The Laws of Theodosian Dynamics

by TravelingOsprey

Summary

Marin Alvarado is a damn good engineer, and she spends way too much time at work trying to prove it. When a car crash strands her in a world that is unnervingly similar to her brother’s favorite video game, she knows she is hallucinating, because that is the only rational explanation. Unable to wake up she sets about science-ing the shit out of the Inquisition.
Prologue - The third law of thermodynamics

Chapter Summary

The third law of thermodynamics states that the entropy of a perfect crystal at absolute zero is equal to zero.

I switched off the car engine and slumped against the faded grey steering wheel. Well that day royally sucked.

I got out of the car, and walked to my house. Unceremoniously dumping my computer bag, jacket and shoes as soon as I got in the door. My brother’s voice rang out from the other room. “Hey Marin, working late again.” It was a statement not a question. I only grunted in response. He continued “I ordered Chinese, it’s in the fridge.”

I rummaged in the fridge and pulled out the first container that presented itself, chow mien, and shoved it in the microwave, then I rummaged on a lower shelf and pulled out a bottle of bourbon, and poured a measure into a glass with a lemon wedge and a few ice cubes. After a moment’s consideration I poured a second measure in. It was that kind of day.

As soon as the microwaved buzzed and the food was warm. I slumped on the couch next to my brother, with the drink and the food, put my feet up on the table with a sigh and began ungracefully shoving food into my mouth. He tore his eyes away from Dragon Age Inquisition to give me a sidelong glance. His eyes fell on the double portion of whiskey in my glass.

“Whoa—We celebrating or mourning?” I scowled, and the jovial grin fell from his face and transformed into a frown. “Oh, what happened?”

“They gave the JPL- NASA project to Sanders.” The sentence leaving a bitter taste in my mouth.

“What?!”

“Yea, announced today to the whole company. Its finalized. Done.”
He hit pause on the game, and turned to me “But I thought that was your project. Wasn’t it your idea in the first place? Haven’t you been working overtime on it for months? I can’t even remember the last time you were home on time.”

“Yes, yes, and I think it was some time in April.” I took a big sip of bourbon.

“So…”

“Well, Sanders IS a good engineer with a flawless work record.”

“You could run circles around Sanders—especially on this project”

“I took time off prepping this project. It doesn’t read well.”

“You haven’t taken more than your allowed, they can’t hold that against you.”

“Not officially, but they can worry about my commitment officially.”

He snorted bitterly. His tone matching my dark mood. “Please, you were beyond excited about the project and you wouldn’t take as much time off again—its not as if mom and dad can die twice.”

_No they couldn’t_. Resentment coiled in the pit of my stomach. I couldn’t bring myself to respond to him so I just nodded tersely and took another sip of the amber liquor in my glass.

He somberly said “Sorry Rin.” From his tone, and the endearment that was the shortening of my name, I knew he regretted bringing up Mom and Dad. It was still a raw spot for both of us.

“It’s alright”

“So that was the whole reason then? Just the time off?”
The memory of the horrible meeting early that day flashed back to me.

“This project is going to get a lot of media coverage Alvarado, and Sanders looks like an engineer.” The prick in the suit rambled on, oblivious.

“Excuse me?” I hissed.

“What he means is that we need someone that is good with the media, and Sanders is the best person to represent this project moving forward.” One of the other board members corrected, in the sort of hurried tone that executives only use when they fear lawsuits.

“They said he would be a better face for the project.”

“That’s bullshit.” Leo spat

“He looks like an engineer.” And that, right there, was the crux of it. Sanders LOOKED like an engineer. I, on the other hand, had been mistaken for secretary or intern on more than one occasion. I was just above average height and too thin for my own good. I lacked any of the right curves to be really attractive, instead I was stuck perpetually looking like a lanky teen. Women would always exclaim how lucky I was -- ‘I wish I was that thin’ -- but their fuller figures turned more heads than mine ever did. I had a dark complexion, olive-brown skin, brown eyes, and brown hair that was usually a wavy un-styled mess that fell just short of my shoulders. I wasn’t an ugly duckling, but I wasn’t poster material. Sanders looked like the photo of the guy who came with the frame. Plus, he had connections on the boy’s club that was the board and he knew how to put on a show for the press. It didn’t matter that I knew the project better or that it was my idea. He got to head it up, and went to cocktail hour with the executives. I got to spend my Friday night eating takeout on the couch.

“Well that sucks Marin. They’re all patronizing assholes if you ask me.” He fumed.

I smiled at my brother’s righteous rage on my behalf “And that is why I love you Leo.”

“Well I am supposed to have the corner on the ‘messed up career’ market in this family. Don’t go moving in on my turf, Ok?”
“Speaking of—shouldn’t you be practicing for your audition tomorrow? It is bright and early to the airport tomorrow morning.”

My brother was the most gifted musician I had ever met. Nothing short of a genius, but he had been aimless for a bit, trying to find a direction. Hence, his crashing with me for the last year or so. I had just talked him into flying out to audition for a major symphonic orchestra. It wasn’t what he wanted long term, but it would get him playing again, which might stimulate whatever mysterious muses powered artists. So I was driving him to the airport tomorrow and I was going to use the trip as excuse for a weekend getaway to San Francisco.

“Naa-” He responded “I am as ready as I will be.” Leo had a laissez-faire attitude about life that perpetually astounded me. It was the antithesis to how I approached things.

“Well fine then.” I said ruffling his hair affectionately. He needed a hair cut. “Where are we?” I said indicating the Dragon age game. I had never played but had spent a lot of time watching over his shoulder and was fonder than I cared to admit of the characters of the Inquisition ensemble.

He talked me through his new inquisitor’s back story while I fetched my latest DIY project and settled in on the couch. The new Inquisitor was Male, Qunari, a mage, and angling for a romance with Josephine. (Which prompted me to make plenty Beauty and the Beast jokes). The DIY project was an ukulele. We were dorks.

It made my shitty day less shitty, this comforting routine. He played, I watched while tinkering with my endless build projects and inventions. At the end of the day I had family, a home, a good job I (usually) loved waking up to do, and things I was passionate about. I was a good engineer and I worked hard. I knew that would win out in the end, and things would come right. Today had been a train wreck, but my life was pretty good.
The second law of thermodynamics states that entropy in an isolated system always increases. – All ordered systems trend towards disorder.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing that I was aware of was a biting cold. I could hear a voice calling out, but it was warped, muffled, or maybe that was just me. My head felt incredibly thick. There was a metallic coppery taste in my mouth. Something warm and sticky was in my hair and running down the side of my face. I was bleeding, and by the smell, something, somewhere was burning.

I opened my eyes with a groan. I found my field of view obscured by a deployed air bag and a windscreen that was shattered into so many pieces it was rendered opaque.

Where was I?

My memory was fuzzy, and I was completely disorientated. Out of the fog of my current situation the voice started to resolve itself.

“Hey are you ok? Come on -- wake up.”

The voice was deep, male and it had a pleasant timbre, if a slightly desperate edge. It was coming from my elbow. I blinked blearily and looked over to the driver’s side door and found a man standing there. “Where am I?” I asked, my voice was raw.

“Haven. Are you alright? Are you hurt?” I had NO idea where Haven was. Was it somewhere off the 84? I had been driving on the 84, I think.

“I’m alright.” Then re-assessing my situation “I actually… I’m not sure.” I was in a lot of pain but it was kind of vague, hard to pinpoint. Adrenaline probably, and I was starting to suspect I had a concussion. My brain seemed to be working very slowly. “I’m … cold.” I finally said, failing utterly to put any of these thoughts into words. It WAS bloody cold. Looking around it wasn’t hard to see
why. We were in what looked like caverns made up largely of ice and snow.

Snow? That was wrong. There shouldn’t have been snow on any of the roads in-between my house and San Fran….

Suddenly a horrible dread hit my stomach as a single thought bubbled to the surface of my brain… Leo.

“Leo” I managed with a gasp. “where is Leo?”

The stranger who was fumbling with the door of my car stopped and asked “Who is Leo?”

“Leo, he is my brother, he was with me in the car.”

“There was only you here. A car? Like a carriage? Is that what this--”

I stopped listening as soon as he said I was alone. That was wrong. Leo was with me I was sure of it. Panic gripped me. I scrambled for the seat belt, popped open the door and swung my legs around to get out of the car, shouting “LEO!!!!!”. I tried to stand up, but I realized too late that moving was a bad idea. Shooting pains accosted me from several sides as the stranger raised a hand to halt my rise and quiet me.

“Shhhhh, not so loud. There may be enemy forces still within ear shot, and we don’t want to be discovered. Also I don’t think these caves are super stable, too much vibration could bring the whole thing down on our heads.”

What the hell was he on about?

I sat back down, sideways on the driver’s seat, wincing as I did so. My grimace drew the stranger’s attention. “You are hurt!” The stranger’s tone was almost accusatory.

I nodded absently. I was trying to reason my way through what he was saying. I was not at all comforted about Leo, but I had to agree with him about the caves, they didn’t look super sound. The rest of his sentence made absolutely no sense. Something about this whole situation wasn’t adding up
and it was really starting to bug me. -- And holy shit my head hurt.-- I tried to make some order out of the chaos and focus on my most pressing concerns. Looking down I could see my white v-neck knit sweater was tattered and covered in blood. Ok Marin start with the injuries. “I think I may have hit my head, have a concussion probably. My wrist also doesn’t seem to work like it should, and I am bleeding from my head, and umm… somewhere else. Not sure where.” The car seats where covered in blood.

The man I was talking to was handsome. Not quite a head taller than me, with coffee colored skin, wide brown eyes and curly hair that was cropped close around his head. He was dressed peculiarly, in some sort of armor. I would say that he looked WAY too ready for the renaissance fair, except that he was a little worse for the wear. Blood spatter and singe marks covered his unusual attire. He had deep cuts above his eye and on his cheek. His hands also were covered in what looked like burns. I decided, however, against commenting on any of this. Since my description of my injuries he had started to wrap my wrist using a handkerchief. Best not insult the good Samaritan.

“I am Marin by the way. Marin Alvarado”

“Hi Marin, I am Maxwell Trevelyan, everyone calls me Wells.”

Suddenly it all slotted into place. Haven, the snow, the weird clothes, enemy forces, why he had been so perplexed about the car, called it a carriage. I groaned. Fuuuck.

“So umm… I am definitely concussed then, and hallucinating.” I gave a little breathy hysterical laugh then at the absurdity of it, and regretted it immediately, as sharp pain shot through my side. “Also think I may have cracked a few ribs”

“Hallucinating” He asked his voice pitched with concern. “Why are you seeing things?”

“You for a start.”

“Me?”

“Yea Inquisitor Trevelyan! Herald of Andraste!” I announced the titles with sarcastic pomposity. “Closing sky holes and bringing order to a world gone mad!”

He gave me bemused look. “I’m not the Inquisitor, there isn’t an Inquisitor.”
I shrugged this away with a swipe of my hand. “Ah you will be. That happens later in the story”

“Story?”

“You’re a story. You’re a character from a fantasy video game.”

“Look I know the whole Herald of Andraste thing is…”

“No I mean you’re not real. You, Thedas, Haven, the Inquisition all made up. All make believe, a fairy-story.”

“I am definitely real.” He gave me a look somewhere between alarm and pity.

“I think we are going to have to agree to disagree on that point.” I said with as much humor as I could muster. Trying to put him at ease. Then wondered what the hell that would like to anyone watching from outside whatever head-trauma induced imaginings I had going on. I raised my voice then, to let it carry to an unseen audience beyond Maxwell’s head. “Look I’m sorry to whatever medic or random bystander may be witnessing this. I have had some head trauma and am clearly seeing-and-hearing-things. I probably need medical attention. Also look for my brother Leo, Please. He was in the car with me. He may need help too.”

I waited for a second. Half hoping to get a response – perhaps be pulled back to reality-- but only silence greeted me. After a long uncomfortable moment Maxwell spoke. “I think maybe you ARE hallucinating.”

“Well at least we are on the same page now.”

He cracked a genuine smile then and gave a deep chuckle. He had dimples. “I had better take look at that side, if you could lift up your tunic.” He said pointing at my sweater. I complied. There were purple bruises blossoming all along my rib cage, as well as some wicked looking lacerations. “I am sorry I can’t heal you. I have exhausted all of my mana.” So he was a mage. Because they were totally normal. Marin you have completely lost it. “These cuts aren’t deep, but there is more blood on your top than they would supply...”
“Maybe from the head wound.” I suggested “They are meant to bleed a lot, the head is highly vascularized.”

“Are you a healer?”

“Umm … no an engineer actually” His hands were ghosting over the bare skin on my side as he examined me. It occurred to me that this was incredibly intimate. Unintentionally I blushed.

“I’m sorry.” He said noting my reaction “Did that hurt?”

_Shit Marin pull yourself together._ “No, no its fine, its just… I am quite… concussed.” _Yea blame the head wound._

“Do you think you can walk?” He asked. I nodded and he stepped back and pulled me to my feet. I noticed as he did so that he held one of his arms awkwardly against his side.

“You’re injured as well.” I said.

He gritted his teeth and gave a non-committal shrug in response. I reached up to examine his arm. It was hard to tell under all those clothes he wore, but his arm seemed unbroken and his shoulder was in its socket. But he cried out when I palpated area around his clavicle.

“Broken collar bone. Here.” I said. I unwrapped my red scarf from around my neck and used it to fashion a sort of sling. He had to crouch a little so I could reach up to tie the knot around his shoulder.

“So let me get this strait, you think I am a hallucination but you’re treating my injuries anyway?”

“Well, I am not an asshole Maxwell.” I replied sardonically. He grinned. There were those dimples again.

“Please Wells is fine. Maxwell is so stuffy. And … thank you” he said.
“Don’t worry about it Wells. Let’s just say I owe you a handkerchief and you owe me a scarf. Mind you, it is my favorite scarf.”

“Noted.”

“You shouldn’t move your arm, try to keep it as still as possible.” I said, finishing the sling. “What is the plan then?”

“Well I don’t think we should stay here, we need to make our way to rest of the Inquisition.”

I hesitated. Generally, in when you are lost in emergency situations you are supposed stay put and to let the rescuers come to you. But from what my fuzzy memory could recall I was driving in the early hours of the morning on a winding back road. It would be a long time before someone came looking. Plus, in the game the Inquisitor -- no wait at this point Herald -- did make their way out of the caverns to the camp and was found. If my hallucination mapped onto reality in anyway maybe I needed to follow, it might take me back to the road, to help.

Then a sudden thought occurred to me. I was such an idiot for not thinking of it right away! “Wait” I said “I want to try something”. I lunged into the car and groped for my phone. It was miraculously undamaged. I made a mental note to write a nice review for the tough case I used when I got out of this mess. Then I glanced at the top corner – No signal. Damn it.

I looked up at Maxwell who was staring at the smart phone in my hand. “What is that thing?”

“It’s a phone.” I said, and when all I got was a blank look back. “A device for communication, among other things.” Out of desperation I dialed 911 despite the lack of signal. The call failed to go through. I tried Leo’s number. Same thing. Fuck.

“How is it enchanted?” He said, looking slightly awed.

“It’s not enchanted, it’s just a very complicated machine, and right now it’s not working. Maybe the caves are blocking the signal.”

“So we should go then.” He looked relieved that I agreed with his plan of action.
“Yes,” I agreed. “We should go, but let me grab a few things first. They might help us out.” I extracted my overnight duffel bag for my weekend getaway to San Francisco, and the emergency go-bag I kept in a waterproof backpack, from my totaled car. I paused only shove my purse, and few items from my glove box inside my duffel. I pulled on the leather bomber jacket, and an extra sweatshirt. I would desperately need them against the biting chill of Haven’s tunnels, even if it was a hallucinatory cold. I hesitated before deciding to leave Leo’s suitcase. Both Maxwell and I were injured, we should carry as little as possible. Since Leo wasn’t here, as far as I could tell, His bag could wait. I could always come back and get it after I had gotten some medical treatment.

I pulled on the backpack, grimacing as the action caused the pain in my side to flare.

Maxwell stepped forward. “Here let me carry that.”

“No” I responded “your collar bone is broken.”

“And your ribs are cracked” We stared each other down. “At least give me one of the bags.” He finally conceded

I relented, handing over the duffel “But carry it on your good shoulder.” I also handed over the red cross blanket I got for donating blood, and that lived in the back of my car. It was thin, but it was better than nothing. “Take this too, it is bloody freezing in here.”

He nodded. Slinging the bag over the appropriate shoulder, and wrapping the blanket around him like a cloak. I switched on the flashlight.

He looked at it again with wonder. “No Its not enchanted.” I said forestalling the question on his lips. “Another machine”.

He nodded. But I could tell his curiosity was not sated. “Lets go then?”

“Yea.”

We walked for a while in silence. The cold was biting, and with every step the pain in my head, wrist and side intensified.
Finally, I burst out “I think I need to keep talking.”

“Sorry?” He said nonplused

I continued in a jumble. “I need a distraction, is talking ok?” *Even if it was essentially talking to myself.*

“Sure,” He responded “You probably have questions; I know I do.”

“Ok” I said. “We’ll take turns, I’ll ask one, you ask one.”

“Alright—Where are you from, how did you get here?”

He didn’t start off with a softballs did he. “That’s two questions. Umm… I am from a region called California, In a nation called America, on a planet called Earth. And as for how I got here, I think I got into a car crash and am now hallucinating.”

“Right…” He said slowly “I am not even sure I understood all of that.”

I sighed “The last thing I remember I was driving with my brother in that white vehicle you found me in, a car. Like a carriage but minus the horses. We were going to the …” I paused, trying to figure out how to explain an airport “To a port, of sorts. It was really early in the morning still very dark outside.” I furrowed my brow trying to recall the detail out of the fog in my brain. “Then suddenly there was a figure in the middle of the roadway. I swerved to avoid him, -- at least I thought It was a him. Came to an abrupt stop in the middle of the roadway. Leo --My brother-- he got out of the car, to approach the figure, see if everything was Ok and then…” *and then what?* I groped in my mind for what came next but nothing was there. “and that is it. That’s all I remember up until the point where I woke up with you outside my car door.”

He nodded slowly like he was putting the pieces together.

“My turn now.” I said “ You got two questions I get two questions.”

“Ok” he smiled “Fair is fair”
“What happened on your end, When you faced off with Coryphaeus, did you see my car... what? fall from the sky?”

He gave me a perplexed and slightly alarmed look. “How do you know about Coryphaeus? And that I faced off with him? It only just happened.”

“You’re a hallucination of a story character remember? I know the story. Only it’s a little more complicated than that.” I definitely didn’t want to launch into a full scale explanation of video games and branching RPG narrative to someone who was impressed with a flashlight. “Lets just say for now that there are multiple versions of the story, and in all of them the herald faces down Coryphaeus as Haven falls, and escapes through the tunnels under Haven. In none of them does a skinny idiot fall into the story from earth via car crash.” He chuckled then. “And that’s three questions. So what happened?”

“Corypheaus was holding an orb thing and he was trying to take my mark, he called it an Anchor.” I nodded I knew all this. “I tried to stop him, by… well, using the anchor.” That bit was definitely new. “Suddenly I couldn’t see anything, I was surrounded by darkness, then a blinding light came towards me. I saw a male figure emerge, out of the light… then” A furrow formed between his eyes. I realized that he had some memory gaps too. He continued “Then, suddenly I was back being held up by Coryphaeus, and a rift had opened up behind him. The white thing you called a car tumbled out of it, and fell crashing through the roof of the tunnels and the rift closed. Coryphaeus seemed frustrated. He threw me away from him. Told me I had spoiled the anchor with my stumbling…”

I interrupted him then, I knew how the rest of the story went. “and when you saw Cullen’s flare and Coryphaeus let you get a word in edge-wise you activated the trebuchet, started the avalanche and ended up in the tunnels with me.”

“Right yea.” He gave me a peculiar look. “That is disconcerting.”

“What?”

“That you just … know things.”

“So, I am strange enough to weird out even my own hallucinations, brilliant.”

“Well only the discerning hallucinations” He retorted. Causing me to snort.
“Ouch, don’t make me laugh, it stings like shit.”

“Well I think you have two more questions due to you.”

“Yes. I believe I do” My smile fading from my lips. I hesitated a moment then plunged forward “You’re sure I was alone in the car, in the caves there wasn’t anyone else. Not even …” I swallowed hard, I couldn’t bring myself to say the words ‘a body’.

He gave me a sympathetic look. “No, I am sorry there was no sign of your brother” I nodded and tried to let go of the anxiety. There was nothing I could do about it right now.

“Right, Ok I get one more question yes?… Did you recruit the mages at Redcliff or the Templars at Therinfall?”

The threw me another bewildered look. I was unnerving him again, but he offered up an answer without protest. “Mages. I thought if the mages have an opportunity to put the world right of their own volition, it might go some way to assuaging peoples fears. So many people think us monsters.” The regret in his voice moved me. He cared deeply about this, about a lot it seemed.

I thought through what his answer meant for the world state “Ok so then you had adventures in time with the delightful Dorian Pavus, and red Templars attacked Haven, and Cole showed up at your door to warn you.”

“Right again. Could it have happened another way?”

“In the story there, are two versions… Recruit the Templars, you meet Cole first, and Dorian shows up at the doors of Haven right before Coryphaeus shows up, attacking with the mages. Recruit the Mages and things happen the other way around.”

“So Haven falls, every time, there is no avoiding it?”

I pang of empathy shot through me. “Yes, none of what happened is your fault.” I am consoling a hallucination. A psychologist would have a field day with this.
He hesitated for a moment “If this is a story, then you know the ending.” It was not quite a statement and not quite a question.

“Yess.. sort of” I said, suddenly wary. Hallucination or no, turning prophetess seemed like a bad idea. “Look I think maybe it’s best If I don’t tell you anything about what happens later in the story.”

At that point we had reached the exit to the tunnels and stepped into the open mountain pass. If I thought I had been cold before, it was nothing to what I felt now. I curled into myself and shivered. I pulled out my phone again, No signal. Fucking shit.

“Just one question, looking forward” He asked. He looked as miserable and cold as I felt. It seemed wrong to deny him just one. I gave a nod. “Is there a version of the story where we win? Is it possible to beat him. Corypheaus, I mean?” He looked at me with big eyes full of despair.

“Yes.” I answered simply. “It is possible.” His face transformed utterly. Hope dawning on his features. “Come on,” I said “We need to keep moving, I am pretty sure there are wolves around.” There are no wild wolves in California Marin. Keep it together.

We continued forward. Talking became all but impossible in face of the howling winter winds. We had to stay within an arms reach of each other as the snow was so blinding at times things beyond the reach of your fingers were lost to sight. Moving through the snow drifts was sapping more energy from me than could have thought possible. My attire was appropriate for a mild Northern California autumn, but I was beyond unprepared for this kind of weather. The heat of my body was pulled away from me as though the jacket was no impediment. My gloveless hands went from pins-and-needles pain to numb in seconds. My leather boots weren’t water proof and the snow quickly soaked through the denim of my jeans. I was reminded of the old camping adage ‘cotton kills’.

The first time I stumbled Maxwell offered to carry me. I flat out refused. “I am not some fucking damsel in distress for you to sling about.” I said with more of an edge than I meant it. “and your collar bone is broken. I can manage.” I knew as I said it that that might not be entirely true. I had stopped shivering, which meant I was dangerously hypothermic, and I wouldn’t last much longer. Still, that was not a problem that would be solved by him carrying me, or by us stopping now. “We just need to keep moving.”

“You’re worse than Cassandra” he said in a good humor, considering the circumstances.

“I will take that as a compliment, she is a bad-ass lady. Though I like to think I have better literarily
“What?” He roared against the wind.

“Never mind, just keep moving.”

I stumbled several more times before my legs buckled beneath me, and I couldn’t recover again. I could no longer see Maxwell. I lay in the driving snow as a grey tunnel closed in around my eyes. The last thought I had was that I had made a terrible mistake. My final act of idiocy. I had wandered away from the crash site into the wilderness. I had done what every good first responder will tell you NOT to do.

