

pushing this luck (all the way to the coast)

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by [alliterate \(rigormorphis\)](#)

Summary

Krem finds himself enjoying the scene: his large and improbable saviour lit up by a flickering fire, glaring at it like he's never heard the saying about watched pots. By the time he's removed the bowl from a fire and made his way over with the water and a pile of bandages, Krem's feeling positively cozy.

Notes

For Stonestrewn, because she wanted Bull/Krem fic that dealt with the eye and had Bull picking out eyepatches with the new boyfriend, and I am a great friend. (And I love her and stuff, I guess.)

Contains: some description of a (canonical) traumatic eye injury; minor DA:I spoilers.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

The guards are dead, and the Qunari had barely paused long enough to wrap a spare piece of cloth over half his face, and Krem's no healer, but he's pretty sure that between the two of them, the man who just took a flail to the *eye* shouldn't be the one supporting him across the wintery Tevinter plains right now.

"You're— are you sure you don't want to find an infirmary?" Krem asks, for what must be the third time.

The Qunari - the Iron Bull, he'd called himself - grins. "Nah."

"Because I know someone nearby. Know *of* them, anyway. Apparently, they don't ask too many questions."

"I've been banged up worse than this, kid. You should be more worried about that hole under your ribs."

Krem frowns at that. He's bleeding, true, but his body has barely registered any pain from where one of the guards stabbed him. Beyond the bruising to his ego, anyway; the knife had been his own. "But your eye."

"Get a couple drinks in me and I'll be fine."

"I'm... fairly certain that's not how it works," Krem says, but then they're stumbling through the door of some hovel and something bumps against the wound in Krem's side and everything starts to spin.

"Fuck, *shit*, sorry," Iron Bull's voice mutters from somewhere in the sudden haze. Krem's feet keep moving, strong hands pushing him along, and when the world rights itself once more, somehow *Krem* is the one being lowered into a chair.

"Wait—"

"Nope. Sit."

Another protest rises to Krem's tongue, but honestly, he's still dizzy enough that he's not sure he could stand if he tried. He keeps quiet. Iron Bull moves to the other side of the dark room they're in and starts banging around, cursing loudly to himself and slamming what sounds like several pots together. Before long, though, there's the unmistakable sound of steel on flint, and the beginnings of a fire start to light up the room.

"Gotcha," Iron Bull says, unduly smug. He grabs a bowl off the table next to him and leans out the window for snow.

The fire grows, and it doesn't take long for the snow to melt above it. Krem finds himself enjoying the scene: his large and improbable saviour lit up by a flickering fire, glaring at it like he's never heard the saying about watched pots. By the time he's removed the bowl from a fire and made his way over with the water and a pile of bandages, Krem's feeling positively cozy.

Then Iron Bull starts to pull at the hem of Krem's shirt and Krem's entire body goes rigid, even before his brain has quite had a chance to catch up.

Surprisingly, though, the big guy gets the picture faster than Krem himself does, and he stops. He drops Krem's shirt and holds his hands up, palms out, like, *My mistake*.

Krem shakes his head a little. "I don't," he starts, but he finds himself unsure where to go with that sentence next. He is, he thinks with some surprise, in rather a lot of pain.

Still, Iron Bull lowers his hands. "Just wanted to get a look at that wound. No funny business." His visible eye narrows, searching Krem's expression. "Whatever you got, kid, it's nothing I haven't seen before."

Krem rolls his eyes. He straightens in his chair - not without a few fresh stabs of pain, mind you - and lifts the hem of his shirt up past the wound, just to his ribcage.

Iron Bull gets down on one knee and peers at him. "Oh, that's nothing," he says amiably, and Krem huffs out a laugh. He tips his head back against the wall. "Way you were going on about it, I was expecting something *weird*."

"You're an ass." He narrows his eyes. "How weird could a stab wound even get?"

"You'd be surprised." Iron Bull retrieves a rag from the water bowl and applies it to Krem's skin. The cool water is even more of a shock than the sharp sting of some of the smaller scrapes. "Lockpicks, writing tools, those spiky things on pineapples. Guys walking around with forks still in them, seen that a lot. I once saw a noble lady stab a man with the heel of her own shoe. Fatal, too."

