Captivating

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by SilverInk

Summary

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“Why?” She tilted her head to the side. In the firelight, her features became sharper and the scar across her cheek looked more prominent. She looked fierce, and yet her expression was so soft, and that summed up her essence to him. He couldn’t resist smiling and taking her hand.

“I doubt you have another bed for me to use,” he pointed out, amused. She probably did have extra furs, and he could sleep on the floor if necessary, but he doubted his body would take kindly to that. He would be in pain the next day, surely, and he would rather avoid it if he could.

Eivor just grinned and raised an eyebrow. “Another bed? I would prefer to have you in my bed, Hytham. If that is acceptable to you, of course,” she added, and Hytham’s breath caught for a moment.

“Yes,” he said quickly, “yes, of course that would be acceptable.”

She laughed softly, relieved, and kissed him for the first time that evening.

A rainstorm forces Hytham to stay in the longhouse in Ravensthorpe, and he spends the night with Eivor for the first time...

Notes

Part 2 of Hidden Depths!!! <3

Again, reposted from AO3. I’m also SilverInk there, I’m not stealing her identity!!

Eivor had been gone for two months on her latest venture to win alliances in Lunden, and Hytham missed her fiercely. The two of them had spent a lot of time together before that time, eating meals together, going out into the countryside for a few days on their own, or watching the stars. Hytham had told her what he remembered learning of constellations and the stars and planets in the House of Wisdom, the great library in Baghdad, and Eivor had listened with rapt interest, laying next to him on the blankets and pillows that they'd brought up to the hilltop. The lines of their bodies were pressed closely together, and Eivor mindlessly took hold of his hand as he talked and played with his fingers in a way that made his heart ache with joy. Now that she was gone, his mind kept going back to that night and hoping they could repeat it soon.

In the meantime, he had been training. His body was stronger than it had been since his injury, now. He had been working hard alongside others in Ravensthorpe in the grain fields, and as long as he didn't push himself too hard, he didn't really feel any pain anymore. He didn't think he was able to hold as much air in his lungs anymore, which he would need to accept, and he was trying to adjust to.

There were a couple of days when he had pushed himself too hard and had ended up doubled over in pain, struggling to breathe, and someone had forced him to go to Valka's hut. The healer was pleased with how well he had been doing, but chastised him, rather fondly, for overworking himself. She gave him something for the pain and something to relax his muscles, and let him rest in her hut.

All in all, though, he was doing well. He was strong; it had been a long time since he'd felt physically strong.

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It seemed there were multiple Order members infesting the city of Lunden, ruling it with their iron fists. Hytham was frustrated that all he could do was wait, but at the same time, he had faith in Eivor, that his decision to bring her into this was the right one. He heard word from a contact within the city that the Compass, the most senior Order member there, was dead, and then a day later, Eivor returned to give him the full report herself.

Hytham listened to the story of Eivor's alliance with the Reeves Stowe and Erke, and how they uncovered the Arrow, the Leech, and the Compass together, writing down the general information in scrawling Arabic that he would need to rewrite into a proper report to send to Alamut later. He asked questions, focusing intently on her words and on his parchment and quill, because if he didn't, he would become hopelessly distracted by Eivor herself — her eyes, her smile, concern for her wellbeing — and then he would be utterly useless as a Hidden One. He could not let that happen, and so he clung to his stoicism until she was finished.

“Is something wrong, Hytham?” Eivor asked, finally, after he had rolled up his scroll of notes and set it on the shelf. “You seem tense. Does this — ” she gestured to the page, “ — worry you?”

“No, not at all.” He turned back to her, feeling slightly guilty that he had made her concerned for him. He took her hand tentatively, then smiled, taking in her face fully for the first time since she’d arrived. She looked tired, he realized, and he was glad they were finished now so she could sleep. “You did brilliantly, and it was a true success. I only — I needed to focus on the details of your mission. Before I got too distracted.”