I was going to die in a car crash like my parents.

I didn’t want to die.

And then everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

The story begins. Please let me know if you have any feedback or if you find typos or grammatical errors. Updates will be slow because... Life.

Enjoy.
Ch.2 - The Copenhagen Interpretation

Chapter Summary

The Copenhagen Interpretation is a commonly held interpretation of quantum mechanics, where an object can exist in multiple states simultaneously, a superposition of states, until observed. Illustrated by the “Schroedinger’s Cat” thought experiment.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I woke up to light filtering through my eyelids and the feeling of slightly itchy linens. A hospital.

I opened my eyes, and had to work for a second to piece together the image before me. I was staring up at the canvas of a tent, illuminated by afternoon light. As I peered around groggily, my eyes fell onto a figure in armor standing by the flap of the tent.

No. No. No. No. This was not happening. I sat up and threw back the blankets covering me. No… they weren’t blankets so much as furs. I looked down at myself and what I had taken to be hospital linens was actually a simple linen shift.

FUCK. FUCK. FUCK. I was not awake I was still hallucinating. How long could this last?

The guard by the door shouted something to the outside of the tent. And a kindly looking older woman in robes rushed in. She had short neatly cropped silver hair… and long pointed ears. An elf, she was a bloody ELF. Fuck I was completely mad.

“Hello dear I am a healer—“

I cut her off “No, no no. This is not real. You are not real. I need to wake up. I need to find my brother.” I ranted hysterically.

She gave me a pitying look and spoke in a light and calm manner that was utterly patronizing “You are awake dear. I understand you’re in shock, been through quite the ordeal, you haven’t healed … “
“No! I am not in shock. I am losing my fucking mind. Thedas isn’t real. You are not real.” I shut my eyes and and chanted softly to myself “Wake up, wake up. PLEASE WAKE UP.” I ended in a frustrated growl. I then yelled, to unseen person or persons beyond my sight “Please help me I am seeing things. HELP PLEASE.”

I continued to call for help. I was aware of a commotion, healers talking about me in edgy voices, but I didn’t care. I didn’t have time for this, I needed to wake up NOW. To find Leo. He was out there somewhere, alone. I needed someone to help me out of this nightmare.

No help came.

Fine… I would fucking do it myself. Perhaps some physical stimuli were needed. I slapped myself. No effect. I pinched myself hard enough to draw blood. That didn’t work either.

The healer then grabbed my forearms in a vice-like grip, I wouldn’t have thought her strong enough to posses. “Stop it dear. You are hurting yourself.” I gave a frustrated cry and flopped back down in bed. I shut my eyes I took deep calming breaths, trying to center myself, will myself back to sense.

Wake up, wake up, wake up, wake up.

There was a conversation happening without me.

“She is in shock, she has been through a trauma and needs rest.”

“She may have important answers.”

“I believe she will be better fit to answer questions later.”

I did my best to shut them out. If I concentrated, If I focused hard enough I had to be able to bring myself out of this. Mind over matter, my mother had always said.

Suddenly, I felt the healer grab my shoulder and give me a good shake. “Dear, can you hear me. I need to you listen. Drink this. It is to help you sleep, can you do that for me?” She held a small bottle of blue liquid in her hand.
Sleep. Maybe that is what I needed. If I slept perhaps I could wake up out of this delusion? Before I could change my mind or chicken-out I took the bottle and swallowed it in one pull.

Instantly my eyelids felt heavy. As my head hit the pillow, A saw a lithe red-headed figure cloaked in purple standing in the corner of the tent. Leliana.

Shit. If I didn’t wake up in reality I was screwed.

****

Whatever that blue tonic was kept me under long past when my brain wanted to wake. I kept coming in and out of consciousness, hearing snippets of conversations happening around me and about me.

“I will not have her treated like a criminal bound and chained, as I was when I fell out of a rift.”

“She could very well be a spy”

“She was terrified that she was going mad.”

“She is not a mage, but something is strange...”

“She wanted to find her brother. She sounded desperate.”

“It could be a trick. We need to be cautious.”

“I have no explanation”

When I awoke fully, it was night once again. This time there was no disorientation, I knew instantly where I was, that my fervent wishing had not worked. I had not willed myself back to sanity. I was
Two guards stood by the entrance to my tent one wore the armor of inquisition scouts, one of Leliana’s people, and the other I recognized as one of the Chargers. I think it was Stitches. I was the only one in the tent other than the guards and neither one was paying close attention to me.

*Where did I go from here? How does one confront the reality of something that wasn’t real?*

Then I noticed why the guards weren’t attentive. A song was wafting into the tent.

*The Shepard’s lost, and his home is far.*

*Keep to the stars the dawn will come.*

I rose from the bed. Pulling the furs around my shoulders to protect against the chill. My feet where bare and ground was freezing but somehow the discomfort seemed to ground me in this strange reality I was experiencing. There was a breeze flowing through the tent and the linen shift I was wearing flapped around my ankles as I approached the tent entrance. Both Stitches and the Inquisitorial scout jumped.

“Sorry I didn’t mean to frighten you. May I go outside? I would like to see.” They nodded stiffly, and I peaked out of the open tent flap. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed the scout leave the tent. She is going to inform Leliana.

*The night is long and the path is dark*

*Look to the sky, for one day soon*

*The dawn will come.*

Our tent was on a slight rise so I had a view of the makeshift encampment laid out before me. It was haphazard at best. Tents, coverings and lean-tos were fashioned out of whatever was at hand and littered the snow covered valley without a discernible order or pattern. The dancing orange light of torches glittered like jewels against the snow. Breathing life into this temporary harbor for the displaced of Haven. As the song carried through the night I could see Maxwell at the center of rings of the faithful. Ragged men and women, were shedding grief and despair as they kneeled before him. Hope was blooming in the cold valley, right before my eyes.
Bare your blade and raise it high.

Stand your ground the dawn will come.

And suddenly I knew what I had to do. I had to tell them; tell them where I was from, what I knew. I understood it wasn’t real. It couldn’t be real. I was totally and utterly convinced of it. But I had failed to wake myself with the means at my disposal and I couldn’t live ignoring the evidence of my eyes and ears. That would drive me mad. If I wasn’t already mad.

I would have to treat it like Schrodinger’s cat. If a cat in a box could be simultaneously both alive and not alive, then I could treat this world as simultaneously both fictional and not fictional. A hallucination and not a hallucination. Do my best to survive and to help until I woke up, or got the right anti-psychotics prescribed to me.

The night is long and the path is dark

Look to the sky, for one day soon

The dawn will come.

I stood and watched as the song ended and the crowd cheered, renewed. I watched the torches move as the masses shifted. Fireflies dancing in the night. The dawn will come… God please let that be true.

The blizzard from earlier seemed to have passed and the sky was clear, inky black and moonless. The stars where more brilliant and more numerous than I had ever seen them on earth. No light pollution in a world without light-bulbs. As I studied them I realized with dawning horror I didn’t recognize a single constellation. There was no Southern Cross or Big Dipper. No Seven Sisters or Orion. Geek that I was, I had always been enamored of the stars and space. I should have been able to find something familiar, but nothing was there. Suddenly I felt more lost and alone and afraid than I had since waking up in that icy cave. More than meeting Maxwell, or seeing an elf, these foreign stars made me feel utterly alien.

“Aren’t your feet cold?” An accented voice said from behind me. I jumped. I had been totally lost in my thoughts. Leliana stood behind me. The game didn’t quite do her justice. She had a powerful presence, piercing eyes and copper-red hair set in a pale face with strong cheekbones. She was lovely. Silk hiding steel. I understood why she had made both a good bard and a good spy.

“Yes, um actually” I said, “But I don’t know where my things are.”
“We have all things that you carried with you. You’ll forgive us prying, but you are a stranger carrying strange things. Precautions needed to be taken.”

“Yes … I understand.”

“I am …” She began, but I interrupted.

“Leliana, the Nightingale, veteran of the fifth blight and left hand of the Devine.” As I said it I realized that revealing how well I knew her, and by extension the Inquisition, right on the off, was perhaps not the best way to convince her I was trustworthy. Hello foot, welcome to my mouth.

Leliana was studying my face coldly. Perhaps trying to sense my motivations? Or maybe she was trying to intimidate me. If so it was working, I was definitely intimidated. Trying to regain my composure I stammered “What happened, after I collapsed in the snow?”.

Leliana told me that Maxwell had collapsed only a few feet from me. We both were found in the early hours by a search party lead by Cullen and Cassandra. Once back in camp, we had both been cleaned, and treated for exposure and our injuries. I squirmed at the thought of stranger undressing me and bathing me while I was unconscious, but had little right to complain. I was alive, right? Dead people don’t hallucinate.

As we talked we walked back into the tent. I sat down on the bed. Leliana gave a nod to the Charger that I thought was Stitches and he left the tent leaving us alone. My mouth went dry. Shit she was terrifying.

“You are very curious.” Leliana began slowly in a thoughtful tone of voice.

“I bet I probably fucking am.” I muttered. She ignored me.

“You arrive out of a rift carrying materials and items, that as far as we can tell, have never before been seen on Thedas. Your hands are calloused and scarred like someone who has had to use them, yet you do not have the muscles indicative of a life of labor. You have the strong teeth and glossy hair of a noble woman who has never gone hungry. You speak in an educated manner like a scholar, but swear like a sailor.”

Leliana didn’t miss a beat. All of those things tallied with my life, and would have marked me out in
the medieval social structure of Thedas. I had two masters degrees in mechanical engineering and materials science. My language was foul but that actually helped me fit-in, in my male dominated work place. My hands were covered in scars from the burns and scrapes earned during a life time of tinkering. I had grown up in a well fed middle class American family, had suffered through braces, and had ready access to shampoo. I felt a little hurt about her comment over my muscles. I had a weekly workout schedule I adhered to strictly, but in a world where literally doing anything and getting anywhere required intense physical labor, I probably was a weakling.

“I agree.” I said.

“Do you have an explanation for these strange inconsistencies then?” Leliana asked in a leading one of voice

“Yes, but not a good explanation.”

When I didn’t elaborate Leliana raised a perfect eyebrow at me. “Who are you?” Her voice was dangerously casual.

“My name is Marin Alvarado” It was after all the truth.

“Then you are sticking to the story you told the Herald? It is hardly a credible tale.”

“Again I agree.”

“What does that mean?” Leliana narrowed her eyes.

“I…I wasn’t trying to be cryptic. I simply mean that I didn’t lie to Wells, The Herald, everything I told him I believe to be true… Including the part where I don’t think any of this is possible, and I have therefore concluded that I am hallucinating.”

“Still?”

“I am having a conversation with a character from a story. Yes, I still think I am hallucinating.”
“And in this story Maxwell becomes the Inquisitor? Do you know how this story ends?”

“Yes.” I was trying to keep my answers simple. I probably had been less discreet than I should have been in my initial encounter with Maxwell. In my defense though, I was in a FUCKING HALLUCINATION. How was I supposed to know I would need to play a long game?

“Would you mind elaborating?”

“Yes.” That was the wrong answer. Something dangerous to flashed in Leliana’s eyes, and it scared the living shit out of me. Please don’t murder me in my sleep Leliana. “I mean to say that foresight could be dangerous, and there are…well multiple versions of the story. It is … I am not really cogent enough at the moment to explain it… I promise I will. I want to help. Honestly I do, but maybe it would be smart to explain it all at once, to everyone. Like I said it is complicated.”

“Who exactly is everyone?”

“Well the other … main characters in the story, apart from Maxwell. There are the advisors Cullen, Josephine and yourself. The other members of the ‘inner circle’ include Varric, Solas, Cassandra, Sera, Vivian, Blackwall, Iron Bull, and Dorian.” I tried to gauge her reaction to the names as I gave them. But her face was a still pool, so I continued “I think It is best that all of these people are present when I explain.” I omitted Cole. He would not yet have been officially recruited, and he wouldn’t need any explanations from me to understand. Besides I got the distinct impression from the game that inviting Cole to anything was mostly pointless, if you needed him there he would be.

“And when exactly would you be prepared to explain this complicated tale?”

I was beginning to get the distinct impression I had made quite a terrible mess of this conversation. I wasn’t the best with people under normal circumstances. These were NOT normal circumstances.

“The morning perhaps? When would you like me to explain?”

As she opened her mouth to respond Wells walked in followed by the healer from earlier.

He and Leliana exchanged a long look that contained a whole unspoken conversation. Leliana’s lips
when thin then with a sharp nod of her head she rose, leaving my bedside “I will arrange a meeting for the morning then.” When I opened my mouth to ask a question she cut me off. “You may have your things, AFTER you offer up your story. You understand. Precautions.” I nodded, though the words seemed to as much a reproach to Maxwell as a threat to me.

Leliana slipped out of the tent, and Maxwell approached my bedside. “Good to see you up. You gave the healers quite a scare.”

“Yea.” My earlier freak out would have frightened a few people “Sorry about that.” I addressed the apology to the healer.

“No apologies needed. I imagine finding yourself stuck in what you believe to be a hallucination must be quite startling.” The healer said.

“That would be putting it mildly.”

“My name is Cora incidentally” She said with a smile that was had a certainly motherly warmth to it.

“Marin. Its a pleasure to meet you. Well meeting you is a pleasure, the rest of it…”

“You just woke up dear, don’t start getting all clever on me now.” She said puckishly.

“Sorry I can’t help it sometimes clever just comes out.”

She gave a little chuckle then proceeded to conduct an examination of my wounds. Maxwell turned his back respectfully when she lifted the shift to examine my side. I couldn’t help but noticed as her exam went on that a knot was forming between her brows, then a frown came and camped on her face. When she finished she said. “I am so sorry we can’t seem to get these healed up properly for you.”

“Don’t worry about it. Bones and bruises take time to heal, and you have done a very neat job with the resources at your disposal.” I said with a smile. I was confused and discomforted by her remorse. *Was something more wrong that I didn’t understand?*
She shot a perplexed look at Maxwell but he gave a little nod of dismissal and she bowed her head respectfully and took her leave.

“Thank you Cora.” I called after her. *That was strange,* but I let it go. “You look much better.” I said to Maxwell.

“Thank you I will try to take that as a compliment, how do you feel?”

“Tired, a little beat-up and very confused. Which is to say pretty good, Considering”

“Considering you nearly died?”

“Who knew hallucination blizzards could be so dangerous!” Maxwell gave a chuckle and a shake of his head. Then I asked I a more serious tone. “How many people did you tell about what I told you?” That could have a big bearing on how I approached the conversation I had to have tomorrow.

_Fuck that conversation was going to be a nightmare. This whole thing is a nightmare._

“Outside of Leliana, who you just spoke to, I told only Seeker Pentaghast, Commander Cullen, and Ambassador Montylet. It turns out a lot of people saw that carriage thing of yours fall out of the rift, and everyone saw when we were carried back to camp after we were found in the mountains, so there is no keeping that under wraps. And obviously the healers, like Cora, know that you believed yourself to be hallucinating.”

I nodded. “Well thanks for not spreading it around too much.”

“There is quite enough rumor and misinformation flying around about the Inquisition without me adding to it.” Wells replied sardonically. “How much did the Nightingale pry out of you?” His tone was apologetic. “She was quite insistent on questioning you immediately.”

“Don’t be too hard on Leliana, it is her job to get information after all, and she feels guilty about the fall of Haven.” Leliana was a dangerous enemy but a loyal friend. And I felt for her. Leo had mentioned that she had been though some shit in a previous game. I wish I had asked for more details now. “In any case, I promised to explain all, or at least as much as I can, tomorrow morning to the whole crew.”
“Keeping us in suspense?” He teased

“Trying to figure out how explain something very complicated.” I replied soberly.

“Well perhaps this will help.” He pulled out the scarf I had used to bind his wounds. It was blood stained and tattered. “We did clean it but I am rather afraid it is ruined, but I thought I should return it anyway. I will see about replacing it when we are able.”

I smiled gratefully and took it from him. Despite its state it was warm and a touchstone back to home, to reality. “Thank you, truly.”

He smiled, a wonderful smile that made me feel much better, despite the fact that a grin could fix precisely none of my problems. “Good night Marin Alvarado”.

I lay there in the dark, wondering how I had gained his trust. I doubted the others would be so easily won over. Perhaps I wouldn’t have too, perhaps I would wake up to my alarm and find that it was time to take Leo to the airport. I would have a cup of coffee, drive him to the airport have a wonderful weekend in San Francisco. Then perhaps I would get a phone call and find out that I had won the lottery and a noble prize…fucking shit.

I pulled the ruined scarf close, trying to draw comfort from the tattered fabric, but all got was the smell of soap, blood and ashes.

Chapter End Notes

I got excited and posted this chapter early, so please let me know if you find typos! Also my internet is pretty limited as I am currently working on a remote atoll in the pacific, so don't be surprised if you don't hear back right away. Thanks & Enjoy!
Chapter Summary

Occam’s Razor (The law of parsimony); A line of reasoning that suggests that the simplest answer covering the facts is mostly likely to be the correct answer. Among competing hypothesis, the one with the least assumptions should be selected.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was a long and restless night. I spent it trying to puzzle out exactly what I knew about Thedas, the Inquisition, its members, and the war to follow.

When I thought about it, I didn’t really know that much at all. I knew many of the personal backstories of the Inquisition’s members. I knew what the dramatic turning points of the Inquisition story were, but I knew next to nothing about how the world of Thedas actually worked. The bits I did know about the lore, culture and history were such broad strokes at to be of little use to me.

I knew healing potions healed people, but what did that mean outside of restoring hit points or a health bar in a video game? Did it treat infection, set broken bones, heal damaged tissue, restore lost blood volume? I knew that the technology was roughly equivalent to medieval Europe, but not exactly. Had the printing press been invented? Crucible forged metals? Was glass making advanced enough for lenses? Did they have knowledge of a spherical world? What was the state of mathematics? Did they even work off a base 10 numbering system?!

Did anyone grow/brew coffee? I might die without coffee.

Then it got more complicated still, because of the things I knew, I had to figure out how much I should tell them, and how to go about doing it. I was pretty sure dispensing all the knowledge that I had in one massive dump at the could do more harm than good. For instance, I could probably tell Cullen to write his sister more often or give my apologies to Cassandra over the loss of her former lover at the conclave, safely enough. But Blackwall? Anything I had to say on his backstory could ruin him, and I wasn’t about to touch ‘Solas is the fucking dread wolf’ with a ten-foot pole.

And that’s assuming that they even believed me, and I sort of needed them to believe me. Or at least believe I wasn’t dangerous. I didn’t want to get thrown out on my ass, or locked in a prison cell as a suspected spy, or put in whatever this world’s equivalent of a madhouse was. Hallucination or not I wouldn’t survive long in Thedas. I might have been better equipped than your average 21st century
American to survive in the dark ages, but I still worse than useless compared to a random joe in
Thedas. I had done a fair amount of camping, I took kickboxing classes every Saturday, took an
archery class in college, and my engineering background and misspent weekends in the garage
tinkering, meant I could build plenty of things, even with medieval tools. But I had no money, no
connections, no family or social standing, and very little knowledge of the culture. I would be the
worst of whatever trade I tried to take up. Here was the only place I could be of any use, do any
good. I wouldn’t make it two weeks here If they threw me out now.

Maybe if I died I would wake up, Inception-style? No Marin that is not a healthy thought to have.
Even if you are dreaming. I didn’t want to die even a hallucinatory death.

I just wanted to wakeup.

The morning and the meeting came far to early for my liking. Leliana flanked by her scouts came to
rouse me from an uneasy slumber shortly after dawn. They brought a spare set of clothes. That I
recognized as having been packed in my overnight bag, a pair of jeans, a cowl necked sweater, my
bomber jacket and my leather boots, which were now dry after their trek in the snow. I dressed,
grateful that I was in my own clothes and not a borrowed set. They were more comfortable and fit
better scrounged clothes would. Plus, I didn’t want to be fumbling around trying to figure out how to
lace/buckle up a ye-olde dress without any coffee to assist.

Once dressed, Leliana lead me to more spacious tent that I took to be their makeshift head quarters.
The low rumble of people idly chatting amongst themselves went immediately quiet as soon as I
entered. Leaving a stifling sort of silence. Everyone that I had requested be present was in
attendance. It was beyond bizarre to see the whole cast of inquisition standing there blinking at me. I
may have gawked a bit. The assembled group was as faithful to their in-game appearance as flesh
and blood people could be to animated doppelgängers. Or was their in-game appearance faithful to
them? Ugh it made my head spin.

Varric was the first to broach the silence. “So this is her. The mystery girl who fell out of the rift.”

Dorian chimed in “that is seems to be happening with alarming frequency now.”

I gave a stupid little wave “Hello.” Wow Marin please be more awkward.

“Marin, if you could please share your story.” Wells prompted kindly.
All eyes where on me. I felt, suddenly, like I had the first week of grad school. The first time I had taught a class, with sixty students blinking at me, and the sinking feeling that I was totally unprepared for this. *I needed to get this right.* I took a couple deep breaths and began to speak.

“I will start out my saying that I won’t blame you if you don’t believe me. The story I am about to tell you -- What happened to me -- is unbelievable, impossible. So much so, that I don’t even believe it. I am quite convinced that everything here, that you all, this whole world is a delusion of mine. That I am back at home, unconscious from a head wound having one hell of a hallucination. But since I can’t wake up, and I have tried -- really tried-- to wake-up, I am forced to deal with the reality in front of me.”

I looked around to see how my preface had been received. I saw various levels of confusion, skepticism and anticipation, on the faces of those around me, but they all looked receptive enough to listen, which I counted as a good start.

“Right, Ok, so here it is… My name is Marin Alvarado. I am twenty- seven years old. I am an engineer and I am not from Thedas, not from this world, in fact I suspect I am from a different universe all together. I am not sure how I got here…”

I proceeded to relate what I remembered of the crash and waking up in the tunnels in much the same way I had explained it to Maxwell. I was driving a horseless carriage to take my brother, Leo, to a port when a figure appeared, I swerved to avoid him, Leo got out to investigate, then, poof, I was underneath haven.

Maxwell then explained the same events from his point of view. When he finished there was a small pause, and Cassandra asked in a gentler tone than I was expecting. “And what of your brother?”

“I do not know what happened to my brother.” I said choking back aback a sudden swell of emotion at the question. *No Marin, pull it together.* I could not linger on thoughts of Leo right now. I took a deep breath and pressed forward.

“I am from a world called earth, which has a population of around 7 billion people.” That number caused several mouths to drop open. Making me wonder what the approximate population of Thedas was. “I live in a nation called The United States of America, in a region called California. My world, the observable universe, where I come from has different rules that govern it. The fundamental laws of nature are different. There is no magic, no mages, no veil, no fade. And there never has been.” My eyes flicked to Solas but his face was a neutral mask. “Nor have there ever been any Elves, Dwarfs, or Qunari. The only sentient beings are humans. The rest only exist in tales for us.” That statement caused mutterings and uncomfortable shifting but no one interrupted.

“With no magic to speak of my people, have over generations, studied the mechanics of how the
universe functions, and have developed advanced machines and technology. We have machines that fly and carry people and things great distances. We have machines that hold a library of information in the palm of your hand. We have machines that can capture an image and then share it with people vast distances away, or allow you to talk to people on the other side of the world. We have weapons that can fire hundreds of rounds per minute killing a room of people in seconds, explosives that can level whole cities. We have machines that help healers see inside a wounded person without cutting them open, machines that allow you to breathe underwater, and we have sent explorers into the heavens to walk on the moon.”

I glanced around the room. The expressions I saw ran the gamut from slack-jawed astonishment to distrustful scowls. There was really nothing for it but to continue.

“Based on what I have seen of Thedas I would estimate your technological state to be equivalent to that on earth approximately 500-1000 years ago. Which will go along way to explaining the unusual clothing I was wearing and the strange items I brought with me.” I said with a nod at Leliana.