Krem laughs again, in spite of himself. Iron Bull grins at him and falls silent for a while. He gets to work cleaning the wound below Krem's ribs.

He rests one enormous hand on Krem's other hip as he does so, just to steady himself, and Krem is still with it enough to recognize that on a better day, that alone might be enough to spark his forge, so to speak; it's not like Iron Bull isn't attractive. As it is, he mostly just appreciates the warm point of contact.

By the time Iron Bull finally fastens some bandages in place and claps Krem heavily on the shoulder - "Good as new," he booms - Krem is feeling far more clear-headed. When Iron Bull rises to his feet, Krem stands up, too.

"Now you," he says.

Iron Bull stares at him. Krem gestures helpfully to the chair.

"Unless you think I'm going to find some stilts to prop me up so I can get a look at that eye, you'll need to sit. Go on."

They have another brief staring contest, but finally, Iron Bull sighs and sits. He goes down heavily, the chair's legs creaking ominously beneath him, and crosses his arms over his chest like a petulant child. Krem grabs the rag from the bowl, wrings it out, and leans in.

The wound, when he removes the tacky cloth covering it, is... really not pretty. It seems like his eye was closed when the flail hit him, the one saving grace of this whole situation, but it's bloody and swollen and—

"You're *sure* you don't want a healer," he says once more, just to make sure.

"Nope. I'll get one of my guys look at it next time I see him, it'll be fine."

Krem wipes away some of the blood from Iron Bull's upper cheek and finds several small puncture wounds buried beneath. Not a good sign. "Your guys?"

"My Chargers. Merc group. I'm their commander." He doesn't *actually* puff up his chest like a phoenix as he says it, but it's implied in his tone. Krem hides a smile.

"Why am I not surprised."

"Hey, no judging."

"Who's judging?" The more blood Krem removes, the worse the wound looks. It turns his stomach enough that he's thankful he hasn't eaten since yesterday. "You're probably going to lose this eye," he says, tone mild, because he isn't sure how aware of that Iron Bull is.

"Eh. Wasn't using it anyway."

Krem pauses. He shifts his gaze to Iron Bull's good eye and raises an eyebrow.

Iron Bull just smiles at him.

Rolling his eyes, Krem turns back to the task at hand.

"Aw, don't roll your eyes at me." Iron Bull's voice is far too warm and teasing for someone with fist-sized swelling on one side of his face. "Not when I can't do it back. That's just unfair."

"Get used to it," Krem replies, trying to remove the blood from Iron Bull's lower eyelashes as gently as he can. They're nice eyelashes, he thinks irrelevantly. He'd never really considered before whether Qunari have eyelashes.

"I mean, sure, I could *try* to roll them right now," Iron Bull continues, as if Krem had never spoken, "but I'm not sure how that would work out. Only one way to find out, though."

Krem winces at the thought. "Please don't."

The worst of the blood out of the way, he drops the rag back in the bowl with a wet *plunk* and reaches for the bandages. It's awkward work, with those horns in the way, but he manages to start winding them carefully around Iron Bull's head.

"Oh hey," Iron Bull says, like a thought has just occurred to him, "what's your name, anyway?"

He blinks and stills his hand. "Did I not tell you that already?"

"Would I ask if you had?"

"How would I know?" Krem doesn't think *he* would let someone into his hideout without at least knowing their name. Krem isn't the Iron Bull, though; that much is very clear.

"Cremisius Aclassi."

"That's a mouthful. I'm gonna call you Krem."

"Creative." No point telling him he's gone by that since he was old enough to figure some things out about himself, about all the different ways he could watch soldiers training and want. Not exactly first date conversation, that.

"Hey, we can't all be the Iron Bull." Iron Bull flexes; his biceps bulge to roughly the size of Krem's skull. "Admit it, you're totally turned on."

The whole display is at least as funny as it is impressive, but Krem finds that there's a certain charm to even that. He raises an eyebrow and looks Iron Bull up and down. "Eh."

"Admit it!"

"You're all right."