She looked at him for a moment, then grinned. “Do I distract you, Hytham? Did you have to concentrate so sternly on your writing so that you wouldn’t immediately pounce upon me and kiss me?”

He turned his head away, flustered, his face hot. She had a way with words that disarmed him, and she had an almost otherworldly ability to read his mind. She cupped his jaw and turned his head back toward her, still smiling. Now, he leaned closer to her, and she closed the distance and kissed him, like she’d been wanting the same thing this whole time, and Hytham couldn’t help smiling into it too.

“I admire your dedication. Denying yourself what you so desperately desire for the sake of justice against the Order.”

“I am a selfish man, Eivor,” he said lightly. “I can’t give up you or my desire to hunt the Order, and I must have both somehow.”

Eivor raised an eyebrow teasingly. “As you deserve, my dear little eagle.”

He kissed her again. “When I write to the leader of the Brotherhood, he will see how important your contributions to our cause are. And he will hopefully forgive me for taking things into my own hands here in England by enlisting your help, before even asking his permission.”

“He will see the wisdom of it,” Eivor assured him, and Hytham felt deep warmth in his chest at the faith she had in him, despite not understanding the hierarchy within the Hidden Ones and Hytham’s place in it. “He will see and appreciate your wisdom and dedication, and give you the recognition you deserve.”

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The night after Eivor’s return, after she had rested some, there was a feast. Hytham had spent the afternoon rewriting his notes into a letter to Mentor Rayhan in Alamut, and after he had given the letter to their mail courier, who made regular trips to the mainland, he headed to the longhouse.

As soon as he arrived, Eivor met his eyes and smiled widely. There were many in Ravensthorpe that wanted to speak to their strongest drengr, but she stayed by his side as much as possible between those conversations.

She didn't participate in the drinking contests as she usually would, instead only watching and cheering, and drinking only a couple mugs herself. Hytham sat and ate with Rowan and Yanli, and Eivor joined the three of them after a while, to Hytham's delight.

Somehow, the feast ended up being surprisingly short. There was eating, drinking, and merrymaking, as always, but as the stories were winding down, they began to hear faint thunder claps in the distance. People gradually began to leave to secure their shops and homes, but Hytham was not worried about his Bureau. He locked his doors to secure the Order's medallions and his precious documents whenever he left, though no one else in Ravensthorpe could read many of them anyway.

Rowan was one of the first to leave, with a hasty apology, to tend to his beloved horses, many of whom were still afraid of thunder storms. Soon after, Yanli left Hytham and Eivor alone at their table with a significant look Hytham's way that made his face heat up. Of course, Eivor noticed his reaction and glanced at him, concerned, and he did his best to brush it off.

Eventually, without Hytham quite realizing, the storm was fully upon them. The other residents of the settlement were gone by this point, and the rain was pouring heavily, loud on the longhouse roof.

"I am going to bed," Randvi announced. "Please come and wake me if the storm gets worse and someone needs our help."

"Of course I will," Eivor nodded. "Sleep well, Randvi."

"Goodnight, Randvi," Hytham called, and she smiled.

"Goodnight Hytham, Eivor."

With that, they were fully alone in the great hall, and he glanced at Eivor.

"I apologize. Perhaps I should have returned to the Bureau before the rain got so bad…"

"Why?" She tilted her head to the side. In the firelight, her features became sharper and the scar across her cheek looked more prominent. She looked fierce, and yet her expression was so soft, and that summed up her essence to him. He couldn't resist smiling and taking her hand.

"I doubt you have another bed for me to use," he pointed out, amused. She probably did have extra furs, and he could sleep on the floor if necessary, but he doubted his body would take kindly to that. He would be in pain the next day, surely, and he would rather avoid it if he could.

Eivor just grinned and raised an eyebrow. "Another bed? I would prefer to have you in my bed, Hytham. If that is acceptable to you, of course," she added, and Hytham's breath caught

for a moment.