“My world also has a long and interesting history, and many nations on it have vastly different systems of government than any on Thedas. I would be happy at a later date to explain in much more detail, what I know of the science, engineering, history, and any other topics you find relevant, relating to my world. Much of it will be useful to the Inquisition and Thedas as a whole. I worked as an Engineer, designing and building technology. I spent a lot of time in school and even some of my basic knowledge in other crafts such as medicine could be revolutionary in Thedas. Which is just as well, since your world is so different from my own that here I probably lack many of the most basic survival skills. I would like to do what I can to be useful, to help the Inquisition.”

“Well I think you’re full of piss!” Sera spluttered. Making me jump. “If you’re from another universe or wherever, then you shouldn’t know jack-all about us! How’da even know Thedas is called Thedas?”

“That is where the story gets really fucking weird.” I sighed

“You mean it wasn’t weird before?” Varric burst out.

Chuckles bubbled through the room. The tension in the air suddenly was cut in half. That dwarf really had a way with words, and could read a room.

“You don’t even know the half of it. It is seriously bonkers.” I quipped back. Then reverting to a solemn tone “And I think this it the part that needs to stay strictly in this room, and Bull that includes Par Volen”
The tension that Varric had cut from the room instantly returned. “I had heard of Thedas before the crash. I have heard of all of you, I have heard of the Inquisition and Coryphaeus because in my world, it is a story. A story told using a very complicated type of storytelling technology… Do you guys have those choose your own adventure storybooks? The ones where you make choices then based on your choices you flip to a certain page and continue? For instance, ‘there is a path in the forest, do you go right or left. For right flip to page 6, for left flip to page 10.’”

“Yes, Aquilinus was particularly famous for making such stories, was wild about them as a child” Dorian spoke up helpfully, god-bless that glorious bastard.

“Right and have any of you ever drawn pictures on the corner of a notebook, and changed each image slightly so when you flip through the pages you get a moving picture?” I wish I had my phone or my laptop. It would have made explaining the concept of videos a lot easier. Although perhaps doing without them was was for the best. I didn’t want to overwhelm anyone.

This time Sera snorted and gave a maniacal little laugh “I drew one of those on Josie’s clip board.”

“It was most inappropriate!” Josephine retorted red faced.

“Well we have very advanced versions of both of those things and have found a way to combine them, an interactive, choose your own adventure story, set to moving pictures, with sound and everything.” I watched the frowns as people tried to picture the world I was painting for them.

“There are three such stories set in the ‘imaginary’ world of Thedas. One based around the hero of Ferelden and the blight, one based around Hawke and the events in Kirkwall and one, centered around the inquisition and the Herald.” I watched the implications of this statement ripple through the crowd. “The player—the reader – experiences the story from the point of view of the Herald, they can make choices, up to and including who the Herald is.” I grimaced apologetically to Maxwell, who was frowning at this. “What race are they? What gender? Are they a Mage, warrior, rogue? In conversations do they react, aggressively, sympathetically, inquisitively, sarcastically? Do they recruit the mages or the Templars? Do they take the mountain pass or charge to the temple with the soldiers? Who do they fancy?” Wells was frowning now, I couldn’t tell if it was anger or just confusion.

“And you have read --participated in -- these tales.” Cassandra said a scowl drawn over her angular features.
I shook my head “No not exactly. My brother was a big fan of all of the stories. He would have been so much more help to you than I could be.” This was not about Leo, Marin get back on track. “I only ever watched the third one, this story, from over his shoulder. But he spent a lot of time immersed in these stories and I picked up a lot. I know the major plot points, and I know a lot of the personal level stuff. I well… I liked the lot of you. Thought you were, a … compelling group of characters.” I flushed at that admission. It felt a little icky and voyeuristic, like I had been violating their privacy. In a way I had, I knew some pretty deep dark secrets of theirs.

“This story doesn’t end with the fall of Haven does it?” Said Bull slyly. I shook my head slowly.

Blackwell barked “Then you know what will happen, you could warn us…”

“I am not so sure that is a great idea.” I interrupted, “For a couple of reasons. One, I have no idea how accurate the story is to this reality, and my recollection of the story is also not perfect. Second, my presence in the story may have already altered the plot, or the future, if you like, in ways which are impossible to predict. Third, what if by giving you the details I actually cause you to fail? Think about it, If I had warned you that Coryphaeus was going to attack Haven in advance, what would you have done?”

“We would have had to evacuate. Haven was hardly a very defensible position. ” Cullen replied, remorse coloring the commander’s voice.

“Right, and then with you gone from Haven, do you think Coryphaeus would have attacked an empty encampment? No, he would have switched tacks and gotten you guys out in the open, without any chantry to shelter in, no secret path to cover your escape and no siege engines to bring down the mountain on the army.” An amazed silence greeted these statements. Everyone was still so weighed down with the events at Haven they saw only the defeat and not the underdog victory it really had been. “Things at Haven were bad, but if I had told you what was going to happen, and you had acted to prevent it, it could have made things MUCH worse. It could have been the end of you. Instead, you made it out with a lot of people, you gained knowledge of your enemy, and a folk hero.” I nodded in Maxwell’s direction. He flushed.

Cassandra spluttered at this “We lost a base of operations… our resources … our ---“

“Those things will fix themselves in time, I suspect there is already a plan for a new base of operations.” I looked at Solas and Maxwell. Solas’ face gave away nothing but Maxwell’s face spoke too clearly. They had already talked about getting to Skyhold. I was right on the mark.

“We do?!?” Cassandra gasped. Glaring at Maxwell and Leliana accusingly.
“Not now Cassandra.” Leliana reprimanded. Before turning to me “There is something to what you say. Although it could all just be prevarication to cover for the fact that you are a charlatan. It is a convenient reason to not give us specifics, or a handy excuse if you’re predictions come out wrong. If you will not tell us what happens, what good are you?”

There was a reproach on Maxwell’s lips but I cut him off “I… I am not sure how to prove to you I am what I say, without telling you things that will fuck shit up. There is the stuff I brought with me of course. They would be hard to counterfeit. As for what good I can do, have already said I am willing to bring all of my engineering skills to bear. I can also do my best to point you in the right direction, try to keep things on course. In some cases, I may be able to tell you the consequences of certain decisions. But I don’t think it is wise to tell all. I know quite a few things about the past and future of the people in this room, and I don’t think that your secrets are mine to tell.” Cue uncomfortable shifting from the crowd. “I understand that might not make me incredibly popular.”

“But you said” Maxwell cut in. I could hear the desperation in voice. “That we can beat him. That we win.”

“Yes.” I said “It is possible, though not easy and not guaranteed. The future…” How did you tell people that horrors lay before them? “Is a trying one.”

“The cost is high?” Asked Cullen. “Many of us fall?” Cheery Cullen. Ask me to prophesy your death why don’t you. But as I looked around the room, that question was on many faces. It struck me that despite their flaws and agendas everyone here was some strain of selfless. They were all ready to die for this cause, of course they read the worst into my cryptic words.

“No” I said “Not necessarily. There are versions of the story were we win and everyone in this room lives. I will do everything I can to minimize loss of life in general. Though, as I said, I can not guarantee anything. Again who knows how accurate the story I know was, or whether events have already been altered.”

“It is a tall tale to tell without offering any proof, dear.” Vivian drawled. “I am afraid your going to have to give us something.”

I stammered. What to give as proof without getting myself killed on the spot? “Just to clarify you WANT me to spill your secrets in front of everyone?”

“Darling” Vivian replied “I am absolutely unconvinced that you know anything of value, much less
anything that could hurt me.”

I did need a proof of concept. I couldn’t ask people to take my word as gospel on nothing but my say so. “Ok… well, for starters you are from Wycome”

“You’re a fellow Free-Marcher?” Varric boomed, Vivian responded with a scowl to Varric but her attitude towards me looked unchanged so I continued.

“You fell in love across a crowded ballroom. The Winters-end ball, brought from the circle to court to entertain. You were young and in awe of everything. He spent the whole night at your side. Regardless of the risk he was taking to his personal safety. Bastian… He has fallen ill hasn’t he?” Vivian froze, the answer was written all over her face. *He was.* I suddenly felt wretched for the brash way I had rushed into that sentence. “I am sorry. I wasn’t sure if he would be yet… the timing of events is hard to pin down in the story sometimes.” Vivienne may have been elitist and ruthlessly ambitious, but at the end of the day she she had thrown her considerable weight behind a good cause, and right now she was a just a woman was watching the man she loved die. “In the story you seek a remedy with the heart of a snowy wyvern. I… have never seen a version where it works. I hope you can find some answers elsewhere.”

Vivian had lost all of her scathing veneer, but none of her dignity. She nodded gravely. “I… thank you.”

The room was quiet enough to hear a pin drop. Most of my audience looked disturbed. Sera looked outright terrified.

“I promise I will keep your secrets unless it becomes absolutely necessary to the survival of the inquisition. I want to help as many people as possible but your choices are yours to make, and your pasts are yours deal with. I am happy to provide more proof that I am not lying through my teeth but maybe we should do that on an individual level? Instead of with an audience?”

Leliana looked a little murderous at that, but Wells shot her a quelling look, and instead of pushing she said. “What would you ask in exchange for this foresight of yours?”

I frowned at that. What would I ask? What I really wanted to was to wake up. But they couldn’t give that to me.

“ I well… I wouldn’t ask for anything really, just the chance to help. A job. I mean I don’t have any
money here in Thedas, or a trade, or social standing, or family. I don’t really know that much about Thedas itself beyond pockets of this very specific tale. So I might need food and a place to sleep you know, … that sort of thing.”

I got a few looks of surprise and some of pity. I guess I was bad at negotiating. But what was I supposed to ask for?

“You don’t want help trying to get back?” Asked Josephine.

“I…” I paused at that “ I mean I have tried to wake up from my hallucination. I scared the healer in my attempt. I think... I don’t know what else I could do. Even if I assume this is all real, I know shit about magic, and my world doesn’t have any.” I glanced at Solas, He would be the most likely to understand what the fuck had happened, but he remained stone faced.

Dorian finally broke the silence. “The events as Wells described them, seem to indicate a very specific and complex situation resulted in your arrival. I doubt they could be recreated to safely study, much less reverse. I would not be optimistic about your chance of getting home by arcane means.”

“Still, looking into the circumstances of your arrival here would be wise” Solas interjected “We may learn some valuable information, You are an anomaly.” The way he emphasized the word was unnerving. He definitely was referring to something more than, ‘mysterious gawky girl falls out of rift’, and I had no idea what; which was fucking terrifying.

I suddenly wondered, perversely, who was more likely to kill me in my sleep, Solas or Leliana. Or perhaps Solas was simply curious. He was a hard read.

“To the rational mind, nothing is inexplicable, only unexplained” I quoted.

Solas gave me a strange look, I had surprised him. “Indeed”

The room was quite for a long moment before Maxwell said decisively “I believe her.”

I felt a rush of gratitude towards him. I would not have believed me, had he situations been reversed.
“It is too weird a story to be made up.” Varric grumbled from the back. “Even a moron would have come up with a better lie. And you don’t strike me as a moron.”

“I would still like to test the truth Lady Alvarado’s claims.” Said Cullen. “But I can not see that she poses any immediate danger.” I smiled gratefully at the commander. His voice and appearance was every bit as striking as his digital double, although his handsome features were haggard with the horrors of his past and the worries of his present.

“In any case we need to decide what we will say about Lady Alvarado to the wider world.” Josephine said in an official manner

I gaped. They really are going let me join! “Does that mean. You’ll let me stay? Really?!” I wanted to laugh with relief.

“Throwing you to the wolves was never truly an option my lady.” Leliana said smoothly. She could have fooled me.

“I .. thank you!” I tripped over my words in gratitude. “But I am no noblewoman. You need not address me as my lady.”

“What is your title then?” Asked Josephine scribbling on her clipboard.

“Ummm… I didn’t really have one. My degrees don’t really afford me any special address. Engineer… I guess if you really need a formal title, but just plain Marin is fine by me.”

“I think that it is wise to keep Marin’s… foreknowledge, private but we can hardly hide the fact that she fell out of a rift, or deny her claims of being from another world. Too many witnessed her arrival and her strange materials.” Wells said.

Josephine broke in “Even if we could, I do not believe it to be the wisest course of action. Stories of a person bringing knowledge and wonders across realms to help the Inquisition, could strengthen our position.”

“So I tell no one about the story but otherwise I am free to tell the truth of who I am and where I come from?” I addressed my question to Leliana, but got only a cold stare, she was along way from trusting me.
Josephine answered instead “Indeed Engineer Alvarado. Is there any other business for the whole group, before we start the war council?”

Wells interjected. “I have just one more question for Marin.” I nodded, but my stomach rolled nervously, suddenly feeling very on the spot. “Earlier you mentioned a plan for a new base of operations…” I nodded. Maxwell threw a glance at Solas before asking. “Is Solas correct?” Confused looks bounced between people in the room. Beyond Solas, Wells, and the advisors, no one had a clue what this conversation was about. Wells was giving me a piercing look. Leliana had a slight smirk on her face. *This was a test.*

“Yes” I said simply. “Go north. You need to guide us north.” The smirk melted off Leliana’s face.

Wells eyes never left mine “And what will we find north?”

*A beautiful and bad-ass mountain fortress.* “A home.” Wells’ dimples made an appearance “A home for the inquisition.”

Chapter End Notes

You all are so encouraging I am posting these much faster than I had planned. The downside is that you may have a while to wait a while for the next chapters, so that I have time to write something that isn't total garbage.

As usual let me know if you find typos/grammar errors or continuity issues. And please forgive me if I am slow to respond. I am currently working my butt off in a very remote part of the world and internet is not a given.

Hope you like it!
Chapter Summary

Acute Stress Response (aka Hyperarousal or the fight-or-flight response) is a physiological reaction to perceived attacks or threats to survival. Perceived harm triggers the activation of the sympathetic nervous system and secretion of hormones such as epinephrine and norepinephrine.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When I walked out of the meeting it took me a few steps before I realized that I had absolutely no idea of where to go or what to do. I didn’t even have anyone I could ask about it. Everyone I had met so far was still inside the command tent I had just been dismissed from. For perhaps the first time in my adult life I didn’t have someplace to be, or something waiting to be done.

I didn’t have a plan.

I stood there, blinking dumbly in the well trod snow of the footpath, and let crowd wash around me.

“You look lost.” Said a voice from behind me.

“I feel lost.” I replied to the soldier, standing before me. He gave a smart salute, pressing his hand to his breast plate with a snap.

“You’re the one fell out of the rift in the carriage. Collapsed in the snow with the Herald?”

“That’s me!”

“I am Corporal Elton Ashford, I have been assigned to … um escort you…” And by escort he means watch me. I was still suspicious enough that I needed guards apparently. Oh well… if this was the price to pay to not be thrown down a dark pit by the Nightingale, it was worth it.

“I am Marin” In my best attempt at a winning tone. “I don’t suppose anyone told you where you
were supposed to escort me to?” Hoping for some sort of plan, anything that might overcome the feeling of helplessness that had started to worm its way into my chest.

“Umm.. No my lady.”

“Ugh fuck, is everyone here going to call me my lady!” I protested. “I really don’t know if I can handle that. Just Marin is fine.” Apparently that was the right thing to say because the Corporal relaxed a fraction and suppressed a snort.

“You are not what I expected. My lady…I mean Ser… Marin.”

His fumbling was interrupted by my stomach, which gave a loud grumble. I flushed and the corporal couldn’t resist giving a small chuckle.

“I don’t suppose there might be something like breakfast available anywhere?”

“Right this way!”

“Thank you!!!” Food was a pretty good start to a game plan.

He led me to a small cluster of tents arranged around a campfire, and gestured for me to sit down on a convenient log. Dozens of other soldiers were clustered around the fire many of whom where eating breakfast. As we approached I noticed them stiffen.

“Elton aren’t you on assignment, who’s the guest?” Said another soldier, a towering bulky redhead with a huge scar running across his face and an impressive beard.

“This is Marin. Marin this is Avery, he is another soldier in my unit. Marin is…” He hesitated awkwardly trying to figure out how to explain me.

“I am the weirdo who fell out of the sky…” I answered for him in an attempt at self-deprecating humor, and extended my hand for a hand-shake. The man looked surprised but took my hand in his meaty palm and gave if a firm shake.
“Call me Scab” He said “You really from a different world?”

I nodded “Either that or I am having a very fucked up dream” No reason to tell them I thought the later was far more likely. My use of profanity seemed to endear me to the soldiers who seemed to relax, and slowly people started to introduce themselves.

“Are you all in the same unit?” I asked

“Yes Ser! We all look to Captain Rylen.” I couldn’t help but hear the pride in their voices. Rylen must be a good Captain.

“Is this the whole unit?” That question seemed to sober everyone.

Elton replied quietly. “We… we lost quite a few at Haven.” Oh right.

“Bet you got one hell of a story.” Scab quipped. Bringing the conversation back to a lighter place.

“I would happily trade the tale for some food. I’m ravenous.” I was quickly handed a heaping bowl of some sort of hot grain, like oatmeal, and a few strips of something that might have been bacon but defiantly didn’t come from a pig. I didn’t bother to ask what it was. I was far too hungry to be picky. I had eaten only a granola bar the morning of the crash and had only a handful of dried fruit and bread last night. I wasn’t exactly sure how long I had been unconscious, but my last full meal must have been days ago. The chow mien the night before the accident. I scraped every last drop from the bottom of the bowl. The way I downed it seemed to impress the soldiers. They gave me a second helping. Which I downed almost as quickly as the first.

“You got an appetite on you for such a little girl.” Scab said

I smiled. His comment, while not exactly flattering, was such a familiar one that it was comforting. “Well I haven’t had a full meal in some time. But I always have had a big appetite, eat loads and never put on any weight.”

“Maybe you’re part elf” Said a pale elf across the way. She was Dalish judging by her Vallaslin, and had asked to go by Lillian. “You got the figure for it, even if you’re a bit tall.”
“Unlikely, my world doesn’t have any elves.” My fairly casual comeback, completely silenced the rowdy bunch. It occurred to me that in a Theodisan context that statement must have seemed horrific.

“What happened to them?” Lillian asked in a hushed tone.

“Nothing, there were never any elves. Or dwarfs or Qunari, for that matter, at least not outside of stories, just humans” Well Neanderthals and other early hominid species but we didn’t need to get into that. Again, I was greeted with a long uncomfortable silence and I spoke simply to fill it. “That doesn’t mean we don’t have racism or hatred. Humans come in all sort of different sizes and shades, and we have found plenty of ways of making people ‘other’. How and whom people worship, the color of skin, nationality, sexuality, gender, all of these things are sources of bigotry where I come from. Too often people are judged for these things, instead of for their actions or the content of their characters.”

“Some shit never changes.” Scab muttered. “There are always assholes.” His words opened a flood gate, and the group started lobbing questions at me. They were incredibly inquisitive for a group of soldiers. The idea of a world without magic and with complex machines seemed to take their imaginations by storm. I spent quite a lot of time describing airplanes. The more I talked the more my audience seemed to grow. In exchange, for my knowledge they answered some of my questions about Thedas. I discovered that the Hero of Fereldan was a “shield-maiden” named Elissa Cousland and that Anora was Queen. I had to be careful about how and what I asked. I didn’t want to give away that I knew things I shouldn’t. To my surprise, they asked quite a lot of questions about my life specifically, my schooling, my job, my family etc… It was odd to have a group of strangers so genuinely interested in the banal aspects of my life.

“Wait so your just an ordinary person, where you come from?” shouted someone from the back.

I nodded. “Still am last I checked.”

“That was your take away from that story, Fletcher?” Scab said with an eye-roll. “Girl lost everyone and everything in the space of a year.” For someone who looked like lumberjack crossed with a Viking raider, Scab was a bit of a softy. “You’re a dense son-of-a-bitch.”

The man called Fletcher shouted some good natured insults back at Scab and pulled the whole group into raucous, friendly bickering. Which was quickly interrupted by an ear-splitting whistle from behind me.
The group instantly fell quiet, and I was suddenly the only person who was not on their feet at attention.

“At ease.” Said a gruff male voice. Not a single person sat down, though the group relaxed their postures allowing me to get a glimpse of who had interrupted. Dorian stood next to a tall soldier with brown hair and hazel eyes, one of which was bisected by an old scar. There was also a days old bruise coloring his cheek. “We are moving out at dawn, we need to help the survivors get ready for the march.”

“Where we headed Captain?” Scab asked.

“North.” He replied. I couldn’t help but smile a bit. “Go to your lieutenants for assignments. Dismissed.” The people around me were instantly a flurry of movement. It was hard not to be impressed. The Commander and his officers ran a tight ship. “Ashford with me.” Elton nodded and motioned for me to follow him.

“Marin this is my Captain, Capitan Rylen.” Elton introduced me. The Captain gave me cold once over.

“A pleasure Captain.” I responded warmly, extended my hand for a hand shake. The Captain ignored it, in favor of a formal and slightly reluctant salute. I awkwardly lowered my hand.

“Lady Marin, I understand you have already met Lord Pavus.” Jerking his head to indicate Dorian over his left shoulder. I nodded my affirmation. “He and Corporal Ashford will take you to fetch your things, then I believe the healer has requested your presence.”

The corporal gave a salute, as the Captain stalked away.

I frowned at Elton. “Is he always like that?” Elton gave a confused frown that I took to mean No. I wondered if it the loss of Haven and the logistical nightmare of the impending march that had the captain annoyed or if it was just me.

“Pay him no never mind Engineer” Dorian in his usual rakish manner. Ahh so it was me then. “Why don’t we go get your things. I will admit to some curiosity.” I gave him a smile then followed him away from the fire through the maze of tents. The encampment had already come to life with activity. We had to wind our way through carts and crates as people and things where shuffled about, prepping for a journey. We wound up in front of something that might have been the quartermaster’s
tent. There was a queue of people and Dorian eased his way into line. I noticed Bull and a group of people that could only have been the Chargers hauling boxes on to carts. Elton seemed distracted.

“Excuse me, while we wait I might just umm…” He indicated the chargers over his shoulder “Help.”

“Yes very well... go on then.” Dorian replied with a suggestive waggling of his eyebrows that mystified me. Elton gave a small smile jogged over and helped a young Ativan woman with a tumble of dark curls and a wicked looking pair of blades strapped to her hips with a box.

It was several minutes before we reached the front of the cue. “Hello we were--”

Dorian’s request was interrupted by a loud and horrible scream. I spun around to see a knot of people had formed around the cart the Chargers had been loading. Dorian, was suddenly tense, alert. Dropping the languid raffish posture, he rushed over to the knot of people. I followed without thinking.

We found Elton on the ground, face splotchy, and swelling, gasping for breath. Next to him, was the raven haired woman he had helped with the boxes, she was holding his hand.

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“Elton? No!! Please breath Elton please!” She was nearly in hysterics

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“What happened?!” Dorian bellowed.

“Buzzrach” Rumbled Bull. Dorian’s lips wet thin. “Anything for it?” Bull asked in a measured tone. Dorian gave a small shake of his head that said volumes more than words ever could. He believed Elton was going to die. His breaths where rasping, ragged. Bull moved towards his anguished charger and scooped her up, hauling the crying woman away from Elton.

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“Come on now Cutlass you don’t want to see this.”

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“NO!!” She screamed. “Let me go! ELTON!” Anger found it’s way on her face, edging out some of the panic and fear that ruled it. She struggled in his grip, but Bull was holding her by her waist, arms pinned to her sides. Her flailing feet were more than two feet off the ground. She threw her head back, in a move that would have exploded a smaller man’s nose. On Bull’s big face, she only managed to crack a lip. An olive skinned man whom I recognized as Krem had also moved forward, trying to corral the frenzied woman.
“‘Lass get a hold of yourself’

“Put me down, I can’t leave him!!!”