Iron Bull looks as smug as if Krem had swooned at his feet. Krem fastens the bandages into place and gives Iron Bull's horn a friendly pat.

Now for more pressing matters. Casting a look around the room - the barren, distinctly bedless room - Krem says, "You don't happen to know of somewhere I can stay tonight, do you? Just need to keep away from any more guards or soldiers until I have the strength to start running again."

He thinks it's unlikely that Iron Bull would turn him in, after all this, but that doesn't necessarily mean he wants to keep helping Krem out. Krem knows well enough that some people's generosity only extends so far.

When he looks up, though, Iron Bull is grinning at him. "I can do you one better. How would you like a job?"

It's a week before they reach a town with any kind of smith to speak of, which means it's a week before Bull manages to get himself a proper eyepatch. He doesn't complain about the bandages, lets Krem check them with minimal fuss, but the morning after they get settled in the Chargers' current base of operations, he disappears to find a friend who he says is handy with tools.

Krem's sitting alone at a table an hour or so later, cleaning his armour, when the front door bangs open and Bull reappears with a sturdy-looking eye patch in place.

There's a scratched-up old mirror on the other side of the room and Bull clomps his way over to it. His laugh when he sees his reflection claps through the room like a thunderbolt. "Yes! I knew it! This is badass," he announces. He turns his head, admiring the patch from various angles.

Krem snorts and returns to his armour. Bull describes everything about himself as badass. It should get annoying, Krem thinks, but somehow it just makes him fond of the big lug. Could be the way he always says it - *bad-ass*, that strange inflection, like he wants to make sure everyone within a mile's radius stops to admire how well he can hit things.

To be fair, he is pretty good at hitting things.

"Little plain though," Bull adds. Krem glances up and, yes, he's still marvelling at his own reflection. "I bet if I sent a messenger to this guy I know, back in Antiva, I could convince him to make me something *really* cool."

"What, you gonna get your own horns engraved on your eyepatch?"

Bull looks over at him. He looks genuinely delighted. "That would be *awesome*. But no. I've got a better idea." He starts rummaging around in a chest in the corner, the one with *BULL'S STUFF, FUCK OFF* scratched into the lid.

"Better than your horns? Don't tell me it's the giant nug. I still don't believe you about that and neither will anyone else."

"Nope. Here." Bull resurfaces with a fistful of papers and drops them on the table in front of Krem. Then he flops down in the chair beside him and throws an arm around Krem's shoulders. "Krem! Krem de la Krem. Ha, that's a good one, remind me to use it later. Tell me which of these most says, *I could kill you with my little finger*."

Krem shifts through a few of the papers. They're full of little drawings, sketches of designs of the kind you might see on some lord's heraldry - except, well, more violent. There are dragons, mauls, even, weirdly, spurs. (Krem doesn't really want to know about that one.) There are also several swoopy designs that are so abstract he has no idea what they're meant to represent.

He narrows his eyes at one such design, trying to make sense of all the whorls. "What *are* these?"

"Concepts! I was thinking I should have a symbol, you know, something to strike some real fear into the hearts of my enemies. I was planning to put it on the pommel of a greatsword, or maybe a custom harness, but an eye patch would be *so* much cooler."

Krem laughs, and leans back a little into Bull's arm. He's still not sure how he got here, really: a week ago he was disgraced, a deserter running for his life, and now he's a mercenary who sits around helping this enormous force of nature pick out vanity eyepatches. He says, "The dragon's not bad, but I'd go for one of the less obvious ones."

"Really? And here I thought you couldn't go wrong with a dragon. Well, let's make sure that whatever it is, it's something really gnarly." He turns a little in his chair, toward the mirror, and cranes his head to get another look at his reflection. "Man. I am so gonna get laid tonight."

Krem elbows him in the ribs, hard enough that he's *pretty* sure Bull can actually feel it, and leans forward to get a better look at a stylized, lovingly drawn katoh.

End Notes

That is REALLY not how you deal with a penetrating eye injury if you want to have any hope of keeping the eye. Take your heroic mercenary boyfriend to a doctor, friends and gentlefolk.

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