“Yes,” he said quickly, “yes, of course that would be acceptable.”

She laughed softly, relieved, and kissed him for the first time that evening. Hytham squeezed her shoulder and pulled her closer.

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Eivor’s room was small and cozy, with a large bed covered in furs in the middle, and she drew a thick wool curtain across the door behind Hytham as he entered. There was a set of armor displayed in the corner that he had never seen her wear, and he half wanted to ask about it, but she was stepping into his space with her hands on his shoulders, and his back was pressed against the wall, and then she was kissing him again. Hytham groaned and gripped onto the fur of her cloak, then the front of her tunic, his heart pounding. He fumbled with the clasp of her cloak for a moment before he managed to unpin it, and it fell to the ground at her feet.

Seemingly surprised, she laughed softly and gave him a very charming crooked smile, and Hytham grasped the side of her neck and kissed the corner of her mouth.

“Come, let me — ” she murmured in the space between them, and started working on the buckles across Hytham’s chest. When they came undone, he was able to slip his hood over his head, but Eivor just looked at the rest of his armor with her brow furrowed and her arms held out at her sides indecisively.

“You may need to take care of the rest yourself,” she said, laughing slightly. “I don’t know what to make of this.”

Hytham laughed too, and started to unbuckle his belt. There were multiple small buckles at the front, hidden by a piece of leather to prevent them getting caught or ripped, which he undid with ease. “Of course, *habibti*.” He kissed her lightly, then set the belt, and the rusty-brown sash wrapped underneath it, off to the side. Then he removed his leather pauldrons and bracers, including his hidden blade, and he was just in his outer robe, tunic, and trousers.

Meanwhile, Eivor had thrown off her own armor much more quickly. Now, she was just wearing her own long-sleeved tunic and trousers, and she was slipping off her boots. Hytham undid the ties of his white robe and shrugged it off his shoulders, setting it carefully on top of his belt.

“So many layers,” Eivor said, half-laughing. Her own boots and trousers were gone now, leaving her in just her long merchant’s tunic, but Hytham was practically still fully dressed. He laughed.

“I would freeze otherwise! You know what the weather here is like,” he said, teasing exaggeration in his voice, and she laughed.

“Poor Hytham.” She kissed him. “Come here, I will keep you warm.”

It was his turn to laugh, and he let her wrap her arms around him. He buried his face in the curve of her neck, and her fingers scratched through his hair and over his scalp. It felt good, and he sighed, relaxing.

“Hopefully,” Eivor said, her voice quiet and low, “it’s warm enough in here now that even a desert dweller such as yourself won’t be horribly cold?” When Hytham lifted his head to look at her, she was smiling, hopeful and lightly teasing. He couldn’t help smiling back. The fire in the corner was burning high, and Hytham was starting to feel warm, in fact.

He stepped back enough to pull his tunic over his head, and Eivor’s hands were all over him. She ran her hands up his arms and over his chest, and Hytham leaned in to kiss her again.

“Your tunic,” he said, clumsily, tugging on her sleeve, and she nodded. She pulled back and removed the tunic, then her chest wrap, and Hytham pushed his trousers down.

She was beautiful. She looked at Hytham and smiled teasingly, and she pulled him closer and kissed him deeply, which Hytham returned eagerly, cupping her face gently.

Hytham was fascinated with touching the tattoos that decorated her arms and back. He had seen the ones on her arms at least partially, but he couldn’t stop touching the dark ink. Hardly anyone from his homeland or the parts of world he’d seen with Basim had tattoos, and Eivor’s were stunning and done with incredible skill.

She was pale, and he hadn’t thought it was possible for her to be paler than her face and hands were, but it seemed to him that the skin of her stomach and breasts was almost the color of the snow in Norway. He could see a blue vein high on her chest, and he traced it with his fingers. His own hand looked dark in comparison, though he had become relatively pale after so long in cloudy England and sunless Norway, and the contrast was quite beautiful. Like the sun and the moon, if he dared even think it.