I tugged at Dorian’s at his sleeve and asked “What’s happening? What’s a buzzrach?” I nearly had to shout so he could hear me over the commotion.

“It’s a small stinging insect. Likes to burrow into wood in the winter, they sting when disturbed. Mostly the stings just burn like shit, but some people… react badly.”

“He’s dying, from an allergic reaction?” Gears where turning in my head. I could fix that! I just needed… “I need my bag, now!!!” I seized Dorian’s hand and broke in to a run heading back toward the tent we had abandoned, pulling him along with me.

“Marin!!! What are you doing!” Dorian followed me.

“I can help!!! I just need my bag where is it?!”

“How? There is no cure for reactions like-” I cut him off.

“Not on Thedas maybe but were I come from….” Dorian gave me a long skeptical look, before darting into the tent, over the objections of the grumpy man, whom I assumed was in charge of looking after the supplies, and returned moments later with my two packs. I plunged my arm into the backpack and fished for the zippered case that contained my first aid kit. It felt like forever before my questing fingers found it. I stood up and dashed back, towards the knot of people, which had grown considerably. When I pressed through the pack of people, I noticed Scab and another soldier standing by Elton's side. The new solider bore such a striking resemblance to Elton that I did a double take. Tears were running down his nose, as he held Elton through the throws of anaphylaxis.

“Brother please” He sobbed. Elton’s face was now pale, greying in his ruddy swollen face, his breaths where high and wheezy like sucking air through a tube.

I fell to my knees in the snow next to him and unzipped the pouch digging for the small cylinder I knew would be in there. My Epipen.
“Who are you? What is that?” Yelled the man who I could only assume was Elton’s brother, as he tried to push me away. Resenting my abrupt intrusion on this moment of mourning.

“My name is Marin.”

“You are the woman who…” We didn’t have time for this.

“I can save him please let me!!!” I interrupted.

The soldier paused and gave a nod, it looked more confused than anything but I didn’t give him another chance to protest. I pulled off the safety cap and wrapping my fist around the tube I pressed it into his unarmored thigh, and held it there for a count of three. I heard the click of the auto injector.

The seconds seemed to stretch out before me. A silence had fallen over the observers in the clearing, only the man’s labored breathing made a sound. When I released the epipen I kept my hand pressed to the injection site, rubbing gently. Slowly Elton’s breathing eased, and some of the swelling began to come down. His puffy eyes slowly opened.

“Eaton?!?” Elton wheezed. In response the crying man let out a strangled but relived sob, and they clung to each other.

I let go of a breath I didn’t even know that I had been holding. Thank god—My thought was interrupted as I was abruptly rugby tackled to the ground, pain radiated up my side, as my bruised and broken ribs protested the rough treatment. I found myself wrapped in an embrace of raven curls and leather armor. The sobbing woman who Bull had called Cutlass was on top of me.

“You saved him!” Cutlass nearly sobbed against my shoulder “You are maker sent! Thank you!”

“Ribs ouch” I hissed “You’re welcome but maybe…. if you could get off?!”

She released me with a pained look of apology on her face. “Sorry!” Krem helped her feet. She self-consciously wiped her face clean of tears, she turned to look back to Elton, who gave her the sappiest smile I had ever seen. She blushed furiously then said with forced severity. “Glad to see your feeling better Corporal Ashford” She then turned on her heel, and all but fled from the scene.
“How… How did you do that.” Stiches asked. His confused expression was mirrored by Dorian, and the healers in the group. For the first time I looked around and really appreciated that this whole thing was being watched by a quite large crowd. Most of the faces I didn’t recognize, but I managed to pick Varric, Cullen out from the throng.

“It’s a machine from my world, injects a medicine called Epinephrine, it is a synthesized version of the chemical that causes the flight or fight response, you know, that rush you get in combat? Helps with extreme allergic reactions, anaphylaxis, like he was having.” I got blank blinking reactions from the crowd. “Oh… before I forget.” I pulled two little pink antihistamine pills out of the first aid kit. “You need to take these with water, swallow them whole don’t chew.” Elton’s brother produced a water skin and helped Elton swallow the pills. It took him a couple tries. I guess pill swallowing was not a common skill in Thedas.

“My name is Marin by the way, Marin Alvarado.”

“I am Eaton,… Eaton Ashford Ser, Elton is my brother.”

“Eaton and Elton, your parents do that on purpose? How often do people get that mixed up?”

Eaton smiled “All the time. My lady…. I do not know how to thank you.”

“Just Marin is fine Corporal, and there is no need to thank me.”

“I … Andraste bless you!”

I stood up a little shakily. Healers rushed over to take Elton off. With the drama over, the crowd began to disperse back to their normal activities. I walked over to the knot of healers. “He should be kept under careful observation for a while.”

“What other medicines do you have in there?” Stiches asked looking like a child in a sweet shop.
“What else do you know?”

“Now, Now” Cora said harshly “Let us not forget the Marin is a patient herself, and she has probably quite over-tired herself today.” Her tone was severe and matriarchal and instantly quieted the voices.

“I am fine really—“ I protested, sounding a little petulant

“Nonsense, less than a day out of bed and already running around and slinging packs about…” As she lectured she was giving me a look up and down and checking the bandaging on my wrist.

“You should be focusing on resting before what will be a grueling march with these injuries. NO physical labor. Is that clear young lady?”

“Yes mother.” I intoned with a smile. She harrumphed at me before turning her glare back to the gentleman in the knot.

“Now one of you gentleman should help Lady Marin carry her items back to her tent.”

“…do I have a tent? ”

“You have not yet been assigned one? I am afraid we need the space you have been occupying for the wounded now that you are hale enough for heroics.”

There was a silence. We all glanced at the Commander who gave a grimace. “Resources are very tight, we had not the time to get all that was needed out of Haven.”

Dorian spoke up. “ I have extra space in my accommodations. And I have enough healers training to keep an eye on her.”

Cullen countered “Having the lady share a tent with a strange gentleman is hardly proper.”

“We are in a military encampment, in a survival situation and I don’t want any special treatment. I don’t think this is the time to be overly concerned with propriety. If Dorian is willing to share, I trust
to Dorian’s chivalry.” *I didn’t have the proper equipment to tempt Dorian anyhow.*

The look on Dorian’s face was slightly confused at that, but he said cheerily “But of course. We will need an extra bedroll.”

“Very well then It is settled. I will send a runner with an extra bedroll to you as soon as possible. I must leave now to oversee the rest of the preparations. I will carry news of this to Captain Rylen, Elton Ashford is from his unit. Thank You, Engineer Alvarado, for saving my men. Since the conclave we have lost so many…”

The Commander broke off, rubbing the back of his neck.

“I am just happy to be useful Commander.” I meant it earnestly. The commander gave a nod and stalked away. Dorian gave me a little grin, that bewildered me.

“Come along now Marin.” He said walking over to my bags and hoisting them over his shoulder. “Let me show you my appointments.”

We walked for a while before he leaned in and said “You’re remarkably quick to trust you know.”

I frowned “No one has ever accused me of that before. How do you figure?”

“We have only just met and you ‘trust to my chivalry’?” He quoted “It is like you forgot I am the evil Tevinter magister.”

“Naa you’re not evil, just pompous as fuck.” He threw his head back and laughed at that “Plus as you are so fond of telling everyone you’re a mage from Tevinter, not a member of the magisterium.”

He rounded his expressive eyebrows on me “I don’t believe I have ever said so in your hearing.” I raised my eyebrows at him. “Ah... so I guess this is the part where I accept your astonishing tale as true.”

“Would you like more proof?”
“And hear you lob horrible bits of my past and-or future at me? I am not sure I do. Although I suppose it can’t have been anything too horrific if you agreed to be my roommate.”

I laid my hand on his shoulder. “The story told me you’re a man of incredible integrity Dorian. Even if you were remotely interested, which you’re not, I would trust you not to do anything untoward” Dorian stopped walking and stared at me, as though he was seeing me for the first time. “Also, if I may say, your father is a fuck-wad for trying to change you… And the owning slaves bit. I think I goes without saying that slavery is heinous.”

Dorian opened and closed his mouth several time before managing “I… Well thank you.”

“Plus since you’re are a mage, maybe you can warm the accommodations a bit. A valuable trait in a roommate if there ever was one. This place if bloody freezing!” Dorian split into a conspiratorial grin.

“Speaking of our accommodations, welcome to our humble abode.” It was fairly humble. A small stretch of canvas nestled under a tree. It would admit two bedrolls, but just barely. Dorian held the flap open for me and I plopped down onto the ground. Which was warmer than it should have been.

“You did warm the tent!” I said delighted.

“Guilty as charged. Now what have you got in that bag of goodies of yours?”

Dorian and I spent the remainder of the afternoon inventorying the contents of my Go-Bag and overnight duffel. I was rather ashamed upon review at how thin my emergency kit was. Several medicines in my first aid kit were expired or about to expire. I didn’t have nearly enough extra warm dry layers, or enough batteries. I thankfully did have two solar chargers, one big one for larger items, like my laptop, and one smaller waterproof one that was handheld, but if I hadn’t been spending a weekend in San Francisco I might not have had the proper power cables that I needed. I also had a hard-drive that contained backups of my computer files and hard copies of important documents, these however had not been updated in a few months.

After a few days in the cold conditions, all my electrical devices were out of power, and I thought it best to wait to try and charge them until we were no longer on the move. I carefully stowed them in the dry bag, and stuffed a few articles of clothing, to try and prevent them from being damaged by water or rough handling.
The things that I had been wearing when I collapsed I also found inside my overnight bag. I placed my digital watch back on, my wrist felt naked without it. It clearly read the wrong time. Giving the hour as early morning rather than late afternoon. But without clock to tell me the local time, I left it as it was.

As I unpacked then repacked my items, I did my best to explain what things where and what they were made of to Dorian. He was an eager listener, and was particularly fascinated by zippers, which I thought was adorable.

Just as dark fell. A small scratching sound came from the outside of the tent.

- “Lord Pavus? Engineer Marin? It is Captain Rylan.”

Dorian and I ducked out of the tent.

“Captain Rylan, what a pleasure, we would have asked you to join us indoors, but I fear we might have run out of space.” Dorian smiled

“What can we do for you Captain?”

“Actually Engineer Marin, it is what can I do for you.” He held out a small bed roll to me.

“Thank you.” I said earnestly taking the proffered item.

- “Extraordinarily kind for you to deliver this yourself Captain. Or does the Commander have you on runner’s duty?” Dorian remarked.

The captain gave a smile. “I wouldn’t object if the Commander asked it of me, we all must do our part, but I requested to give this to you personally. As a thank you. I hear you saved the life of my man, Corporal Elton Ashford, earlier today when even the healers had given him up as dead.”

- “I did only what I could to help. As you say, we all must do our part. I would do the same for
anyone.”

“I… I do not doubt that Lady Marin. Nonetheless I owe you my thanks. As well as an apology for my earlier manner…”

“You owe me nothing Captain. I understand I am … unusual. Please let me know if there is anything I can do for you or your men. I was an engineer in my own world and am keen to make myself useful here. So if there is something you need designed or improved…” I left the sentence hanging.

My request seemed to surprise the Captain. “Of course my lady. I will… be sure to bring such matters to your attention.” Then he gave a quick salute and wandered off into the night. Not a moment later the dinner bell rang. I dropped my bed roll in the tent and followed Dorian to the nearest spitfire. Wherever we went we were followed by staring eyes and mumbling mouths. I felt uncomfortable, but Dorian strode through it with a swaggering grace so I did my best to ignore the looks. We were handed bowls of a mystery meat soup, which smelled fantastic to my rumbling stomach, and found a secluded spot by a campfire.

I was still chewing over the interaction with Rylen. Something in his manner troubled me.

“Was it just me or was that a bit odd?” I asked Dorian.

“What the soup?” he snarked. “Yes defiantly something odd about it. Maker knows what this meat is. Best not to think too carefully about it.”

“No I mean that conversation with Captain Rylen, and everyone is staring.”

“Are you joking? How do you expect them to act?” My mouth fell open, He rolled his eyes at me “You’re a lovely woman who up and fell out of the fade at the moment our hero seemed lost, then you walk into camp with our miraculously revived hero and start saving dying men and talking of wondrous machines from another world? How do you think people will treat you?”

I opened and closed my mouth like a fish out of water. I was a fish out of water. “I … honestly hadn’t thought at all about that.” I replied truthfully. I was sort of glad that they hadn’t burned me at the stake as a witch or something. If I had fallen into Earth’s middle ages I definitely would already have been burned as a witch.

Another gravely voice rolled up from behind me “Sparkler has got a point. I saw you save the corporal today it was something else. Everyone thought he was dying. Scene strait out of a novel, the sobbing brother, the helpless healers, the anguish of a love that would now never be, then you turn
up with a mysterious machine and save the man without breaking a sweat.” Varric chuckled as he took a seat next to me. “Even the Capitan’s in on it. This morning he was bitching and moaning about having to spare good men to babysit some lost lady who may or may not be a spy, and now he is singing your praises…You should hear the rumors going around about you right now!”

“There are rumors about me?”

“Do bears shit in the woods?” I gave a reluctant chuckle and rolled my eyes. Varric was remarkably easy to get along with.

“I imagine bears shit wherever they damn well please.”

“Do please” Dorian said wickedly. “Share some of these rumors.”

“Or not, we could not share… you know whatever you feel like.” I wheedled, although it was hollow.

“Well there are the obvious ones.” Varric ticked rumors down on his fingers. “That she is from another world”

“Well that’s at least true.” I said

“That you are some miraculous inventor bringing knowledge and machines to aid our cause from afar.”

“Hyperbolic, but I will do my best”

“That the maker himself pulled you across worlds, that he is your muse.”

“What?! NO!... I mean… ugh…wow… I don’t know about that…”

“Well both you and the Herald claim to have seen a male figure before you were thrown here.”
“I am deeply uncomfortable with that idea.”

“I don’t really think you have any say in the matter.” Varric said. “Stories have a life of their own.” I narrowed my eyes at him.

“You wouldn’t have anything to do with any of those rumors would you Varric?” I scowled at him. He affected a shocked expression.

“Me, why I would never. I only spread the salacious rumors, not the divine ones.”

“Well for my money I still think the lot of you absurd assholes are a hallucination of mine” I said playfully.

“Truly?” Dorian quipped.

“Dorian Pavus that mustache is to glorious to be real.” I said with a completely strait face. Provoking both my companions into riotous laughter.

“It is quite magnificent isn’t it” Dorian replied turning his head this way and that. Modeling it for us in the light of the camp fire.

Varric rolled his eyes, then barked. “Well I hate to break it too you, but I don’t feel like a hallucination. I am pretty damn sure I am real. And you DON’T seem like you’re a few drakes short of a full deck to me.”

“Which is exactly what a hallucination of mine would say. You have to admit, Coma induced delirium it is a much more plausible scenario than I that I really somehow fell into a fictional universe with magic, and fantastical monsters, where the even the fundamentals of how the universe works are different than my own. More than that I fell into a very specific universe that contains a story I know, right smack dab in the middle of that very story! It is just impossible. Full stop. And when you eliminate the impossible whatever remains however improbable must be the truth.” I finished, quoting my favorite fictional detective.

“Well when you put it like that, I get your point. I wouldn’t believe it if I suddenly found myself in
the middle of *Hard in Hightown*, and that story takes place in this universe.” Varric acknowledged.

“At least I hope this is a dream and I am in a coma. The other plausible explanation is much worse.”

Dorian gave me an alarmed look “Worse? Worse how?”

I sighed “That I am not in a coma. That I am conscious and completely off my rocker. That my brother died in that car accident and I suffered a complete psychotic break. I lost the only family I had left in the world and am now dreaming about a thing, about a story, that we shared together. Putting myself in a place were I am just one of many refugees who have suffered tragedy, so I am not alone in my grief.” That possibility had been haunting me since I woken up. Just voicing it left me with an anxious horrible knot in my stomach. But it was a very real scenario, given the evidence.

Varric and Dorian exchanged horrified looks before Varric said falteringly “Well shit Fidget, that is dark.”

I nodded grimly “I know right.” Then after his full sentence caught up with me “Fidget?” I asked.

He shrugged “It seems to suit. Do your hands never stop moving?” His eyes flicked down towards my hands. Which had been absent mindedly building structures out of bits of kindling that littered the ground hear the fire.

“Ha, no they really don’t. I always kept them busy with one project or another, usually I had more than one.” I paused and then failed to suppress a chortle. *This whole situation was absurd.* “Fidget, I can’t believe I got a nickname from Varric. Leo would be laughing his ass off.” My face fell. *Where was Leo? Was he safe?* The unknowns roiled in my stomach and left me feeling miserable.

Both Dorian and Varric seemed to read my change in humor. Dorian put one hand gently on my shoulder and and Varric barked “Well I don’t know about you, but I could use a drink. Would would it be weird to have a drink with a hallucination?” He quirked an eyebrow at me then reached into his pocket and pulled out a flask. Grinning wickedly.

Dorian clasped his chest in exaggerated surprise “My dear Varric, did you actually manage to smuggle something drinkable out of Haven? I could kiss you.”

“You know” I said with a conspiratorial drawl. “I don’t think hallucination alcohol really counts.”
“I bet your right. It might even jog your brain out of whatever fevered imagining this is. Help you loosen up, get back to reality.”

“That sounds like a testable hypothesis.”

We finished the flask.

Chapter End Notes

So... I am not super happy with this chapter, but I want to keep moving forward so here it is.

As usual PLEASE let me know if you find any typos, grammatical errors or continuity issues, and again sorry If I am less than responsive, I am working crazy hours in a far flung local and things like internet and power are not a given. I literally am sitting on a pile of coconuts to get enough internet to post this.

Hope you like it.
Chapter Summary

The germ theory of disease states that many illnesses are caused by microorganisms, organisms too small to see with the naked eye including bacteria, viruses, protists, fungi, and prions.

Shit get real on the journey to Skyhold. Marin makes a list.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains some moderate gore, and descriptions of injuries. If that is a trigger for you or just not your cup of tea, might want to turn back.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The trek to Skyhold began rather ingloriously. I was roused by Dorian before dawn, and was greeted by a pounding headache.

I groaned “What the shit did Varric keep in that flask?” Whatever it was was a lot stronger than the stuff you got off the shelf at a liquor store.

“Fortified Kirkwall whiskey. I take it your little experiment failed?”

“I think it is safe to say that hallucination alcohol definitely counts. Remind me never to drink after a heavy blood loss again.”

Whatever magic Dorian had used to warm the tent yesterday had faded. Dew and frost coated almost every surface, including the tips of my hair. The cold made the pain in my ribs and wrist that much more noticeable. The last thing I wanted to do was wake up and exit the little pocket of warmth that was my bed roll, but all hands would be needed today, so I grit my teeth, put on my big girl pants, and got my ass out of bed. I gave a shiver as the icy air hit my chest.

“Here” Dorian said “Take one of these.” He dropped a small smooth stone into my hands. I frowned.
“What is this?”

He rolled his eyes at me. “A heating rune,” He waved his hands and an etching carved into the stone, glowed a fiery red then faded “Put It inside your jacket.”

“Thanks” I and moved to follow his instructions.

“Don’t mention it, Cora would have my hide if she suspected one of her out-patients were neglected. In fact, she would have my hide for letting you carouse with the dwarf, best not tell her.”

Warmth began to radiate out from the little stone in my inner pocket. Heating the air trapped by my jacket. “mmm.. That better. Heating runes are like hand warmers but magic.”

“What are hand warmers?”

“A heating rune but mundane.” I smiled.

“Oh very clever… Could you make them, these hand warmers?”

Hmm… It was a fairly simple exothermic reaction. “I could if I could get my hands on the right materials. Not sure it’s worth the effort though. Seems like heating runes already do the job. Probably better and cheaper than the mundane version.”

“Heating runes have to be recharged at the end of the day, only last about twelve hours.”

“Then they have ten hours on chemical hand warmers, those last about two. Although we have other devices for warming. Battery powered. Those would be a lot harder to recreate here though.” I wondered if I could make primitive batteries here in Thedas. Electrodes, an electrolyte and a separator, hmm… “You know I need to start a list. Things to investigate, recreate or invent.”

I loved lists. They were very comforting.

I rummaged in my bag and found my daily planner. I tore a couple blank pages out of the back then
grabbed a pen.

“What is that?” Dorian said pointing at the pen in my hand.

“A pen?” Oh shit Thedas only had quills. “You write with it.”

“The ink is on the inside? Brilliant!”

“I actually have no idea how to write with a quill, on earth no one really uses them anymore.” Dorian cocked an eyebrow and I felt irrationally embarrassed for my lack of skill. “OK then, first thing on the list: invent pens.”

The second item on my list “Plumbing/Septic Systems” was added after my morning trip to the restroom. Sufficed to say that squatting in the icy woods with cracked ribs was not fun.

As no-frills as my grooming routine was, the next few items (toothbrush, antiperspirant, safety razors etc…) were added to the list at Dorian’s insistence when he saw the contents of my toiletries bag.

I had to give credit to Cullen and Josephine the Inquisition was supremely well organized for the circumstances. We were packed up and moved out a few hours after dawn. Which was as quick as one could expect for a band of ill-equipped refugees trapped by war and weather in a treacherous mountain pass. The going was slow. The snow drifts were deep and the terrain treacherous. For my part I was glad of the slow pace. Thedas was quickly humbling any illusion I had of being physically fit. I swam laps or jogged three or four times a week, took a kickboxing class on Saturdays, had a membership at a climbing gym and religiously avoided yoga. This, I had felt, kept me in decent shape. I was wrong. Everything hurt. Being injured didn’t help either. I had stubbornly insisted on carrying my own bags, waving down any offers to help. I needed to be useful here. At the very least I should at least be able to literally carry my own weight.

Frostbite and hypothermia were a real concern. Dorian, as a mage with an affinity for fire, had been put what I mentally dubbed “toe patrol” to make sure that no one lost any digits or succumbed to the cold. I spent my first morning tagging along with him. He happily agreed as having a woman along was much better for propriety’s sake.

“You should have seen the scullery girl when I went to check in with kitchen staff. She looked at me like I had asked her to garnish my drink with puppy eyeballs.”
“Dorian! Puppy eyeballs are only supposed to go with gin cocktails!” I gasped facetiously

“You know Marin, has anyone ever told you that you are absolutely delightful?”

I was happy to help Dorian keep the Inquisition frostbite free. He was an excellent conversationalist and it gave me the opportunity to meet everyone. I quickly despaired of remembering everyone’s names but I got to meet key personnel ask about their crafts, and figure out if I might be able to contribute. My list slowly got longer.

When we arrived at Captain Rylen’s unit I was greeted with an almost confusing level of enthusiasm.

“MARIN!!!” Scab’s booming voice roared, and I was instantly scooped up, and paraded into the center of the chattering group. “Walking with us?!”

His playful antics caused laughter to bubble out of me. “I… I am just here for your toes!”

“Our toes?” Lillian squeaked

“We are here to prevent frostbite.” Dorian called above the din. “The Commander has instituted severe penalties for loosing digits… so who can’t feel their toes?!”

“Why don’t you start with this patient here!” Scab said, pitching me off his shoulder, and I landed nose to nose with a familiar face.

“Elton?!!”

“The very same. They stuck you on frostbite duty?” He asked.

I shrugged “I volunteered. I like to be useful. Although I had no idea when I woke up this morning that my day would involve so many toenails.”

I quickly fell into bantering conversation with the unit, interrupted by the occasional removing a boot or glove, to inspect someone’s numb digits.
“So where is your brother Elton?” Most of the other soldiers I had talked to yesterday had made an appearance, I was confused by the younger Ashford’s absence.

“He is in a different company, he is an archer under Captain Lang. They don’t like to put siblings in the same unit…” I understood that. Putting them in different units made it less likely they both would be wiped out in one attack. Smart but morbid.

“Oh we haven’t done Lang’s company yet.”

He smiled and said with such forced nonchalance it was comical “You been to do the Chargers yet?”

