpy thoughts (I lie, there'll be more of those for certain). Also, special thanks to my beta reader, Plexus (toitsu), who helped me work out all the little bits and bobs that I just couldn't figure out on my own, and was a wonderful friend as a bonus. Please wait patiently for the sequel, The Raven!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!