Eivor was touching him too, trailing her hand over the dark hair on his chest and stomach, touching the muscles of his chest and arms, seemingly growing restless.

“Hytham.” She took his hand and placed it on her breast, and Hytham’s breath stuttered. He squeezed the soft, heavy flesh gently and she huffed a breath out through her nose. He squeezed a little harder, and Eivor let out a very pleased hum, smiling, and pulled him closer to kiss him hard.

“Shall we move somewhere more comfortable?” she asked lowly, tilting her head toward her bed next to them. It was much larger than Hytham’s, and covered in thick furs. Very comfortable indeed.

“We shall,” he agreed, smiling, and kissed her again eagerly. Eivor grinned into it, and Hytham found himself being pushed gently back, until he felt the edge of the blankets against

his calf and broke away from her enough to lay down and pull her with him, not wanting to embarrass himself by tripping over her bed on their first night together.

She leaned over him and kissed his neck, and down to his chest, and all the thoughts left his mind.

“Relax,” she murmured in his ear, and Hytham shivered and took a deep breath, then another. “Good.” The praise, the way her voice went lower and huskier, and then her teeth nipping at his throat, it all made him shudder again.

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It was beautiful, seeing Hytham let go and fully relax. He was normally so reserved and restrained, but with her, he showed what he enjoyed and showed his emotions, and Eivor wanted to be very gentle with him. She squeezed his strong, muscular thigh, dusted with dark hair, and continued to kiss down his chest toward his stomach, and it seemed Hytham knew what she wanted to do because he groaned softly and his hips twitched upward, brushing his already half-hard cock against Eivor’s stomach. He groaned louder and said something in breathless Arabic that she didn’t understand, but sounded like a curse, most likely. Heat was pooling deliciously in her stomach, and she dug her fingers harder into his thigh.

“I’m sorry,” he said, and she wanted to tell him to stop apologizing, but he kept going before she could interject, “I don’t think I will last long if you are doing what I think you are doing. I have never — ”

She smiled at him and moved up again to cup his square, bearded jaw and kiss his lips, groaning into it herself when he deepened it and bit her lip lightly. “We have all night, Hytham.”

“Yes,” he gasped, nodding eagerly. “Please — ”

“Begging already?” She asked, lowly, grinning as his face flushed darker and he *whimpered* deep in his throat, his thick brows drawn together. “Hush, I’ll take care of you, my dear.” He shivered again, like just her voice aroused him, and Eivor squeezed her own thighs together to get some type of relief; she stroked his shoulder, and decided to have mercy. She returned to kissing his stomach, then his hips, and his hand was gripping his shoulder now, tightly but not pushing her despite how badly he clearly wanted her to move further down.

When she looked up at him, Hytham’s chest was heaving slightly and his face was flushed, and Eivor smiled and pressed another kiss to the inside of his thigh, avoiding the area where he most wanted her attention, where his cock was hard and leaking now against his stomach. She wanted it in her mouth or in her body, probably as badly as he did.

“Alright?” She asked, and he nodded, then laughed a little.

“Much more than alright, Eivor.”

“Good. Now, if you liked that, you will really enjoy this,” she smiled at him, and he shuddered in anticipation.

She stroked his cock lightly for the first time, and his breath stuttered. She leaned down and took the tip of it into her mouth, and Hytham groaned already even as she started to take in more and bob her head up and down. His legs were shaking and he suddenly thrust his hips up, and his cock hit the back of Eivor’s throat, making her gag slightly. She pulled off all the way, coughing, tears in her eyes, and Hytham gave a sharp cry. He threw his arm, the one not gripping her shoulder, over his face, and made another short, desperate sound.

“I’m so s — ” he started, when he’d caught his breath again, and Eivor reached up and tried to put her hand over his mouth, knowing he was about to apologize, but she put her hand high on his chest instead. She could feel the way his pulse fluttered rapidly in the hollow of his throat.