I smiled “No… Why is there something you would like me to tell that young woman? What was her name… Cutlass?”

“Ha… Elton even the new girl sees it!” Lillian sniped.

“She literally tackled me after I helped you, it was kind of hard to miss.”

“Been sweet on each other since the Chargers first rolled into Haven.”

“Come on…” Elton hissed at his friends who were so freely spilling the beans.

“Well you have been!”

“They haven’t even talked about it yet.” Scab said rolling his eyes

“Oh Duude…” I said to Elton.

Several confused faces turned to me “What’s dude mean?”
Oh right... different world different slang. “It’s a slang term where I come from, just means a person, but what it means comes a lot from how you say it.”

“So when you say ‘duude’” Lillian said imitating my exasperated tone. “it means that Elton is a idiot and should just come out with it…”

“Yea pretty much… I mean, I am close to clueless with this sort of thing, but I don’t think bad-ass lady mercs are usually driven to hysterics over any random soldier... reason suggests that you two might have something to talk about.”

Elton was rapidly progressing from a slight pink flush to a blistering red. “Oh fuck off the lot of you…”

I suddenly very glad that I had a deadly shellfish allergy. I may have been the subject of suspicion or awed stares to most of the Inquisition, but my epipen had bought me some acceptance with this company, and I was absurdly grateful.

When we eventually made our way to the Chargers I found that saving Elton had earned me good will with them as well. There were maybe three or four dozen of them. The Chargers that had been introduced in the game, Dalish, Rocky, Skinner, Grimm and Stiches seemed to make up the tertiary leadership, under second-in-command Krem. They were an incredibly diverse group, with representatives from nearly every race and nationality in Thedas. The only unifying characteristic seemed to be a skill at arms and an attitude that was uniquely Chargers.

It didn’t take me long to figure out that my characterization of Cutlass as a ‘bad-ass lady merc’ was pretty spot on, she exuded an aura untamed danger than only faded when Elton was brought up. I had to laugh that my conversation with the Chargers mirrored almost exactly my conversation with the Rylen’s unit, with her being the butt-end of her comrade’s mockery for not saying anything to Elton. Even Bull got in on the ribbing, although Cutlass didn’t sass Bull back like she did her fellow Chargers. I got the feeling he didn’t hold fact that she had cracked his lip against her, but he did expect her to get her head on strait so she wasn’t a liability in the field.

“We come down hard on the back talk under the Qun Cutlass… isn’t that right Krem de la Krem?”

“So you keep telling me Chief.”
The carts carrying the critically wounded were one of our last stops in the afternoon, as they were at the back of the column. I had to suppress the urge to gag. The scene before me was... horrible was hardly and adequate word. Many of the the wounded bore appalling burns, flesh blackened, or ashen gray, blistered, melted away revealing yellow-white and angry red flesh. There were several missing limbs, field amputations, by the look of it. The air was laced with putrid-sweet odor, that seemed to lodge itself in the back of my throat. The only name I could find for it was death. It smelled like death.

“Are you alright?” Dorian asked, catching my expression.

I swallowed and gave a nod. “Of course.” Remember Marin … big girl pants. “Whose toes are we starting with?”

When we were finished checking the healers and the patients I begged off from helping Dorian further.

“I think I might be able to help more here.”

Dorian sighed, “Very well, don’t let Cora bully you too much. I’ll find you when we make camp. I want to know more about this so called Dentistry.”

“Thanks Dorain.”

I spent the rest of the day walking with the healers, and Cole. It didn’t surprise me to find him here, next to the people who were suffering the most. None of the healers seemed to acknowledge him however, so I figured he was doing his “invisible helper” thing, and I let him be.

By the end of the day I had rigged a primitive suspension system for the stretchers of some of the more critical patients, so that they would sway with the movement of the carts, and had given away almost my whole supply of painkillers. The healers at first resisted accepting, telling me I should save my supply. But even aspirin and Tylenol have expiration dates, so they wouldn’t remain useful indefinitely, and when could they be put to better use than now? When we were out of supplies and unable to make Theodosian remedies. I kept only a few pills, at Cora’s instance, to study later on the off chance I could recreate their formulas. Really it was a selfish choice, spending my day walking and riding beside these people, watching their agony and not being able to help was difficult to endure. I wasn’t even sure if I had helped any, these people really needed morphine or something stronger. I wished I could have given more away, wished I had a fuller first aid kit.
I added a slew of items to my list including but not limited to microscopes, improved syringes, prosthetic limbs, and medical plastics.

The second day, I watched the first of the patients die. I had been walking along side his cart, wondering if there was a way to improve the suspension when he cried out. I frail broken sort of wail that made the bottom fall out of my stomach.

“CORA!!!!” I yelled. I climbed up onto the cart to see what was wrong. I could hear Cora barking orders to other healers and people scrambling, but I focused on the young man in front of me. He was an elf, his flushed and feverish face lacked a Vallaslin, and his pale hair was plastered to his face with sweat. He had a horrible gash, starting from the outside of his hip and twisting around to his knee, something rancid was oozing out and soaking the bandages that held it. The smell of festering flesh was powerful. Cora came rushing over to the cart.

“Infection? I asked. She nodded grimly. I could tell by the look on her face that it was dire.

“I don’t suppose you have an eleventh hour miracles in that bag of yours?” I shook my head. I had nothing for this, nothing to fix it. What I wouldn’t have given for penicillin or Amoxicillin or antibiotics of any description. God he was young, younger than Leo. He couldn’t have been more than sixteen or seventeen. I pressed my hand to his forehead, it was blistering hot underneath my finger tips. When I did, he opened his eyes weakly. They were a brilliant blue.

I started as Cole appeared over my shoulder. “He is afraid, freezing and burning, floating away on fetid silence. He wishes he could hear her sing one last time.”

“I can’t help him Cole. I’m sorry.”

Cole looked at me and cocked his head like a dog. “Can you sing?”

“I…” I almost answered no. I didn’t want to sing. But the boy grabbed my hand, and I couldn’t lie. “Yes… well I, can I don’t --” My demurral was cut of my a sudden keening whimper, almost a sob as the young man in front of me writhed in pain. “No, shhh it's ok…” I coaxed “Shh it's ok … umm…” And a song came to my lips without me having to pick it.

*When I find myself in times of trouble,*
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom.
Let it be

My voice was shaky with fatigue and cracked with cold, and it took me a few lines to find my pitch.

And in my hour of darkness
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom
Let it be

Let it be, let it be, let it be,
Whisper words of wisdom,
Let it be

As I sang the pain seemed to drain out of his face. He shut his eyes and small smile pulled at the corner of his lips. His finger tightened around my hand.

And when the broken hearted people
Living in the world agree,
There will be an answer
Let it be.

For though they may be parted there is
Still a chance that they will see
There will be an answer …

Then he gave a horrible gurgling breath that seemed to echo deep within him and his hand went limp in my fingers.
“Let it be.” Cole said in flat voice.

I took a couple deep breath. Ok Marin, keep it together. What comes next? I closed the poor boy’s eyes, covered him with the blanket. Than stood up to climb down from the cart. I noticed that I had gathered an audience. I saw a few familiar faces in the crowd, the healers, Stiches, Dorian, and Solas. But I didn’t want to talk to any of them. Several members of the crowd were crying. My eyes were dry.

“What was his name?” I asked Cora softly. I hadn’t thought to ask before he died. Because I am an asshole.

“Liston.” She said.

I added autoclaves, and penicillin to my list. I knew that there was no way I could synthesize penicillin, I didn’t even know how to identify the Penicillium mold it was originally came from… I added it to my list anyway.

Wells himself put Liston on the pyre that night. I spent the next few days trying to explain the basics of modern medicine and sterilization practices to any person remotely interested in healing who was willing to listen. Never before had I so keenly felt my ignorance on a topic. How much good could I have done if I was a doctor or a Biochemist? What I wouldn’t have given to have access to a basic medical textbook, or pubmed, webMD anything.

My short lectures weren’t having much of an effect. They kept getting interrupted by one urgent matter after another, people were only getting fragments, which wasn’t the best way to explain epidemiology.

We lost another three people in the next two days. I watched each of them go. Two of the three were also lost to infection. The third, might have been infection as well, but he had quite a bit of his intestines hanging on the outside of his body, so it might have been the injuries themselves.

I watched the pyres each night, and Wells carried each lost soul to the flames like he had for Liston. One night Wells approached me as I stood in the snow and watched the body burn. Getting lost in the hypnotic swirls of the fire.

“This the first time you have watched people die?”
“No” I answered, with a small shake of my head. “I saw an elderly man have a heart attack once.” It had been in a mall food court, I remember I had been sent to grab the AED. This felt very different. Violent, wasteful. “This isn’t quite the same thing.”

“No it isn’t” Wells agreed.

“If I had the proper medicines from my world, the right training...”

“It is no fault of yours Marin, you never asked for any of this.”

“Neither did you.” I responded. For a second before he flashed a dismissive smile and shrugged off my words, I saw the tremendous weight that he carried on his face. I suddenly was in awe of his strength.

“No maybe not, but I did get a cool-ass title, a glowing green hand … it's great for closing sky holes!”

He managed to surprise a smile out of me. *Wasn’t that the first thing I said to him, when I realized who he was... more or less...* “Don’t forget bringing order to a world gone mad.” I retorted

“That too… it's also excellent for getting late night reading done.”

“A reading lamp… Handy…” *Puns Marin...really.*

“Oooo...” Wells hissed, “That was bad.”

“Yea no... I regret it.” I said through a chuckle.

I realized that the melancholy that had hung on me since Liston had died was ebbing away.

“Rumor is you have a nice voice, like a bard they said”
“Rumors often exaggerate. My brother Leo though, he is an amazing musician.”

“Well some of it must have rubbed off.”

We lapsed into silence after that and watch the pyre burn for a long time, shoulder to shoulder.

I added an ukulele to my list.

***

I soon learned that it wasn’t just my melancholy that Wells seemed to able to wash away. He had a miraculous ability to galvanize. He seemed to be everywhere. When he wasn’t scouting forward at the head of the column, leading us to Skyhold, he was bringing back armfuls of herbs and supplies foraged from the wild. (Where he found all that elf-root on these snowy hills I can’t even imagine.) Or he was chatting with the soldiers, with the refugees, the healers and crafters. Easing burdens and lifting spirits. He didn’t even do it with any flashy speeches or grand gestures, he just was himself.

Inspiring was such a cheesy word, but it fit. The way things were made better in his wake, the way he renewed, his charisma, these were things that had never quite been conveyed to me in the game. Perhaps because you play as the Inquisitor, and you just take for granted the fact that people will follow you, trust you, that you will make a difference. It is a video game, after all, that is sort of the point. But to watch someone actually do it was a completely different thing all together.

“He really is something else isn’t he.” I said to Dorian, Varric and Bull over the camp fire one night. Failing to express my admiration with any kind of eloquence. “I can see why people want to follow him, he makes it easy to believe in him.”

“That is saying something coming from you.” Varric grinned.

I frowned “What’s that mean?”

“You still think you’re dreaming! Don’t even believe the evidence of you're own eyes and ears. Must take a lot to make you believe in someone else.”

“You're just as cynical as the next guy Varric, and you’re here aren’t you?”
“Yea well, I got dragged here by a Seeker more stubborn than a druffalo.” I raised my eyebrows at him. “And also, Stormy sort of has that effect on people… that inspiring, saving the world, belief crap.”

“Stormy?” Wells didn’t seem the type to be gloomy or have a temper that nickname would imply.

Dorian grinned broadly. “Oh yes, it is quite apt. You should see him in the field when he is really working.”

“Why? What is he like then?”

“He is like the storm. Wind and water. Thunder and lightening. He can wrap himself in shadow like a rogue and then hit like a hurricane.” Varric yarnd expressively. “And like a spring rain, he can bring new life to places, renewing people.”

“That a line from one of your books?”

“Maybe it should be, the Inquisition would make compelling reading material.”

“We are fabulously interesting characters, I will give you that.” Dorian preened.

I sighed with frustration. “If only I had half your talent with words.” I was starting to think the higher ups at the company were right to give the NASA project to Sanders over me. Sanders was great with the press and if I couldn’t even explain how germs worked…

“Still not getting through to the healers?” Varric asked sympathetically. I shook my head.

“That’s because you’re going about it all wrong.” Bull said. I frowned at him. He had witnessed my broken attempt to have a conversation with Stitches. “Whatever you’re trying to describe is too big for a quick chat. People won’t absorb it piecemeal and hurried like this. You need to sit people down, give it to them in a narrative, make sure you have their undivided attention.”
“A lecture?” Actually that was exactly what I needed to do. “I… that would be perfect. You think we can arrange it?”

“I will talk to the Boss. I’m sure we can get something arranged for you Professor…” Bull smiled.

Professor… I could work with that. I started a new list. “Lecture topics”. First up: Germ Theory.

Chapter End Notes

Hello! I have internet again so here is another chapter!

As usual, please let me know if you catch any spelling/grammar issues, I am certain they are there. Also, forgive me if I am slow to respond to any comments, I am working long hard hours in a beautiful but remote corner of the globe. So time and internet can be hard to come by. Updates will be slow for the same reasons, but they are coming! (Next chapter: Arrival at Skyhold!)

Thanks for all the love & enjoy!
Ch. 6 - The Trinity Test

Chapter Summary

The Trinity test was the first detonation of a nuclear weapon, conducted on July 16th 1945 in the New Mexico Desert. (http://www.wired.co.uk/article/manhattan-project-robert-oppenheimer)

Skyhold, Septic systems, and a Wolf.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Wait he wants to what!!!!!!” I almost shouted at Leo. We were sitting on the couch as Leo navigated his way through the Trespasser DLC. Well… Leo was sitting, I was nearly on my feet, squirming on the couch with the effort of containing the emotions coursing through me. The spear gun I had been crafting forgotten on the floor.

“He wants to tear down the veil and…” Leo was grinning the self satisfied grin of someone who knows exactly was it going on and is reveling in the reaction of their uninitiated companion. It wasn’t his first play through. I interrupted his smug explanation.

“This has been his endgame the whole time?! He is the reason Coryphaeus got the orb, and the conclave exploded and there was a massive skyhole?! And now he wants to destroy the world? That self-righteous judgey son-of-a-bitch!”

“Rin, think about it from his perspective. He trying to fix his mistake, save his people however he can.”

“Cool motive, still genocide.” I said with every bit of snark I had in me.

Leo laughed at me. “He isn’t like Coryphaeus,”

“He is exactly like Coryphaeus, he wants to destroy this world to bring back an empire and world that is long since gone.”

“I meant that he doesn’t want to cause suffering, he feels terrible about it but thinks he has a duty
“Oh so he is going to be kind to people before he causes mass death and destruction? And he will feel bad about it afterwards... Very noble. Or, alternatively, he could NOT kill everyone.”

“What? You’re not moved by his tragic story?”

“Everyone has a sad story to tell, it is no excuse for being a murdery little shit.” I glowered at the TV. My mind was running back through what I knew of the elf. He had always struck me as philosophical but prideful. “Wait isn’t he a romance option, what happens if you romance him?! Can you talk him out of it?”

“It just gets more tragic, he does fall genuinely in love with you but he breaks it off, midgame, because he knows he is going to have to well... here.” He called up a youtube video of the final encounter with a romanced inquisitor. I gaped as I watched it...


“He is still a fan favorite.” Leo shrugged. “I guess the ladies love that he is intellectual and broody and broken...” I stared at him incredulously. What could possibly be sexy about what essentially amounted to war crimes. Leos voice changed tone, dropping into something contemplative. “For now I am become death, destroyer of worlds.” He quoted.

“So Solas is Robert Oppenheimer?”

“Or maybe more like Vishnu.”

“Still fucked up…”

“Yea but great story telling. The seeds are there all the way through.”

“Yea.” I conceded. “It is a good twist.”
A hand grasped my shoulder. The world spun as my view reoriented. The scene before me disappearing draining away like water in cupped hands. I started awake.

“umm… what.” I murmured groggily.

“Rise and shine, sleepyhead. It is time to hit the road again.” Dorian said softly.

“Mmm, I’m up, I’m up.” I protested blearily, rolling out of my bedroll and staggering upright with all the grace of a wet noodle.

“You were muttering something in your sleep. Or more precisely you were cursing. Even in your sleep you have a foul mouth. Where you dreaming?” There was something strange in his tone I was far to tired to identify.

“Yea sorry, I talk in my sleep sometimes when I have vivid dreams.”

“You dreamed before? In your world? But I thought your world had no magic, no fade.”

“Yea.” I frowned, unable to make the connection between his statements. “Why should that be strange?”

Dorian stared at me then said, slowly like he couldn’t believe he had to explain it. “Here, to dream is to enter the fade… mentally at least.”

“Really, ALL dreams?”

“Yes.”

“Weird. On earth dreams are just, well … dreams. Stories the brain tells itself. Nothing magic about it. I’m not well versed in neurology, but scientists think dreams are the way the brain processes memory, sifting through and transferring things stored in short term memory to long term memory.”
There is definitely no fade involved.”

“Truly? Bizarre.” Dorian frowned his teeth worrying at his bottom lip. Trying to process the implications of what I had told him. “What were you dreaming about?”

I shrugged. The details were fuzzy in my brain… Something about Leo and Dragon Age. Not surprising, given my circumstances. “Come on let’s go get some breakfast before Bull eats it all.”

I wasn’t eager to pursue Dorian’s worry. I had woken up without a pounding headache for the first time since Haven, and I wanted to indulge in the good morning.

I realized suddenly that I also hadn’t woken up with a desperate craving for coffee, probably for the first time in my adult life. I had been suffering the effects of caffeine withdrawal since waking up in the refugee camp. Back in real life, I didn’t consider myself really awake until I had at least one cup and rarely went a day where I had less than three. My average was closer to four or five cups. Going more than a week without, exponentially increased my record. Well it was good to be on the other side of the withdrawal symptoms. They had been unpleasant, I hadn’t quite realized just how unpleasant they had been until I was without them.

As my headache eased so did the difficulty of our journey. The terrain leveled out and became something like a half decent path, and then a definite road. The fires at night were just bonfires, not pyres to burn the injured we had lost that day.

I was near the front of the column, when Solas and Wells crested a rise and stopped.

Skyhold. We had reached Skyhold!

The view from the lip of the outlook was perhaps the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. The abandoned fortress looked indomitable, proud, surrounded by sheer peaks and bathed in the rosy gold light of the setting sun. To the desperate displaced of Haven, the sight was like a breath of air after a long submersion.

“So a home huh?” Wells whispered in my ear. There was a fiery expression burning in his eyes that I had never seen there before. Hope… perhaps, or pride.

“A home.” I confirmed with a smile.
The next few days were a flurry of activity, everyone pitching into the backbreaking work of making the keep livable. The commander insisted the castle be cleared room by room by Inquisition forces to make sure there were no nasty surprises waiting for us in any hidden corners. Luckily the only thing his search unearthed was some entrenched wildlife. Once the fortress was declared free of hazards, everyone one who could reasonably claim some experience in masonry, carpentry or building was pressed into service to make the necessary fixes to the keep. No supplies had yet found us in the mountains so resources were limited and repair jobs had to be prioritized. First priority was safety, we couldn’t have anything collapsing on anyone, second priority was defense. Cullen and Maxwell were determined that the Inquisition would never relive the situation at Haven. I was eager to make myself useful here and although I had little training in architecture and even less in medieval castle defense, I was able to work toward completing item number two on my list: Plumbing/ Septic systems.

I remember having a professor during my undergraduate years boast that engineers had saved more lives than doctors, through prevention of illness and disease. The invention and design of plumping and water treatment systems, in particular. That professor was sort of a prick, but he was absolutely right. I may not have been able to help Liston and the other who had burned on the way to Skyhold, but I could prevent others from falling victim to sickness and infection. If I could pair a decent waste management system, with general cleanliness, hand-washing and brought the healers up to speed on sterilization practices, I would go a long way to accomplishing that goal.

There were not many among the craftsmen working on castle repairs that thought waste management a priority higher than making sure our gatehouses were in working order, but I found an ally in a delightfully grim and sarcastic dwarf named Baz, who had a huge chocolate brown mustache/sideburn combo that wouldn’t have looked out of place on a late 19th century Prussian nobleman. He hailed from Orzarmarr, and apparently had experience engineering their advanced pluming systems. I supposed if you had whole cities underground you would need to have a solid waste and water management systems.

When Baz and I made our case to Wells and the commander about allocating manpower to the issue, I was surprised to find that Vivienne was also vehemently adamant about the plumbing being given priority, something about impressing allies and civilized living conditions. Though I am pretty sure it was my argument about prevention of disease that finally convinced the Commander to let us press forward with the project.

Our job was made a lot easier by the fact that Skyhold’s structure had an existing privy system. There were multiple rooms located on the outer edges of the fortress that had stone benches with holes cut into the bottom, that lead to shoots carved into the outer-walls. These shoots fed into stone channels carved into the masonry that flowed into one large central channel that looked a lot like a roman aqueduct.
A day of treacherous climbing revealed that this aqueduct led out of the castle and deposited the waste over the waterfall that was some-ways downstream of the icy lake Skyhold was positioned over. As long as we were getting our drinking water from upstream, we shouldn’t have any worries about contaminating our water supply.

Unfortunately there wasn’t anyway I was going to be able to install or build proper flush toilets with u-bends in Skyhold without ripping apart a lot of important masonry, but I could optimize the existing system and that was going to smell a whole lot better than latrines or chamber pots. Perhaps I could somehow use a combination of rain water, and water runes to flush the waste down the channels more effectively.

I spent the better part of my first few days in Skyhold with Baz crawling, or climbing around to inspect these channels to make sure there were no blockages or cracks, that would cause any leaks or backups in the system. It was exhausting work and at the end of the day, with most of the castle not yet fit for habitation, a huge chunk of the Inquisition piled into the great hall and to sleep in front of the roaring hearth. There was something sublime about sleeping in the ruined keep, the heat of the bodies surrounding me juxtaposed with the chill of the mountain air and the cold stone. It reminded me, childishly, of summer camp. I found myself sandwiched between Dorian, and Varric, most nights. It was hard to complain. It was warmer that I had been at any point on the trek to Skyhold. The dwarf in particular was exothermic.

I was almost sad when, about a week after our arrival to Skyhold, rooms started to be assigned and the group sleep over came to an end. I was given a small tower room that shared a washroom with Cassandra and a third room that had yet to occupied. The room would be perfect for my needs. It looked scarce right now without any furniture, but when it was properly furnished it would be able to fit a small bed, a wardrobe, perhaps a footlocker or an end table with a chair. Which was more than I needed. After all, the only worldly possessions I had were the things in my overnight duffel, and my emergency go-bag. I had the bedroll Captain Rylen had given me, but that was property of the Inquisition, not mine. The room had a fireplace that would help keep me warm and a small balcony, that would get plenty of sunlight, perfect for my solar chargers.

When I first arrived in my room. I spent almost an hour standing on the balcony and admiring the view. I could see into the garden on my left and on my right I had a view over the outer-walls, looking out into the mountains and the sheer cliffs. A week of staring hadn’t diminished the wonder of the scenery. I doubted a lifetime of staring would.

A gust of wind pulled at my scarf which was not wrapped securely around my neck and nearly blew it away. I reached out with my hand and snatched it before it could escaped. But I left my hand extended, the scarf flapping in the breeze. Have you ever stood on edge of a precipice and had a fleeting and perverse urge to jump? Something like that had risen up in me and I had a sudden strange compulsion to release my scarf, to watch the sad frayed thing flutter away into the white abyss below me.
Someone appeared at my elbow prompting me to let out an undignified gasp. “Cole!”

“The scarf tattered and torn, a fraying connection. It was her scarf first. When you wore it, it reminded you to be your mother’s daughter, but now it is blood and shattered glass and missing pieces. I holds less heat than it used to, and no more warmth.”