“Don’t apologize,” she said, and she turned back to his cock, holding his hips down so he wouldn’t choke her and taking as much of it as she could at a time. She bobbed slowly up and down, relaxing her jaw and throat, making Hytham moan roughly. Soon her nose was pressed into the thick black hair at the base of his cock that trailed all the way up his stomach. The smell of him, the sensation, made her moan, and Hytham moaned too, a raw sound, and when she looked up his head was thrown back.

He was still gripping Eivor’s shoulder, squeezing rhythmically now, and she could tell he was close. She pulled off of him and felt a delicious stab of heat at the disappointed, almost wounded sound he made.

“I was close,” Hytham gasped, and Eivor sat up and moved closer, pressing her body against his.

“I thought you were.” She kissed his neck with a hint of teeth in the way he always seemed to *love*, and he tilted his head back and shuddered, melting into it.

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“Please, a moment — ” Hytham managed, overwhelmed with the pleasure of being so close to release, and then Eivor’s naked body pressed against his own and her lips and teeth on his sensitive throat. He felt himself *twitch* and put his hand over his mouth and tried to stifle yet another moan, only half successfully.

Eivor put some space between them, stopped kissing his neck, and only left her hand on his shoulder. It seemed to take great effort, because she couldn’t stop rubbing and squeezing his skin, but Hytham closed his eyes and tried to let the urgency fade.

It had been so, so long since he'd been with anyone, and he hadn't had the desire to see to himself in this way while he was recovering. It had been, surprisingly, impossible to stay quiet when he felt so good. He could handle pain in relative silence, but he was unused to pleasure, it seemed. He hadn't realized how easy it would be to get to the edge, and he wanted to satisfy her first.

He was still almost painfully hard, but he thought he was as calm as he could be at the moment. He no longer felt so much burning need, and he released a shaky breath.

"I just needed to calm down," he said, probably unnecessarily, moving the hand still covering his mouth to Eivor's own strong fingers, where she'd started tracing swirling patterns on his shoulder.

She nodded, and squeezed his fingers. "Of course. But," she smiled and spoke quieter, "the point is to make each other feel good. To have fun. It doesn't matter if you reach your release quickly or not at all. Although I think it would be a shame if you didn't, now, but it is not a requirement." She grinned wider, and Hytham laughed faintly, something twisting inside him at the thought of not being able to come after all this teasing.

As always, she was wonderful and so very good to him. He kissed her, and she pressed against him again like she had been wanting to do it this whole time, her soft breasts against his chest, and then Hytham rolled himself on top of her.

Eivor gasped delightedly and lifted her legs up, wrapping one around his waist. She was *flexible*, of course she was, to fight and train the way she did, and Hytham dipped his head to kiss her neck and shoulder.

She gave a pleased moan deep in her throat, then moaned louder when Hytham touched between her legs. He let out a shaky breath when he felt just how wet she was, and he rubbed the folds of sensitive flesh in slow circles.

"Come on," she nearly growled, impatient now, and Hytham obeyed, pressing himself into the silky, wet heat of her. It was almost overwhelming, how good it felt, and his breath caught in his throat in a helpless sound.

"Ah, Hytham," Eivor groaned. He opened his eyes, which he hadn't even realized he'd closed, to see her face looking flushed and nearly as undone as he felt. "How did such a marvelous warrior-scholar as you not have all the women of the Abbasid Caliphate falling at his feet? Surely they realized that such a man, who could master so many languages and wield so many weapons, would be just as quick and eager to learn a woman's body and her heart?"

His hips thrust forward almost involuntarily at the words that made even more heat pool in his stomach, and he dropped his head into her shoulder again, groaning. He was all the way inside her now, and the silky, hot feeling of her body threatened to undo him. She clenched around him, and he moaned even louder in her ear.

"I suppose it is lucky for me, though," Eivor continued, panting, "that those women didn't appreciate your character and your handsomeness, and you were able to cross the whale-road

without attachments, so I could meet you and give you the appreciation you deserve." She kept clenching and twitching gently, probably involuntarily, around him, and that sensation together with her words was driving him to madness.

"Eivor — " he shook his head and swore heatedly, in Arabic, thankful she couldn't understand him, and he thrust into her again, making her cry out sharply. Suddenly worried, he pulled back to look at her face, with all the willpower he had, but her expression was utter bliss. Her pale skin was flushed all the way down her heaving chest, her brows were drawn together, and her mouth had fallen open.

"Again," she said, roughly, and Hytham nodded once. He kept his hips at the exact same angle and thrust again, and she cried out again, throwing her head back. He watched in awe and did it *again*, to the same reaction, her breasts bouncing in a way that was so arousing it felt obscene, like he should look away, except she *wanted* him to look as much as he wished, and so he did…

Hytham moaned, overwhelmed. Her whole body was shaking and she made a small, almost pleading sound, and Hytham stroked a hand down her arm.

"Hush, I have you," he murmured.

"Yes, you do, you're so good Hytham, *please* — "

Her hands came up to scratch down his arms and shoulders, and Hytham gritted his teeth and kept going, feeling powerful in a way he never had before. Eivor nearly sobbed, and on the next thrust, she arched her back and she was coming, moaning in pleasure and relief and clenching impossibly tight around him.

Hytham groaned, desperate, and thrust into her only two more times as she kept clenching deliciously around him, still squeezing his hips with her thighs, before he finished too. It felt like the waves of pleasure went on forever, and he couldn't stop moaning helplessly into her shoulder, until at last it was over.

He kissed her shoulder and her cheek, then her lips, and Eivor sighed happily and smiled. Hytham smiled widely too, feeling the joy and satisfaction that always came over him after such heights of pleasure, and kissed her again. Very carefully, he pulled out of her, making her gasp and twitch her hips slightly with how sensitive she was now. He made an apologetic sound and touched her cheek, then kissed her quickly. He rolled to the side so he wouldn't smother her.

"That was… so, so good," Hytham told her, laughing a little, unable to stop smiling, and Eivor laughed too.

"Oh, Hytham," she grinned, kissing him again. "I'm glad you enjoyed it so much, my eagle. It was incredible for me, too. As I knew it would be with you."

Hytham sighed, happily, and kissed her cheek.

He stretched his arms above his head, feeling luxuriantly satisfied, then wrapped them around her again. “*Ya khilaaba*,” he said, softly, “*jamila*.” He pressed his forehead into her shoulder briefly and ran his hand from her hip up her waist.

She raised an eyebrow, still smiling. “What does that mean?”

For a moment, Hytham traced the swirling pattern of the tattoo on Eivor’s shoulder. “It means — you are captivating,” he said. “Bewitching. Beautiful.”

Sighing again, happy and satisfied, Eivor pulled back enough to look at him, smiling widely with the same deep joy he felt. She propped herself up on one elbow, and with her other hand stroked his face, from his eyebrows, down his nose, across his cheekbones, to his jaw. Hytham smiled back at her. “You are incredible, do you know that?” she asked.

He felt his face heating up, felt the urge to look away, but he didn’t. Surely she could feel the heat of his skin where she was still touching him, if she couldn’t see it, but Hytham pushed on. “For saying what everyone thinks?” he murmured, and Eivor half-laughed, very nearly a scoff, and shook her head to the side.

Her reaction made him upset, and to his surprise, anger flared in his chest. He sat up easily, his legs crossing under him. His eyebrows drew together, and he squeezed her arm firmly. “Everyone *does* think it. The ones that are not charmed by you simply are jealous or want your position and talents for themselves. Or they are your enemies.”

For a moment, she just looked at him, breathlessly, perhaps shocked. She sat up too. “Do you really think that?”