“Yes, it was my mothers.” I took a deep breath and slowly pulled my hand in, bringing the scarf back to my neck. “How did you get here Cole?”

He ignored my question “Is it true what the others say? That you think this all a dream. I don’t feel like a dream.”

“Can’t you figure out that out from my head?”

“I can’t hear inside your head. Your head is quiet, caged. Sometimes I like the quiet. The pain is so noisy here. But your calm is only the surface, you still have hurts. How can I help if I can’t hear?”

I furrowed my brow confused. “You can’t hear me? But then how did you know about the scarf?”

“Some pain leaks out, leaves traces. There is sadness on your scarf.” *Sadness on your scarf, sounds like the name of a terrible Indy album.*

“Why can’t you hear me Cole?”

He shrugged. “You are not like the others, the fade buzzes around you, not flowing but caught caged, reinforced by reason.”

“The fuck..” Why would Cole not be able to hear me? There was something going on… And there was one person most likely to have the answers, but fuck if I wanted to talk to him.

Well it was a conversation that needed to happen anyhow, and now was a good a time as any. He would have a slightly harder time murdering me in broad daylight…. No, actually low light levels
would not impede him in the slightest. He could murder me with his little finger and not break a sweat. Probably wouldn’t even get caught.

Who’s afraid of the big bad wolf? … Not funny Marin.

***

Solas was exactly where I expected to find him. In the antechamber of the tower that he could be found painting in the game. Although no murals had yet been begun on the walls.

He cocked his head at me as I entered. I suddenly felt like I had forgotten how to walk normally. Where did my hands usually go again? I thrust them into the pockets of my jeans.

“Engineer Marin, What brings you here?”

“I was hoping to have a word with you, If that is alright.”

“Certainly, was there anything you wanted to discuss in particular?”

“Umm.. There were several topics actually.” Solas seem to pick up on my nervousness.

“Perhaps we could take a walk and discuss these things.” That would be better. It wouldn’t do for someone to overhear.

“Yes that would be best.”

Solas graciously indicated the door to the antechamber then folded his hands gracefully behind his back. We walked out into the courtyard and climbed the steps to find ourselves on the castle walls. The walk in silence helped to calm my nerves slightly.

“Now that we are away from prying ears, what did you wish to discuss Engineer Marin?”
I was toying with the edges of my scarf with nervous energy. *Start with the olive branch Marin.*

“Firstly well I think I should warn you… at some point, it is possible that a friend of yours, a spirit of wisdom will be pulled through the fade against her will by a group of mages. In the story you and the Inquisitor attempt a rescue but…” *It fails you go ape-shit and kill a bunch of fools.* “Well I thought maybe with some warning you might be able to prevent it from happening.”

Solas had lost his erudite demeanor and had become tense. “When does this happen?”

“I… it is hard to say. The timing of the story can be hard to pinpoint… I’m sorry.” *If wisdom died and Solas blamed me…*

“It…” He paused taking a deep breath and relaxing. His rage didn’t disappear so much as resubmerge. “Thank you, for sharing this information. I am not sure if I can forestall this, but I am grateful…. Me and the Inquisitor you say?” I nodded, He gave me along piercing look that confused me for a moment.

Oh Shit you said INQUISITOR Marin. There isn’t an Inquisitor yet…

“I uhh… shit… umm” I struggled to recover.

Solas gave a dry chuckle then shook his head. He mercifully did not press the issue. “Was there another matter you wanted to bring to my attention.”

“Like I said there were a couple things. I have been meaning to have a conversation with you for a while.”

“Then what prompted you to seek me out now?”

“It is Cole… I just found out… he just told me that he can not hear me.”

“Cole can not hear you?”
“Yea he said he can’t hear my thoughts or my pain… Like he can other peoples.”

“Fascinating, that is an aspect of your nature I had not anticipated.”

*My What?!* “Ok Spock, slow down, my what now?”

“Spock?” The elf tilted his head, the deadly calm of the gesture reminded me that I had just given lip to the Dread-wolf, In my shock I had quite forgot that I was meant to be afraid. “Is that a compliment or a slight?”

“I am afraid much of my humor is wasted on references that no one here understands.” I stammered apologetically “Spock was a well known character from a story in my world, he was the exemplification of logic and reason, was knowledgeable on a vast variety of subjects and had a penchant for calling phenomena ‘fascinating’. I imbed the last word with my best Lenard Nemoy impression.

“And I remind you of this character?”

“Yea” *except Spock never tried to destroy the world.* “But that’s not the point. What did you mean my nature?”

“It would seem you have an innate ability to suppress the arcane. Had you not observed? I only blinked in response. “Did you not think it odd that your injuries are not yet healed?”

“No, the body takes time to heal, bones and bruises don’t mend overnight.” I said. The healer had been overly apologetic …. 

“They do with magical aid.” Solas said, in a professorial manner.

“I did not know healing magic had been attempted on me.” I hadn’t thought that the precious resources of the healing mages and healing potions would have been reserved for dire cases. I had spent enough time in the healing tent to know there were plenty worse off than me.

Honestly I hadn’t even thought about it.
“Do you have any explanation for your abilities?”

“None.” It beggared belief. This all beggars belief. Of course I had wound up in world with magic, and obtained the magical ability, to never be able to get magical abilities. A world of death and danger and I would never be able to use a healing potion. Just my luck. Then something occurred to me. I had experienced some magical benefits already. “But Dorian gave me heating runes on the road, to help keep me warm. Those are magic correct?”

“They are indeed ... and you say that you felt their heat?” I nodded “hmm… Intriguing. Perhaps there are limits to your resistance.”

“I am still not sure I understand, I can resist magic? Like a Templar?”

“It is precisely nothing like a Templar’s abilities. Templars disrupt mana, or reinforce the reality around them, negating fade manipulation.”

I frowned, grasping for comprehension. He had listed off words like mana and fade manipulation like a physicist would have talked about gravity or friction, like they were totally normal. I suppose to him they were... This magic bullshit is bullshit. “So...” I said slowly “If I am not like a Templar, then what do I do exactly?”

“I can not say why or how, but seems your being cages the fade, making you immutable. When magic is aimed at you it is though the magic does not exist at all.”

“Well magic doesn’t exist.” I blurted out, frustrated. Then amended “Where I come from anyway.” This is a hallucination.

Solas frowned. “Your abilities are not the lack of magic, but rather it’s inverse, its opposite. The nature of your reality may go somewhat to explaining your powers, but not entirely. If Cole and read pain on objects that you brought from your world but not from you, then there is something unique about you. We should investigate further.” The gears where turning in his head. I wondered if that boded well or poorly. Was Solas interested in helping me? Or was the Fen’harel interested in what my presence here meant to his plans? Where those two things even mutually exclusive? Ok... best take the bull by the horns Marin... or wolf by the... teeth... tail... whatever.

“Solas, do you think I am real?”
“I believe you have not lied, that you are what you say. I cannot confirm or disprove your theory that this is all a hallucination, however.”

“No… I mean do you think I am a real person. That the people here are really people?”

He frowned. “I am not sure I take your meaning.” He said in a measured manner. His eyes boring holes into me.

My heart rate picked up and my palms were suddenly sweaty despite the chill. Perhaps the battlements were not the best place for this conversation. It was a long way down…

“Solas…” I lack the gall to come right out and call him the Fen’Harel “There are some things that can not be undone. This is how the world is now. Unmaking it won’t remake what you lost.” Then I added thinking of his tombstone in the fade “But you needn’t be alone.”

Something dangerous surfaced in his eyes. “You do not know. You can not understand.” His voice was harsh and the glare he shot me made it feel like ice was running through my veins. I decided that between Solas and Leliana, Solas was definitely more dangerous. Leliana was only likely to kill me. Solas… well…

My only way out now was through .

“I woke up, utterly alone, in a world profoundly different from my own, with knowledge and experiences that no one here will ever be able to understand. Yea… I am sure we can not relate to each other at all.” I was being quite earnest under my glibness.

The fury in his face dissipated as he chewed over my words. It was replaced by something that I couldn’t place. Solas reached up and played with the bone that hung around his neck, I noticed for the first time that it was the jaw bone of what could only be a wolf. “You have told no one?”

*Of course I hadn’t. Why would he ask that!* Then I realized with dawning horror that when I had confessed in my first meeting with the inner circle that I had known many of their secrets, Solas, prideful as he was, may not have thought that meant I knew HIS secret. Suddenly this plan of confronting him seemed beyond stupid. “No, It is not my secret to tell. I meant it when I said would keep peoples secrets”
“You also said you would give any information that would help the Inquisition.”

“You help the Inquisition. I would not do anything to jeopardize that. The Inquisition needs your guidance. And frankly I could use some of it myself.” I noticed that my hands were shaking, and I couldn’t seem to get them to stop. I tucked them into my pockets to try and hide the tick. Solas noticed anyway.

“You are afraid of me?”

“Well I am not a complete fool.”

“Clearly.” He chuckled dryly. “And you clearly possess courage. A lesser person would have faced me, knowing what you know, out of prejudice or fear. Though you needn’t worry I do not wish to harm you. In fact, I am eagerly looking forward to learning more about you and your world.”

_I was not sure if that was comforting or not._ “I am honored that you think I have anything to teach you.”

“Only fools think that they do not have anything to learn, and as you said, I am not a complete fool.”

“Please… Give these people a chance to prove they are real, that they deserve a chance.”

He gave me a long contemplative look response “You ask that of me. Yet you believe this world to be less than real yourself. Do you not?”

I opened my mouth to respond but found that I had nothing, and closed it again. We stood for a long time in silence. Before I asked.

“How would you plan on investigating further?”

“Excuse me?”
“You said we should investigate further, this phenomenon, my abilities or nature or whatever. How would you plan on investigating?”

“Well, we should determine if there is a connection between your world’s lack of magic and your abilities. You said Cole read emotions from an object? What object was this?”

“My scarf.”

“Would you mind giving to me, I may be able to run some tests.”

“Sure.” I unwound the tattered fabric from my neck, and held it out to him.

“I should warn you, these tests may … not leave the scarf in tact. Are you alright with that?”

I ran the soft wool in between my fingers. My mother’s scarf.

“Sure, yea its fine.” I deposited the scarf in his outstretched hands.

“Very well. Also you said that you had used heating runes on the road?”

“Yes.”

“We should also determine the limits of these abilities. It would not do to have you rely for some reason on this resistance, only to find that you are indeed vulnerable to certain forms of magic. I can find you, when I am free, unless you have any objections.”

“No that sounds prudent. Is there anything I should do in the mean time to prepare?”

“No your presence should be sufficient.”

“Right well... Thank you Solas.”
“You are quite welcome Engineer Marin.”

I turned to walk away, walking along the battlements into one of the towers. I took couple of turns until I found myself in an empty room. Where I promptly shut the door and slid slowly don’t the back of it my shaking legs no longer able to support my weight. Holy shit. Holy shit. Holy shit. That was the most recklessly stupid thing I had ever done. But even with my tactlessness It could have gone a lot worse. I was pretty sure he didn’t plan to kill me, at least not any time soon. So YAY... I guess.

“Lady Marin. Are you quite alright?” I had been so distracted that I had not heard Cullen enter. I realized, belatedly that it was his office that I had taken shelter in. Or it would be his office. It did not yet have any furnishings, not even the infamous desk.

I stood up, my position hunched on the floor was quite undignified. “Yes… Commander. Sorry for disturbing you I was just…” I had absolutely had no justification for why I was huddled in a puddle on his floor, so I abandoned my attempt to explain. “Anyway, I will get out of your hair.”

“You are not in my hair my lady. You are sure you’re well.” His voice was colored with concern, that I found a little odd, we were barely more than strangers.

“Yes, I am sure. Thank you Commander Cullen. Also you really don’t need to call me my lady. I just spent the week crawling around pipes meant for shitting in. I am NOT a noble lady”

Cullen’s mouth curled upwards into a smirk, pulling on the scar at the corner of his mouth. “Well in that case, Engineer Alvarado,” He emphasized the formal name in a teasing manner and I rolled my eyes at him. “… the Inquisition is gathering in the main courtyard. You might want to be there.”

“Thank you, I will go Immediately.” I exited the room with as much grace as I could muster, which was at this point very little.

When I arrived it the courtyard I saw Leliana standing on the staircase to the great hall holding a Dragon sword in her hand. Excitement bubbled inside of me. I knew what was happening here.

A few moments later Cassandra led Wells up the stairs, and he was officially made Inquisitor. He
held the massive great sword aloft and the crowd was swept up in the moment. Cheering the impossible man before us. Even Josie dropped her manicured demeanor for a moment to shout her support. I couldn’t suppress a smile.

“Inquisitor Trevelyan” a voice said at my elbow. I turned to find Fen’Harel at my side. “That prediction came true rather quickly.” He said in reference to my earlier slip-up.

I smiled, but something uneasy lurked in my stomach. What was it Leo had said about Solas?

“For now I am death, destroyer of worlds.”

Chapter End Notes

Foul weather means I have not been able to get out into the field. While bad news for my data collection, it is good news for you because you get another chapter!

This chapter’s focus on waste management systems is partially inspired by MaryDragon’s (http://archiveofourown.org/users/MaryDragon/pseuds/MaryDragon) wonderful MGIT fic. If you haven’t read her writings, you should. She is beyond brilliant and is the reason I plucked up the courage to share my work. So really this whole story is inspired by her. Which may or may not be a compliment depending on how terrible you think this story is. But her stories are amazing, so GO READ THEM!

As usual I am sure there are plentiful spelling/grammar issues lurking above, if you find any PLEASE let me know. I also would love any other feedback you may have! Please forgive any long delays in posting or commenting. I am giving my all working in a far flung local and finding internet and time is not always possible.

Thanks for all your support and enjoy!
Ch. 7- The Uncertainty Principle

Chapter Summary

Also known as Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle. In quantum mechanics there is a limit to which certain pairs of physical proprieties, such as position and momentum, of a particle can be known. The more precisely the physical position of the particle is known the less precisely the momentum can be known.

A party, a meeting, self-doubt and a pattern.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first wagon train of supplies had rolled into Skyhold the same day Wells became “Inquisitor Trevelyan”, and the tavern dubbed the Herald’s Rest was declared open for business.

We had a new tavern and a new Inquisitor, so of course we had party. After my hair-raising encounter with the dread wolf, I sort of wanted this day to be over, and considered forgoing the party to hide in my bedroll, but Dorian was having none of it.

“Nonsense, if I have to suffer through whatever swill they will be serving, you have to suffer through it with me!”

I wanted to tell him that he didn’t have to suffer through anything either but instead I just laughed, and let him drag me to the tavern. If I expected the party to be quiet, because of the long hard hours everyone had been working, I was wrong. The ‘Rest was full to bursting. I wondered fleetingly exactly how much booze had arrived on that wagon train. I suspected the Inquisition might make its way through the the whole shipment tonight.

Dorian managed to find us seating, which I would have thought an impossible task, given how crowded the ‘Rest was. If there was any sort of magic in Thedas that could conjure up extra bar seating, I am sure he used it.

“Now let us see about getting us some libations.” Dorian said, rubbing his hands together in anticipation. A pang of guilt shot through me.

“Dorian… I don’t have any money, at least not in any currency Thedas would recognize.” I was
pretty sure Cabot wouldn’t take credit cards.

“Not to worry about that!” Said a familiar voice, as Elton, Eaton, Scab and Lillian appeared out from the crowd. Elton and Scab both clutched extra drinks in their hands. “First round is on us.” Elton said sliding a mug of beer to me as Scab slid his extra over to Dorian.

“But it’s not fair if I can’t return the favor. I have no coin.” I protested. I wasn’t one to let other people buy me drinks.

“Think of it as a thank you for saving my life.” Elton said, giving no ground.

“Well I won’t protest.” Dorian flashed a wicked grin and accepted his mug

“You’re sure you wouldn’t rather be buying drinks for another woman.” I said with a smirk, looking pointedly at the Chargers, and the raven curls of Cutlass in particular, on the other side of the bar.

Lillian let out a very unladylike snort, the tips of Elton’s ears went pink.

“Just take the blighted drink Marin.” He snapped, but without any real vitriol.

I laughed and held the drink aloft. “Cheers then, and thank you!” The group sloppily clinked their mugs together, and took a hearty sip.

“Ferelden brew.” Dorian said making a face.

“Hey now, we brew good sturdy stuff in Ferelden.” Scab boomed.

“Yea sturdy maybe, but good…” Elton sniped

“Like your marcher brews are better.”
“Marin, you’re unbiased. What’s your take?” Lillian said diplomatically.

“Its umm… alcoholic.” I said noncommittally. Lillian laughed so hard, beer came out of her nose.

“HA! Take that dog man” Elton shouted taking my answer as a tacit agreement to the superiority of Marcher brews.

“To be fair I don’t know if I am the best judge of ales.” I said “I was more of a whisky girl back home. Or wine. California was famous for wine.”

Scab made a ‘told you so’ sort of hand gesture to Elton. Dorian slapped his hand over his chest dramatically. “Marin, you are a girl after my own heart.”

“Pretty sure your heart has zero interests in girls Dorian.” I whispered to him. Which prompted him to roll his eyes at me.

“Oh very clever.”

“So Scab you’re from Fereldan then?” I asked, pitching my volume so the group could hear me again.

“Yup, Highever.” The name rang a bell in my head.

“Why do I recognize that name?”

Scab shrugged. “The Hero of Fereldan is from Highever, Her Brother is the Teyrn there.”

Ahhh yep that was it. “And a Teyrn is like a Lord right?” He nodded.

“And where are you from?” I asked the two Ashfords and Lillian
“We’re from Wycome, Ser” Eaton said. The younger Ashford was more reserved around me than his brother. He had a hint of awe in his voice when he spoke to me that made me a little uncomfortable.

“And I’m Dalish, so you know, we moved around a lot. Mostly around the Free Marches.” Lillian bubbled.

“Why leave your clan?” Lillian’s face fell and she shrugged. I felt bad for asking, it was clearly a sore subject.

“Ahh Never mind…” Scab said pulling us back from whatever precipice my question had brought us to. “You know now that…” But whatever subject Scab was about to bring up was interrupted by a disruption in the crowd behind him.

Cutlass, was pushing her way through the throng, moving with a feral grace, heading straight for Elton.

“Oh shit…” Lillian said realizing what was about to happen a second before it did.

Elton shot to his feet “Cutlass…” he started, but was cut off. Cutlass, not even slowing for a moment, all but collided with Elton, grabbed him by the collar and pulled him into a fierce kiss.

It took Elton a moment to catch up, his eyes popped wide with surprise, his hands flailing, before he recovered. Responding so passionately he nearly lifted the mercenary right off of her feet.

“Oooo” Scab cried aloud covering his mouth with a closed fist. He wasn’t the only one, the bar was suddenly filled with raunchy whoops and wolf whistles. The Chargers were particularly loud.

“About damn time.” I heard Krem holler.

Cutlass took one hand off Elton, and raised it in a one fingered salute without any pause or break in her ardent kiss.

“Umm… Wow… we should a… maybe.” A beet red Elton stammered, when the couple finally came up for air.
“Yes” Agreed Cutlass, and they nearly ran out of the tavern. Hand in hand.

“HEY DON’T FORGET WE HAVE EARLY WATCH TOMORROW!” Scab called after them.

I was laughing so hard I was nearly in tears.

“Well Fidget would you look at that! You’re a matchmaker!” Varric rumbled, appearing out of the crowd.

“Oh, how exactly am I responsible?” I gasped through my fits of laughter.

“Well he is not dead for starters”

“Here, here.” Scab boomed, “I think that deserves another round.”

I had a couple more rounds bought for me after that, including one from the Chargers, and one from Baz who grumbled something about not knowing any other ladies who would climb around shit tunnels with him. I suspect he was pretty drunk by that point. I made mental notes to return the favor and buy rounds whenever I got my hands on some coin.

“Hey when were you going to tell me I had some weird anti-magic shit going on?” I mentioned to Dorian after my third drink.

Dorians made such a guilty face, He reminded me of puppy who had piddled on the carpet. “I umm.. well it seemed either like you where unaware of it or you were hiding it so we all agreed it would be best to…”

“Wait … who’s we all?”

Dorian grimaced again. *Oh great so it was the whole inner circle.* “When did you figure it out?” he deflected.

“Today, apparently Cole can’t see inside my head. I had a chat with Solas.”
“Well if anyone will know what is going on it is our elven apostate friend.”

I took a sip of my drink, not trusting myself to comment on Solas at the moment. “It figures that I land myself in a magical land without any tech and I won’t even be able to use magic.”

“Are you disappointed?” Dorian asked surprised, which was justified given Theodosian prejudices.

“It is like being a superhero whose super-power is not getting powers. I am officially the lamest superhero ever!!”

“Super what?” Dorian spat “Are you drunk?”

I sighed. No I wasn’t “No… No one here gets my jokes.”

“We will need to arm that sharp wit of yours with some appropriate cultural references darling.”

“Maybe I should read Hard in Hightown?” I mused. “Varric might like that.”

“The dwarf doesn’t need his ego inflated.”

“If that’s not the pot calling the kettle…” my teasing banter was interrupted by a tap on my shoulder.

“Marin?” I turned around to find Wells at my elbow.

“Inquisitor Trevelyan.” I said giving a mocking little bow.

“Ugh Andraste’s dirty drawers, not you too.”

I suppressed a snort at his endearing expletive. “What don’t like your fancy new title? I did give you
some warning that it was coming.”

Wells wrinkled his nose adorably “It sounds very strange. Just, could you please stick with Wells.”

“As long as you don’t call me my lady.”

“I can agree to those terms.” He said with a smile. “You enjoying this little celebration?”

I nodded. “It seems the Inquisition works hard and parties hard.”

“I can drink to that.” Wells said, and he did. We both drained our mugs, and I quickly found my empty being replaced. “Bull tells me that you want to give a talk, about medicine in your world?”

“Yes!” I responded with a little too much enthusiasm, I had consumed just enough alcohol to lower my inhibitions slightly, and there wasn’t anything to hold back the nerd. My excitable reaction caused some of my beer to slosh on the floor. “Ahh… shit sorry. But yes, sort of. I wanted to start off with just a few topics. I only have a background level knowledge of medicine but even that would be too much to go over in one sitting. But there some important concepts and simple solutions that if I could cover would drop the rate of infection and illness.”

“Is this part of the reason why you abandoned me all week to go messing about with privys?” Dorian pouted

“You sound jealous!” Wells remarked playfully “Is it because Baz has better facial hair?”

That quip caused me to do an actual spit take. I caught Dorian with some of my spray, and he disdainfully wiped himself clean. Which in turn provoked Wells into laugh.

“It wasn’t that funny.” Dorian glowered into his drink. When our laughter continued.

“Don’t fret Dorian, your mustache is still my favorite.” I managed once I finally got myself under control.
“So who would you like to give this talk to?” Wells asked getting the conversation back on track.

“Well all the healers should come, but anyone is free to join.”

“Great I will set it up for tomorrow then, does after lunch work?”

“Tomorrow?” I asked, suddenly feeling nervous and underprepared.

“Too soon? With communications reestablished it won’t be long until we are rolling at full steam again. It will be hard to get everyone together if we delay.”

“No tomorrow is fine, I just… well I was surprised.”

“If you need…”

“No really its ok.” I said reaching out to lay a hand on his arm in reassurance.

“Excellent … Well … I will see you there.” Wells gave another little smile.

“You will be coming?”

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world.” He said giving me a huge smile, his dimples making an appearance.

“Oh well… Great. Tomorrow after lunch then!”

We both took a long sip of our drinks before Wells said “I best go mingle.” He gave Dorian a solid clap on the shoulder “Don’t drink me out of house and home Dorian”

“I make no promises.” As Dorian lifted his mug in a salute.
Wells then walked away into the crowd. Coming to rest at a table with Blackwall and Sera. I could hear Sera’s cackle carrying over the crowd.

Dorian was giving me the strangest look over his mug.