“Of course,” he said instantly, and he could hear now how clipped the words came out, but he barely cared, he only needed her to hear this. “I know it, Eivor. I myself was jealous of how easily you were able to master the hidden blade,” he confessed. She tilted her head, and the anger inside him was starting to fade. “It took me weeks and several injuries to learn to use it, but it only took you a night. But, thankfully, I soon saw past my jealousy and saw the truth of who you are.”

Hytham had also only been fifteen when he received his hidden blade, and had only been training to use a sword for a year, whereas Eivor had been an adult with years of fighting experience. Of course, he hadn’t thought of any of that at the time, but later, the realization had lessened his jealousy somewhat.

And then, Eivor smiled, soft and happy, and she stroked the furrow between his brows until he relaxed. She kissed him again, dizzyingly, and said, “Thank you, Hytham. Your fire, and conviction, and faith in me is awe inspiring.”

Hytham felt the anger leave him all at once, easily, and he ducked his head and pressed his forehead to her shoulder. He kissed her there lightly, feeling a little foolish, and then Eivor gripped his chin and tilted his head up to kiss his lips again. Then she laid down again, on top of the thick furs, and beckoned him to join her.

“Come, lay with me a while.” Her smile was so fond and carefree that Hytham could not resist. He moved closer to her and laid on his back, and Eivor laid on her side and put an arm across his chest.

“Is this alright?” she asked after a moment, lifting her arm off him and half sitting up to look into his face. “I’m not hurting your old wounds?”

“No, no, Eivor,” he assured her quickly. He pulled her back towards him and kissed her, smiling. “It doesn’t hurt. In fact, it hardly hurts at all anymore.” She hummed curiously and touched his ribs very gently, feeling where they had healed incorrectly and caused bumps under the skin. “While you were in Lunden, I spent some time in the grain fields, building my strength back up and learning the limits of my body again.”

“Will Valka have anything to add to this story? About how she had to force you to rest?”

Hytham almost laughed, but Eivor looked concerned still, and so he found her hand next to him and kissed it. “Twice, yes, she had to help me, but after that I figured out where my limit for physical stresses is. I do not want to push myself past that, and I’m not sure I really can. My body just… will not let me. The pain stabs through my chest and I find it difficult to breathe until I lay down and rest.” Frowning slightly, Eivor stroked his cheek. “But, I have accepted this,” Hytham continued, wanting to move the conversation into lighter territory again. “I am learning to adapt to it now. I feel better than I have in many months, and I am still doing fulfilling work.”

She pressed her hand to his chest and laid against his side again. “I’m glad you are feeling so much better,” she said, quietly. “Your strength and optimism, your resilience, continue to amaze me. In this matter, and in regard to the Order.”

Life had worked out for Hytham in seemingly impossible situations before, when he had simply pushed through day by day. It seemed that Allah favored him, for some reason, as he knew that others were not always as lucky as he. He didn’t know any other way to manage than to push through, be hopeful, trust in himself and God, trust in his brothers and sisters in the Hidden Ones, and now in the Raven Clan.

Hytham smiled and pressed his forehead to Eivor’s. “You and your Raven Clan have helped me immensely,” he admitted softly. “As has faith. In myself, and in my God.”

“Good,” she said firmly. “That is important.” She knew almost nothing about his faith, he thought, but her words warmed his heart. “And I am glad you feel so at home among our clan.”

“Of course,” he smiled easily, “you have all treated me like family from the beginning, despite me being a stranger from the other side of the world.”

Eivor hummed. “Of course we did. You are easy to like.” Then she kissed him, and Hytham tightened his arms around her and smiled helplessly.

He loved her, maybe, he thought. It was too soon to say it, but he thought it must be true. He felt at ease with her as with no one else, and he thought that she felt similarly at ease with

him. He relaxed into the furs of her bed, and Eivor settled herself against his side again and relaxed, too.

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