“What?” I asked. His eyebrows shot up, but he said nothing. “What!?” I demanded feeling irrationally self conscious. “What is that face you are giving me right now!?” He smiled smugly but said nothing. I gave up on trying to guess what he was thinking. “You’re impossible Pavus.”

***

The sun was just creeping over the mountains and the fire in the hearth was low when a knock awoke me the next morning.

“Engineer Alvarado?” A hesitant male voice came through the door.

“Mmm… Yes? Who is it?” I asked back, rolling over but not leaving the warmth of my bed roll. Why couldn’t I have hallucinated something that took place in a warmer climate?

“Ambassador Montylet sent me to wake you. She said that your presence was requested at the war council. I am to escort you to the war room when you’re ready”

“Thank you, …” I said questing for a name

“Jim. My name is Jim Ser.”

“Thank you Jim, give me a moment I will be right there.”

I rolled out bed splashed some water on my face, ran my fingers through my hair and pulled on my cleanest clothes, which wasn’t saying much. I was a light packer and had only anticipated being gone for the weekend so I was essentially limited to one pair of jeans and a choice of two tops, and my leather jacket which had been doubling as my pillow. After what had been nearly two weeks
with no chance to wash either myself or the clothes, things were getting a little ripe. But everyone else was in the same boat, so I didn’t stink any worse than the rest of the crowd. I would actually smell better since I had antiperspirant. I wouldn’t have argued with a hot shower though.

I scrubbed my teeth with my toothbrush. The little travel tube of toothpaste I had packed had ran out two days ago. Creating a substitute was on my list but for now the mechanical act of brushing would still help beat back plaque and whatever other nasty shit was growing in my mouth.

All told my morning routine took me less than five minutes, and when I pulled the door to my room open Jim, nearly fell on his ass. Apparently he had been leaning against the door.

“I am terribly sorry my lady.” He said as he scrambled to right himself. “You were much quicker than I expected.”

“It’s quite alright Jim. Are you ok?”

“Yes my lady… I’m sorry.” He seemed more flustered than I thought the situation called for, either that or he was just uncomfortable in my presence. So I suppressed the urge to fill the silence with small talk as he led me to the war room.

When we finally arrived Jim knocked heavily on the wooden door. Cassandra opened it from the other side.

“Marin, please come in.” She said and gestured me into the room shutting the door behind her.

Despite the fact that I was supposedly there quicker than expected, Leliana, Josephine, Cullen and Wells were in the room crowded around the war table. A half eaten plate of breakfast rolls, said they they had been here awhile. They must have been up at the crack of dawn.

“Marin.” Wells Grinned at me. “Sorry for the late notice, but it occurs to me that with your particular set of knowledge we would be remiss to not include you in this meeting.”

“I am happy to help.” I said. As I approached the table Josephine kindly offered me the plate of rolls, and I took one gratefully. As I chewed. I looked around at the group who were looking at me with an expectant gaze. I had no idea what they expected me to say or know. I swallowed.
“umm…”

“What no grand predictions or audacious insights” Leliana said smugly.

“Cullen should write his sister.” I said. This caused Cullen’s eyes to pop wide open with a mixture of surprise and alarm. Wells chortled.

“Excuse me.” Cullen choked.

“You haven’t written your sister since Haven have you?” He shook his head. “Write her and tell her you are ok. She worries. As a worried big sister I can empathize.” The last part of that statement seemed to sober the room, but Leliana was still scornful.

“That is your advice?”

“The story didn’t really have a clear timeline. There are dozens of things that might happen next, none of which are necessarily the wrong move. Even if there was some special secret I may not know it. I didn’t read the story carefully remember? I can give you warnings or advice about big plot points but you all should make your own decisions. You all absolutely amazing at what you do, use all the information available to you. I’m not infallible or omnipotent.”

“So what is your role here?” Said Cullen not unkindly

“Perhaps you should carry on like this were any other war council. If anything that you bring up rings a bell, I will speak up and give what guidance I can.”

“That does sound reasonable.” Wells put in. I smiled at him gratefully.

“Very well, now I have sent word too…” Josephine began in her official tone.

It seemed since our arrival at Skyhold Josephine and Leliana had been working overtime to reestablish communication networks, set up supply lines and spread the word that the Inquisition yet
survived. However, words on a page only did so much. Wells, as the Herald and now the Inquisitor, needed to be out in the field, closing rifts, gathering support, and organizing the forces that were scattered about the continent. But more importantly he needed to be seen doing it. The Hinterlands and the Storm coast were mentioned as the regions currently most in need of his personal intervention. I couldn’t recall much about either. I know you initially recruited Bull on the storm coast, and that Leo was always on about the Hinterlands being never ending…

Then something in Josephine’s musings triggered something. “I have sent messengers to Val Rou…”

“Wait Josephine. Have you sent the paperwork to reestablish your families trading rights yet?” Oh shit… I should have thought of this earlier!!

“I’m sorry?! How could you know of that?” She said as I derailed her train of thought.

“Have you sent the paperwork yet?”

“What paperwork?” Cullen demanded.

“I have been trying to get my family’s status as landed traders in Orlais reinstated. The documents did not get all the necessary approvals just before the fall of Haven. I sent a bird off the day before yesterday too…”

“Send another, you need to recall the messengers carrying the documents. If you can.”

“What, Why?!?”

“It will trigger a contract with the House of Reprise”

“Do you mean the House of Repose?” Josephine gasped.

“Yes, them the assassins.” The table gawked at me. Josephine had gone pale.

“Explain” Leliana said in a thin treacherous voice.
“The House of Repose has an old contract from a now extinct noble house to kill anyone trying to restore your family’s trading status. In the story, your messengers are murdered and the documentation destroyed. Your investigation leads to a duke that gets locked in a closet and a friendly little message from the assassins explaining the unusual nature of the contract. Which I always thought was weird but it is apparently polite to let a noble lady know before you try to...”

“Solutions?” Wells interrupted by ramblings in an official voice.

“Umm…” I screwed up my forehead trying to remember the details. “Either Leliana does some sneaky shit, to destroy the contract or Josephine raises someone to nobility to get the contract annulled.”

“Do you remember the name of the family who initiated the contract.” I shook my head.

“But like I said they died out, it’s an old contract.”

“If those that want you dead are gone why should…” Cullen started indignantly

“The contract would still be binding Commander, I will do some digging.” Leliana said.

“I don’t wish any blood being spilled over a personal matter… If I can prevent the contract from being triggered ….” She trailed off and scribbled something on a long thin strip of paper, sealed it in a small tube with wax and walked to the door, and handed it to the runner waiting there. “This needs to get to Antiva city on the fastest bird, NOW.” The runner gave a nervous nod and took off sprinting down the hall.

“I’m sorry Josephine. I only just remembered…” Why hadn’t I paid better attention to Leo when he played?

“Think nothing of it, you have given us a chance at least…” Josephine sighed

“If it is any comfort, I have never seen a version where the assassins succeed.”
“I should hope not.” Leliana said darkly. “Anything else?”

I thought for a long moment. “Nothing from the story, but I did have a conversation with Solas yesterday. Apparently Cole can not hear me and I have some kind of magic resistance. I can’t explain it. Solas agreed to help me investigate.”

“Huh” Wells said. “Wondering when you were going to work that out. I was planning on bringing Solas to the the Hinterlands with me… but If you would rather have him, here.”

“No.” I said firmly. “Your needs trump my curiosity.”

“Hmm, perhaps but figuring out your situation may provide some critical information; I will think about it.” Wells replied thoughtfully.

The meeting stretched on for about another hour or so, the bulk of which was spent discussing resources and troop movements. It was determined that Wells would leave tomorrow, and Leliana mentioned that some mysterious arcane scholar would be arriving in a few days. When the meeting finally broke up, Wells requested a conversation with me. We drifted in silence for a long time and we wandered around Skyhold, ostensibly surveying the dilapidated fortress. Finally, we came to a halt on the battlements that overlooked the icy river in the valley below.

“I wanted to apologize for not telling you about… well whatever abilities you have sooner.”

“Its alright, I understand that I am an unknown element. I don’t expect…”

“Nonetheless You have been upfront with us and…” He let himself trail off.

“I am keeping a lot of secrets Wells. About the people here, about what happens… a lot of it isn’t pleasant. I don’t know if the term ‘upfront’ can really be ascribed to me.”

“Are you alright?”

“Yes. I think so” I replied confused. That wasn’t the reaction I was expecting to my confessing to keeping terrible secrets. “Why?”
“It’s just, you were pulled here out of your life. To hear you tell it you were just an ordinary person and now you are in the middle of war and death and have responsibilities that you never trained for. Most people wouldn’t be OK. Maker’s ass, you just told Josephine that assassins were coming to kill her with a totally strait face.”

I shrugged. I had been doing my level best not to think that hard about it. “I… It was only reasonable, I’m just doing my best to do what needs to be done.”

“People look at you and they are awed or afraid, they don’t see you as an actual person.”

He was right, He was right about all of that, but the way he said it, “Are we still talking about me?”

“I… Maybe…”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Not really.”

“You can do this Inquisitor, I know its shitty but…”

“You don’t know that. I am not the Inquisitor Trevelyan in your story. I’m just Wells”

“There is nothing just about Wells. I don’t think you can do it because of the story. I think you can do this because I have seen the kind of person you are, the kind of leader you are, and frankly it is sort of incredible. I am not sure I can… All I have done is get into a car crash and give a guy some medicine. I’m not some maker-sent miracle genius. Seriously, the gist of the lecture I am about to give is ‘disease is caused by tiny creatures you can’t see. Wash your hands.’”

Wells cracked a smile. “Wait, tiny creatures, really?”

“Yea.”
He shook his head “All I have done fall in my ass on the snow, after all my friends died, and wiggle my fingers at rifts. I have no idea how I am supposed to save the world. I don’t even understand how suddenly everyone is looking to me to make that happen.”

“Ok for the record you have done a lot more than that. And.. There is a name for this feeling. Imposters syndrome. That feeling like you don’t belong, that any second someone is going to find out that you’re faking it, that you aren’t really the thing people believe you are.”

He stared “You’re so fucking analytical, you know that.” He said

“Imposters syndrome is a pretty common, thing. I am given to understand that most people suffer from it at some point. Especially high achievers. Basically how I feel all of the time. In grad school, my job, here and now.” That wasn’t something I would have admitted to most people, but it was the truth and there was something about Wells that made it easy to say.

“Your saying everyone feels like this?”

“Pretty much yea.”

“I’m calling bullshit on that.” He thought for a moment the exclaimed “Sera! I bet Sera doesn’t feel like this.”

“Sera is bonkers so I’m not sure she counts. And also, I bet she totally does.”

Wells laughed and some of the tension slipped off of him. “I… Thank you. This was not a turn I expected this conversation to take.”

“Well anytime you want to talk I’m here, we both fell out of rifts after all.”

“Are we like a club?”

“Yea, we should get hats that say ‘I fell out of a rift and all I got was this stupid hat’” I giggled at myself like a dork. “Sorry that would have been funnier on earth.”
“If you say so.” Wells said, his jibe undercut with his soft smile.

A sudden gust of wind whipped my at my hair causing me to shiver. “I am not looking forward to winter.”

He frowned at me “You would be looking back to winter, we are in the spring.”

I frowned, it had been fall when I left, the first of October. Then when I thought about, Everyone talked about the warmer climates being North… Thedas must be in the southern hemisphere.

At that moment the bell rang signaling the noontime meal. By sheer force of habit, I glanced at my watch …. the face read: 00:01.

Alarm bells starting roaring in my brain. My heart started racing. Gears where turning in my head. It was noon here, and my watch read just past midnight… a twelve-hour difference, and Thedas was in the Southern Hemisphere. … What had Solas said about polar opposites, being the inverse…

No that didn’t make sense. There were a million reasons it couldn’t make sense. Not the least of which being that I WAS FUCKING HALLUCINATING. It had to be a coincidence…. Right?

Chapter End Notes

I am having far too much fun writing this! I am such a fucking nerd.

Bonus points if you can guess why the pattern wigged out Marin. If you figured that out you also can figure out why the conclusion is erroneous. Don’t worry I know, and Marin knows…We will dive into it in the next chapter.

As usual call me out if I have any grammar/spelling errors. They are in there for sure. This story is definitely in need of a good editor. Sorry if I am slow posting updates or responding to comments. I am putting in crazy hours researching things in out-of-the-way places and internet and spare hours of the day are hard to find. Please don’t let it stop you from leaving a comment though! I LOVE feedback and just hearing from you all.

Thanks for everything and Enjoy!
Ch. 8- The Longitude Act

Chapter Summary

1714 the British Government passed an act of parliament offering monetary rewards to anyone who could find a practical solution to the problem of accurately determining a ship’s longitude at sea. Perhaps the most notable recipient of these rewards was John Harrison who received £23,065 for the invention of the marine chronometer.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was just after noon and my watch read 00:01. It was spring instead of fall.

That would put me on the opposite side of the planet, from where I had been. In fact, I was trying to fight the rising suspicion that if I were to take the GPS points of Haven and where I had disappeared from I would find that they were on precisely opposite sides of the globe. I was trying to fight it, because it was a stupid, crazy theory. It didn’t make sense… Did it?

“Um Marin? You still with us?” I nearly jumped out of my skin and gave an undignified squawk as Well’s voice brought me back to reality. Which caused Wells to burst, unchivalrously, into laughter.

“Ass.” I scowled

“I thought we lost you there for a second.” He said through his mirth.

“Yea I just had a thought.”

“Was it painful?” He sniped.

“How do sailors and navigators determine their latitude?”

“Wait what?” He asked thrown by my non sequitur. “Where is this coming from?”
“Humor me Wells. How do they do it?”

He shrugged “Charts and a sextant. Pretty simple use the altitude of the sun at noon or the stars.”

“Right and what about longitude.”

“More difficult, and there is no accurate way to do it at sea. Have to rely on dead reckoning. It’s actually a big problem, common cause of shipwrecks, saw a few growing up in Ostwick.” I grinned. “I am assuming you have a solution?” He asked.

“An accurate clock… Or rather two accurate clocks.” He frowned at me confused. “See the earth… or globe… whatever you call this planet… turns at a constant rate, so the time difference between two points is equivalent to the longitudinal distance between the two points. Compare the time of solar noon at a baseline, to solar noon wherever you are, and you know your position.”

Wells eyes widened with the implications of that simple truth. “Clever… no not clever, Brilliant. But…” and a frown formed on his face. “I don’t think It could work in practice. To be of any use in finding your location a clock would have to keep time very precisely. At sea with a pitching deck and changes in temperature and humidity… There isn’t a clock out there that could do it.”

“There is now.” I said pointing at my wrist and the watch face that was still advertising the time as slightly after midnight rather than slightly after noon.

“Wait that’s a clock?”

“Yep.” I said offering up my wrist to show it to him. He inspected it carefully turning over my wrist in his hands.

“Woah… I thought maybe it was some weird sort of jewelry.”

I laughed, my watch was about as plain as they come. A plain black plastic square, and matching black band, with some electric blue details. It was however, waterproof. “Nope, just a thing for keeping time.”
“Practical as ever. Could you build more of them?”

I shrugged “Not like this but with some work I might be able to make a clock good enough to keep time at sea.”

“That would be incredible! A lot of lives could be saved.” He said with a smile. I realized my wrist was still in his hands. Calloused fingers gently playing over my skin. I suddenly felt a flash of warmth, despite our position on the high windy wall.

Wells seemed to have realized the same thing because he cleared his throat and dropped my wrist, hastily. “So um… Why the sudden interest in time and navigation?”

“There is a time difference in between here and home and I just…” I hesitated trying to articulate the idea that the stupid watch had popped into my brain.

Ok so let’s break this down. Let’s pretend for a moment that I was not hallucinating. I WAS but let’s pretend. … If my watch was indicating roughly a twelve-hour time difference between my current position and California, that would mean I was roughly on the other side of the globe, longitudinally. I say roughly because my watch was set to the standard time for a time zone, PST, not for solar noon for the specific longitude, where I left. Also although lunch here was supposed to be around high noon. I doubt that the kitchen was measuring with any kind of precision…. So roughly, plenty of room for error.

Now I had no knowledge of the stars here and didn’t have a sextant handy, with which to get a fix on my latitude, but the switch in seasons and the fact warmer climes in Thedas were north, put us in the southern hemisphere. Also since Wells told me it was spring I could ballpark my latitude based on the sun’s declination/ the day length for the time of year. If my guesses were correct the Frostbacks were about at the same distance from Thedas’ equator as Northern California was from Earth’s equator, except in the opposite direction. But again, there was a lot of room for error there, so it could totally be a coincidence.

Now all of that reasoning would be brilliant, if I was on earth… which I clearly wasn’t. Not only were the laws of physics completely fucked here, which suggested that I was in a different universe, (Or, you know that I had gone crazy), but the stars were different. Not a little bit different, completely different. There were two moons. Earth never had two moons. Plus, even on astronomical time scales, the relative positions of the stars wouldn’t shift enough that I would find it completely unrecognizable. So I wasn’t on earth at a different point in time. I was someplace totally alien. Which meant I had no idea what size this planet was, how fast it turned, how long it took to travel around it’s star. I could guess it was roughly equivalent to earth based on the fact that I didn’t bounce like I was on the moon, and wasn’t squished like I would be if there were high g forces. Plus the day length didn’t seem to be completely different. But those where crude measurements at best. Getting
better measurements was something I could easily do though, and probably should. Anyway, the upshot of all of that was that my watch or the seasons couldn’t give me any information about my global position. Because I was on a different globe. Even if I did all the math and got all the measurements and found out that this planet was essentially identical to earth my info still meant nothing. Where this planet was in it’s day/night cycle or trip around the star had no connection to where earth was. Hell, if I had traveled though space, somehow impossibly, I had no guarantee had not traveled through time as well. They were sort of different aspects of the same thing after all: space-time.

The idea, however poetic, that the accident had somehow pulled me the exact opposite side of the globe through some weird polarizing- inverse-force-thing was total bullshit. Any patterns HAD to be a coincidence. An amusing happenstance, like when the clock reads 11:11. Nothing solid to be inferred from it. Most likely it was a quirk of my imagination, my feverish brain trying to give me some semblance of logic. It was seeking to give me patterns to read reason into, and had spat out some pseudo-science, timey-wimey, reverse-the-polarity-of-the-neutron-flow, Bullshit.

The pattern still bugged me.

“Ok, I think I can actually see the gears turning in your brain. What idea have you concocted?”
Wells asked.

I let out a frustrated sigh. “A confounding one.” I griped. Nothing about this place made sense. This weird pattern bugged me because It was so suggestive of something that couldn’t be true. It was a microcosm of this whole situation. Everything around me felt real, and yet was empirically impossible. It was maddening. In the back of my mind I had been questioning every sight, every sound, every smell searching for some flaw. Something that would indicate this was a delusion, and had come up blank. This, whatever it was, was internally consistent. The veracity of my perceptions, was sound by every indication except that what I was perceiving was the plot of a video game, in a pseudo-medieval world, with magic, and other things that were definitely impossible.

The sober tone of my response and my thoughtful silence wasn’t lost on Wells.

“Is something wrong?” He asked concerned.

“Thedas this world… doesn’t really have magic, does it? At least not in the way people where I am from would define magic. There is nothing super-natural here, nothing is breaking the laws of physics. The laws are just different than where I come from. Right? But there are laws? Fundamental mechanics that can be observed, understood, studied…”
A small knot formed between his eyes as he digested my words. “Well yes, I suppose. It is just a matter of figuring out the mechanics.” Then he resumed his light tone. “Of course this preserves that you are not hallucinating, and this is indeed reality. If you are hallucinating, then your mind could be making up anything it likes.”

I gave a sly smile. “If it is MY hallucination, then there are definitely rules.” I had some tests to run.

“Oh?” A conspiratorial grin was creeping across his face.

My stomach grumbled. “But figuring them out is going to have to wait until after lunch.” I said with a wink, and bounced towards the kitchens.

***

After lunch, Wells lead me to the undercroft where I was meant to give my lecture. I hadn’t really had that much time to prepare anything elaborate. Even if I had more time it wasn’t like I could give a power point presentation. The entirety of my preparations consisted of scribbling a hasty outline (with far too many question marks and “etc…” for my liking) onto a sheet of paper.

-Germs cause illness

-Explain microorganisms (Bacteria, Viruses, Fungi, Protists, Prions Etc…)

-Common vectors; bodily fluids, insects/vermin etc…

-Germs can be killed or their growth inhibited by certain conditions

-Salinity, Temperature, PH etc…

-Discuss Hand-washing and Hygiene

-Hand-washing after toileting and before meals

-Cooks should wash their hands before food prep

-Healers before, and in-between patients.

-Sterilization of med. equipment through heat (Boiled/steamed) or alcohol
I had thought that only healers and a handful of others would be interested in hearing what I had to say, but it looked like a full half of the Inquisition was stuffed into the undercroft. I swallowed audibly.

“Quite the turnout” I whispered to Wells. I was aiming for dry with my tone, but missed and hit nervy instead.

“You’re a spectacle! What? Aren’t you loving the attention?” Wells mocked good-naturedly.

“At least I don’t have a glowing green hand.”

“Hey my little reading lamp saves us coin on candles.”

“You know I can build a machine for that.”

Wells grinned at me then straitened up, raising his hands to get the attention of the crowd. The room instantly fell silent. “Hello everyone, thank you for coming. I doubt at this point she needs introducing since rumors fly faster than ravens with you lot.” That got a good natured chuckle. “This is Engineer Marin Alvarado. Her… serendipitous arrival from a very distant and technologically advanced world gives us the chance to learn some things. The topic of her talk today will be healing. Marin?...”

I caught the eye of Elton in the audience. His whole squad was in attendance, and were waving at me enthusiastically. Scab gave me a cheeky little thumbs up. I waved back at them, which earned me idiotic grins from them all. Elton was holding hands with Cutlass, which was so sweet I may have gotten a toothache.

I cleared my throat and began.
Once I had started digging into the subject matter my nerves eased. It was surprisingly familiar despite the anachronistic setting. I had given a fair amount of talks at conferences and done the mandatory teaching in graduate school, so it wasn’t that hard to fall into a rhythm. The ideas I presented were taken up with astonishing alacrity. I got some resistance from one surgeon who insisted health and the prevention of disease was achieved through “a good diet, proper exercise and a balance of the humors.” Which, to be fair, was a solid two out of three. I am not sure I managed to convince her that humors weren’t a thing but she did agree to hold reserve judgment, and any blood-letting, until I could build a microscope and show her some bacteria.

The lecture itself was fairly short but there was a long question and answer session afterwards, for which the idle spectators thinned. Presumably bored now that the conversation was getting technical. I had to inform a slightly disappointed Stitches that I didn’t think I would be able to recreate the medicine that had saved Elton. I had one other Epipen with me, as they usually came in pairs, but I wasn’t sure how to synthesize epinephrine. I knew that it was originally synthesized from the adrenal gland, but I wasn’t sure what the adrenal gland looked like or where it was, near the kidney somewhere maybe? Vivienne seemed captivated by the idea of vaccines and asked several surprisingly astute questions on the subject of biochemistry. Josephine and Cullen, neither of whom I had expected to attend, but was glad that they had, both were less interested in the science as the practical measures I suggested implementing. Where should hand-washing stations be installed? Was a special sort of soap required? Solas didn’t ask a single question, but stayed for the whole session and was absorbing every single word.

The discussion was at least if not more helpful to me than it was to the audience members, it gave me the opportunity to fill in a lot of the blanks about what exactly Thedas knew about medicine and how magical healing worked. Thedas, it turned out, had a very good grasp on anatomy, not having quite the same level of taboo about the body as was present in Earth’s middle ages. They, however, didn’t have a very good understanding of physiology. For instance, they knew where the heart was, and major arteries and blood vessels, but didn’t understand blood’s role in delivering oxygen and nutrients to tissues. There were a few different varieties of healing potions that did different things, one to restore lost blood, one to mend damaged bone and soft tissue etc… Healing magic was also rarer than I had thought it would be, especially outside the Inquisition. This was due in large part to the fact that mages were mostly isolated in circles and many people had fears and prejudices regarding magic. Magic was simply not something that most ordinary people ever saw. It was also limited by the fact that healers needed to know what was wrong with a person to fix it. Since the root cause of many illness was unknown, magical healing just couldn’t solve them. It was clear what was wrong when someone got run through with a sword but bring someone in with a fever, and there was not a lot a mage could do. Infection, and plagues were a huge concern for an army like the Inquisition. Time was also a factor, there was no magical healing that could bring back Bull’s eye.

The session dragged on long into the evening and might have gone on longer if the dinner bell had not rung. As soon as people began to leave Dorian came and steered me away from the group, in the same manner one would snag the best table at a restaurant, as soon as it was vacated.

“Marin my dear, you have to know just how marvelous you are. I could kiss you.”
“You should take me out to dinner first.”

“You just sat down half of Skyhold and convinced them that washing with soap not only a courtesy, but a medical necessity. SOAP. I bet even Blackwall, the great hairy lummox, will get acquainted with the stuff now. My nostrils are forever in your debt.” I couldn’t help but throw my head back and laugh.

“You are an absurd, absurd man Dorian.”

“You love it.”

“God help me I do.” I said digging into the potato and meat concoction that was for dinner.

“YOU!” I gasped and turned around to find a messy haired tidal wave coming at me in the form of Sera, who careened over and sat right next to me, nearly on my lap. “I thought you was all future-magic-machines and scary portals and fancy words and shite… but tiny little critters growin’ and crawlin’ around making us ill.” She cackled riotously. “That’s brilliant. And you had lady Vivi off her fancy high horse and asking you questions like student. After you spent your week crawlin’ around in privy tunnels. You’re alright Marin.”

“Ummm Thanks Sera.” I grinned bemused. I hadn’t seen hide nor hair of the blonde rogue since my first meeting with the inner circle. I had gotten the impression that she was purposefully avoiding me, and I wanted to respect her reasons for that, whatever they were. “I am glad you came to the talk.”

“Quizzy said we should all go, thought it’d be stupid but it was pretty good. I mean it was weird and you’re still weird, but alright.”

I grinned, gratified. That was about as genuine a complement as I was likely to get from Sera.

“Thanks! If you ever need anything let me know.”

“Really? You mean like make stuff? Inventions? For me?”

“Of course. I would love to.”
Sera grinned a huge grin that spelled mischief more clearly than any facial expression I had ever seen before in my life.

“BRILLIANT!” She sprung to her feet. “I have so many ideas! Oh and we need BEES!”

“Wait bees?” I said slightly alarmed by this development.

“BEES!” She cried as she sprung up and began to sprint into the darkness, colliding strait into Well’s broad chest. She stumbled several steps backwards.

“Oops sorry Quizzy.” She giggled then took off sprinting into the night, cackling about bees as she ran.

“Maker… Wait Sera…” Wells shouted after her to no avail. Wells turned to us, baffled. “Bees?”

I was still in the mist trying to process that chaotic interaction, and only shrugged Dorian however offered up a ready explanation. “Marin offered her inventing services, and Sera, being Sera, brought bees into the equation.”

“ I am going to regret this aren’t I.” I said to no one in particular.

“Well as entertaining as that would be, any bee machines you had in the works are going to have to wait. I ride for the Hinterlands and then the Storm Coast at dawn, and I need Sera.”

“Who else? Should I be getting kitted up?” Dorian asked enthusiastically

“I am taking Bull and Solas as well. Sorry Dorian, but I thought I would leave you to make sure that the keep is livable by the time we get back.”

“I will endeavor to make sure the Library is up to scratch.” Dorian said with a shade to much earnestness.
“How long will you be gone?” I asked.

“Several weeks at least. Leliana, and the advisors will be getting regular updates from me so they should be able to keep you informed of my movements” I nodded, feeling slightly glum. “I wanted to thank you for today, before I headed out.”

“You’re welcome. I should be thanking you, though. Safe travels.”

“Yes do come back to us in one piece.” Dorian chimed in

“I always do don’t I? At least mostly in one piece.” He grinned and turned on his heel muttering “Now where did Sera get off to?”

I sat and watched him leave until he completely disappeared into the darkness. Dorian turned a thoroughly wicked smile in my direction.

“What?” I asked

“I should thank you for today.” He grinned wiggling his eyebrows. “Whatever did you do for him Marin?”

I shrugged nonplussed. “Helped at the war council, talked about falling through rifts, gave a lecture…”

“You're adorable.” He grinned. I scowled, confused over what I had done to earn that descriptor.

“And you’re ridiculous”

“We make quite the pair.” Dorian said with a toast and we downed our drinks

“BEEEEES!” Sera said as she reappeared as unpredictably as she had left. “So miss smarty-pants got some notes on bee things, for ya. Well they are sort of notes, mostly drawings actually… Wait where did Quizzy go? Did he need me for something?”
It was all I could do to keep my drink from coming out of my nose as I laughed.

I may not have known my global position, but in this company I didn't feel lost.

Chapter End Notes

I have an (intermittent) internet connection again, so here is another chapter!

As usual please let me know if you spot any typos, or errors in spelling/grammar. I am sure they are hiding somewhere in this chapter. Also I am working long hard hours on isolated islands at the moment so updates to this work will be slow. The same warning applies to responses to comments, but please don't hesitate to leave one. I love feedback.

Thanks & Enjoy.
Newton’s law of universal gravitation says that particles are attracted to each other in a force that is inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them and directly proportional to the product of their masses. This law was later replaced by Einstein’s theory of relativity, however Newton’s law is still suitable for approximating the effects of gravity in most situations.

It took three days after Wells left for a feeling of aimlessness to set in. I had filled the first two days after his departure finishing my work with Baz on the privies. Once that was completed Baz, drifted off to help Harritt finish setting up something with the forge and I found myself without a project. I didn’t yet have a workspace or permission to dip into any of Skyhold’s freshly acquired resources and thus had drifted to Dorian’s little nook in the, still quite empty, library, and worked on refining my list of potential projects. It wasn’t particularly productive and around mid-day we found ourselves at the Herald’s Rest with Varric. We were arguably eating lunch, although there was more talking than eating going on. Varric had been begging me for stories from my strange world and I was in the middle of telling him about my 20th birthday.

“Wait was it broken or something?” Varric asked eyebrows creeping towards his hairline.

“No” I replied

“and you jumped off of it?”

“Well, out of it, but yea.”

“On purpose?”

“Yes.”

“Why exactly?”

“Fun!” I enthused sincerely.

“Ok so let me get this strait, you jumped out of a perfectly functional flying machine, intentionally, for shits and giggles.” Varric summarized skeptically.

“Yes. Its called sky diving.”

“Because you dive out of the sky? Horrible name. I could come up with something much better. Also you’re insane.”

“Well it’s not like I named it. And it was so much fucking fun.”

“Weren’t you, I don’t know… frightened?” Dorian chimed in.
“NO! Well … maybe a little, but that is sort of the point. It would be boring if it wasn’t a little scary.”

“Boring, she says, like falling from terrifying heights could be boring.” Varric grumbled.

“Was this a common recreational activity? Dorian asked.

“Well I don’t know about common, it was something of a novelty, it was a little to pricey to be a regular thing.”

“Wait you paid actual coin, for that?” Varric asked, indignant.

“Well yea. It wasn’t free.”

“Horse shit.”

I laughed at Varric’s blunt expletive “No! It was such a rush. It was like you’re flying, wind racing past you, world spread out below you.”

“I think you are mixing up flying, with falling to your death.”

“Well I’m not dead.”

“Yes, how is that exactly?” Dorian asked “What kind of marvelous technological wizardry prevented your lovely head from being splattered all over the ground?”

“Well after free falling for a bit you pull the parachute. I don’t know if you could call a parachute high tech exactly.” All I got was raised eyebrows from the table. Right, the parachute hadn’t been invented yet. I smiled. “Here I will show you.” I reached around and grabbed a dirty linen napkin off the bar.

“Does anyone have some string?” I called to the bar at large. The ‘Rest wasn’t very crowded but a handful of Chargers were here, and so was some of Elton’s squad. Elton’s and Cutlass coupling seemed to have pulled the two groups together. Lillian produced some string out of her pocket. Why she was carrying string around I had no idea.

“What are we doing?” Scab asked as Lillian handed over the string.

“Just a little practical demonstration of a parachute. Thanks Lillian.” I pulled my multitool out of my pocket and used the small blade to cut holes around the edge of the napkin.

“Hey!” I heard Cabot protest, as I ruined his napkin.

“Put it on my tab.” I responded, and was backed up the curious crowd that was now gathered around my table. Cabot grumbled but relented. I wasn’t really causing that much damage, especially compared to the regular patrons. The chargers came here after all.

“Before we go any further, I have to ask. What is that?” Varric said indicating my multitool.

“A multitool?” I said holding it out to him. “You don’t have something similar?” Both Dorian and Varric shook their heads. “Hmm.. consider it on my ‘to do’ list.”

“How terribly useful.” Dorian put in. “Do you just carry it everywhere with you?”

“A girl never knows when she is going to need a pair of pliers.” I grinned impishly
“You know sometimes you remind me of a friend of mine.”

“Bianca?” I asked glancing up from my project in front of me to sneak a look at Varric’s face.

If I hadn’t been looking for it, I wouldn’t have even seen it. In fact, I was not entirely sure I hadn’t imagined it, but for a for a millisecond the smile seemed to vanish out of Varric’s eyes before he recovered. “It’s a complimint Fidget! Bianca is a fine lady.” He said his arm falling on his signature weapon.

“Man has an unnatural relationship with that crossbow.” Krem grumbled.

I only smiled and got back to my mini project in front of me. “Never mind that.” Scab said. “What are you making Marin?”

“Yes I do believe you were attempting to show us how you aren’t paste, after jumping to your potential demise, for amusement.” Dorian drawled

I was running the string through the holes I had cut on the edge of the napkin. “Ok first, a little thought experiment.” I announced to the group at large. “What falls faster? A hammer or a feather?”

“A hammer.” Elton answered automatically, like it was the stupidest question he had ever been asked.

“Well…” Krem responded warily, suspecting some sort of trick. “because a feather is lighter, right?”

“Ok if that is true then this little contraption I am building will fall faster than just this salt shaker alone? Right? Because I have added the weight of the napkin and string? Yes?”

“Yes.”

“Wait what are you doing to my salt shakers?” Cabot asked from the bar.

“Science Cabot. I am doing science.” I answered. “Lets go test that theory shall we?” and with that I raced up to the third landing of the ‘Rest and opened up my napkin parachute so that the salt shaker was dangling below it, and let it go.

It wasn’t an elegant, breezy, float down. The parachute, after all, was rather hastily constructed. But it worked. The parachute slowing the decent of little clay shaker, which didn’t shatter on impact, as it would have if I had dropped it on its own. I walked down the stairs back to the group.

“Woah,” Lilian said with a childlike wonder.

“Huh…” Dorian said. “Who would have thought.”

“I want a go!” Skinner said scooping up the shaker-parachute from the floor. And taking the stairs two at a time tossed the parachute off the third story as everyone watch it float down again.

“Haha” Scab boomed. “Me next!” he said catching the parachute before it had even reached the floor and bounding up the stairs. The scene quickly devolved after that. With everyone wanting a turn with the new toy.

“Floating, fluttering, flying, free from the bonds of the earth. Wisdom hidden in wonder. They play but … you meant it as more didn’t you?” Said a voice at my elbow. I remembered that the third story
of the rest was a usual haunt of Cole’s. I wondered if he had just arrived or if he had been watching the whole display.

“Yes, Cole I was trying to teach them something, but I don’t mind if they play.” I said

“A toy to teach. Did you want to make them happy?”

“I… did I make them happy?” I asked, slightly touched.

“Yes, Parachutes against the pain.”

“I am glad I could help Cole.”

“Really?” He said with such earnest enthusiasm that my heart nearly broke. “I am glad too.”

Our conversation was broken by the sudden shattering sound. The clay shaker had shattered on the floor.

I looked up the stairs to find, of all people, a red faced Lillian. “I wanted to see what would happen If I wadded up the napkin before I dropped it.” She said apologetically.

I laughed, and Cabot let out a string of unintelligible profanities. “The shaker is going on your tab Alvarado.” Cabot grumbled

I nodded at Cabot through my laughter. “Yes sir.”

“Why didn’t it work that time?” Cutlass asked

“It didn’t work because things don’t fall faster or slower because they are lighter or heavier. I dropped a melon and a cannon ball off the third story they would hit the ground at the same time, despite the difference in weight because they offer about the same amount of air resistance. As they fall, the air that they fall through pushes back against the downward force of gravity. When the parachute --the napkin -- was bunched up, it no longer offered that same resistance, hence the splat. If I were to drop a hammer and a feather somewhere that had no air, they would hit the ground at the same time.”

“How’d you know that for sure?” Cutlass asked.

“People have done it. Back home we have the capability of pulling all the air out of a sealed room. We also have sent explorers to the moon, where there is no air, and done the experiment there.”

“You know the things that come out of your mouth are so absurd sometimes. People walking on moons.” Varric said with a shake of his head.

“The truth is stranger than fiction.” I smiled

“So a flat thing… like say parchment or the napkin has a lot of space for the air to push back against.” Elton said slowly. “So they fall slower?”

I smiled. “Right exactly.”

“Have you quantified the downward force? The one you called Gravity?” Said a new voice from the doorway.

“What?” I looked around for the source of the voice. Josephine stood in the doorway to the Hearld’s Rest, and by her side was a round faced redheaded, dwarf in inquisition garb, her ears were sticking
out from her hair which was pulled into a tight bun on the back of her head. “Dagna?!”

“Um… yea that’s me.” She replied confused. “Arcanist Dagna. Have we met?”

“Umm… No sorry.” Shit Marin way to play it cool. I scrambled to recover from my blunder. “Your reputation proceeds you. I’m Marin it is an honor to meet you.”

“Arcanist?” Dorian said eyebrows raised, looking down at the Dwarf.

“You’re the Engineer?” Danga said with a quick glance at Josephine.

“Indeed.” The Ambassador’s recovery was more graceful than mine, and she smoothly introduced the diminutive arcahist to the room and the room to the Dagna. “Danga is our new Arcanist, and since you two will be working together, we have informed her of your … unique circumstances Marin.”

The dwarf was still eyeing me skeptically. “So have you quantified the force of the so called ‘gravity’?”

“Yes. Where I come from acceleration due to gravity is 9.8 meters per second per second. It might not be the same here.”

“Why would it be different.”

“Different planet, it may have a different mass.”

“And that would affect the force?”

“In general particles are attracted to every other particle with a force that is inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them and directly proportional to the product of their masses.”

“So why would the mass of an object not affect the rate at which it falls?”

”Ah, we are conflating the acceleration of an object due to gravity and the force of gravity. You see, force equals mass times acceleration so set the formula for the force of gravity equal to ....”

“The masses cancel.” Danga interrupted.

”Yes... Exactly. In laymen's terms the force of attraction between the planet and an object may be stronger with larger objects, but it also takes more force to overcome the inertia of those objects, the masses cancel.”

“Could you determine the force of gravitational acceleration here?”

“Yes!” I exclaimed “I would need to construct a pendulum.”

“To what end?”

“Here I will show you.” I broke off glancing around “I need something to write with.” Every face in the bar was staring at me uncomprehendingly except for Danga who was bobbing her head up and down eagerly awaiting more.

“Sweet maker, now there are two of them.” Dorian said

“Umm... Well perhaps if you two would follow me we could get you something to write with and continue this discussion elsewhere.” Josephine said more diplomatically.
“YES!” Both Dagna and I exclaimed at the same time. And with a pleased little smile Josephine turned and headed out of the bar.

As we walked away a heard Scab’s booming voice call “Do you think we could make another one, a parachute. I want to see what happens if we throw it off the battlements.”

I barely listened to Josephine’s chatter as we made our way to the undercroft. After showing us the workspaces that had been dedicated to us and requesting that we meet with the war council the next morning Josephine departed. The undercroft was much the same as it had been the night before except there was now a large blackboard on wheels against the far wall.

“So Gravity.” Dagna said. I gave a huge smile and picked up a piece of chalk.

Before long, not only was the black board but the walls of the undercroft were covered in equations as Dagna and I had discussed topics that ranged from Newtonian physics to atomic theory to and fundamentals of runeing and working lyrium. It was quickly apparent that Dagna was at least two whole levels above genius. She was picking up the concepts that I was teaching her far faster than I was picking up the concepts that she was teaching me. It took her all of three hours to learn calculus. We also put together the pendulum experiment and determined that Thedas’ gravity was, within a margin of error, the same as earth’s.

“So assuming it that Thedas is the same density, is It also the same size as your earth?”

“Presumably. It would be an easy measurement to make. We would just need to measure the difference in the angles of the sun at two different cities, a known distance apart, at the same time, on the same day of the year. 360 divided by whatever the difference between the angles, tells you what proportion the distance between the two cities is of the planet’s circumference.” I scribbled an example on an empty chunk of wall using Eratosthenes originally numbers: Distance between Alexandria and Syene: 500 miles. Difference in the the shadows cast by poles at noon on the summer solstice 7.2 degrees. 360/7.2 = 50. Therefore 500 miles was 1/50th of the earths circumference, making the earth 25,000 miles around. (Actually the earth was closer to 24,900 miles around, but all things considered an error of 100 miles was amazing given Erathosthenes had calculated those figures some 200 years before Jesus Christ was a thing.)

”Hmm… we can’t do that from Skyhold. Maybe if one of us went to Val Royeaux …” Dagana’s thought was interrupted by a voice from the doorway.

“What in the Makers name…” Cullen exclaimed

“This place looks like an insane asylum.” Dorian sniped glancing at the crazed looking writing that covered the stone of the undercroft. The two men were followed by Jospehine, Leliana and looking utterly boggled.

“It certainly makes for interesting décor” Leliana said strolling around the room. Her posture idle but her eyes scanning and scrutinizing the equations.

“Oh the chalk will come off, We tested it to make sure.” Dagna said in a hurried tone looking to reassure.

“What brings you here?” I asked brightly

“We became concerned when you did not show in the war room an hour ago.” Josephine replied.

“I thought we were meeting in the morning.” I said perplexed. Glancing at Dagna who gave an embarrassed flush and looked severely apologetic.
“It is morning you silly girl. I came looking for you because you missed two consecutive meals and you didn’t show up at the ‘Rest last night. Given your appetite I thought you might be dead.” Dorian scoffed.

As if on cue my stomach rumbled. And Dorian gave me an exasperated look, “oh…umm oops I guess we got a bit carried away.” Now that I thought about it I was incredibly tired, and starving.

“No? Truly?!” Dorian said in a voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Should we come up now?” I said. Next to me Dagna tried and failed to suppress a yawn. “I am truly sorry we honestly didn’t realize.”

Cullen gave a light chuckle “I don’t think we had to discuss anything time sensitive. Perhaps you should get some rest it wouldn’t do to overwork yourselves.”

“You're one to talk commander.” Josephine grinned. “Exactly how much sleep did you get last night if I may ask?”

“It was sufficient. Thank you.” The commander answered in clipped tones

“Here” Dorian said and he thrust a small basket at me. The basket was warm to the touch and smelled divine. “Because I am a selfless and heroic man I brought you some savory pastries from the kitchen. No, don’t thank me, just do eat something before you waste away on me, Maker knows you're small enough as it is.”

I grabbed a pastry and took a bit before handing the basket over to Dagna so she could have something. Perhaps it was the hunger, but it was possibly the best pastry I had ever eaten. “mmm… Thank you Dorian.” I said with my mouth still half full of food. “You are my favorite!”

“You have excellent taste Marin!” He smirked. “Now off to bed both of you!”

My feet felt heavily as I climbed by way up to the tower shoving pastries in my mouth as I went. Dagna trailed behind me. Apparently she had been given the third room in our little cluster in the tower.

When I got to my room I almost thought I was in the wrong place. It was utterly transformed. Instead of a Spartan room with only a bed roll and bag on the floor next to the fire, I found a fully furnished, cozy living space. A narrow wardrobe sat against the far wall and the balcony now sported a small table and two chairs. Rich looking curtains now hung above the door, and could be pulled to block the morning sun. My bags had been carefully stowed in a footlocker at the end of a twin bed, which was replete with bedding that looked warm and soft. I wanted to wash-up or look through my new furnishings, but the sleepless night seemed to break over me all at once and the siren call of sleeping on an actual bed for the first time in weeks was too strong to ignore. I barely managed to pull my shoes off before I was sound asleep.

Chapter End Notes

I told you Dagna was coming!! Truth be told I am not entirely happy with this chapter but I will likely be out of internet range again soon and wanted to keep the wheels rolling.
I am sure this chapter is rife with errors, spelling or otherwise so if you catch something PLEASE let me know. Sorry for the slow updates or responses to comments but I am doing field work in gorgeous but remote places and I am putting in some crazy hours. That said I love to see your comments. I love feedback, even if it takes me a while to be someplace I can see it.

Thanks for all the love and support. Hope you enjoy!

P.S. Updated this chapter to make some of the science clearer. :)

Ch. 10—Fraunhofer Lines

Chapter Summary

Fraunhofer lines are a set of spectral lines that appear in the optical spectrum of the sun. They are named for their discoverer, German Physicist Joseph Von Fraunhofer. Fraunhofer was orphaned young and worked as an apprentice to a cruel glassmaker, until the workshop he was working in collapsed and he was pulled from the rubble by a Prince-Elector of Bavaria. The Prince took the young boy under his wing, insuring he could continue his studies. Fraunhofer, came to be a preeminent Physicist and maker of optical glass.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I woke up sometime in the late afternoon to soft knock on my door. Any reluctance I had at dragging myself out of my lovely new bed, evaporated when I found out that not only had the servant brought leftovers from lunch but had come with hot water to fill the washroom’s brand new tub. For the first time since I arrived in Thedas I got to break out my tiny travel bottle of shampoo and shave my legs.

A real bed and a hot bath, life was pretty good. Strange how not a few weeks ago these things were givens in my life, now they felt princely. It threw my privilege into sharp relief. I thanked the servant, a mousy brown haired woman whose name was Addie, profusely, but she demurred good-naturedly telling me that she was only doing what she was told.

Who had told her to makes sure I was bathed and fed, she didn’t say. I suspected Dorian’s mothering hand, but if I confronted him about it he would probably deny it and say something like “About time, you are too skinny and you stink…”+. So I suppose it would remain a mystery.

After my bath I found another surprise. Not only did I have a new wardrobe but it appeared to fully stocked. There was a note pinned on the inner door.

“Engineer Alvarado. These clothes should be more befitting your new title as the Inquisition’s lead engineer. Everything should be in your size. – Ambassador Montilyet”

A quick scan through the clothes gave me an instant respect for the Ambassador. She was clearly an exceptionally astute lady. Despite only having seen me wear two outfits she had clearly gotten a sense of my personal style. This was most made most obvious by the fact that most of the proffered outfits involved pants. The only exception to this was a solitary dress in a deep burgundy red color. It was simple but finely made and the fabric looked costly. It was clearly something for special
occasions. She also had somehow contrived to obtain my measurements. My lanky frame made jeans shopping a nightmare back home, but the three pairs of pants, in a soft brown leather, she had provided fit perfectly. The pants were accompanied by a fitted leather vest. (Or maybe the appropriate word was jerkin?) It looked not unlike the Inquisitor’s “lounging” outfit in the videogame, complete with brassy clasps, except it was in a sturdy chocolate brown leather and had a small keyhole just under the hallow of my throat. The seal of the Inquisition was stamped on the upper right hand corner vest, along with another symbol that I didn’t recognize but looked vaguely like a gear. There were a variety of warm and practical shirts to be worn underneath the jerkin as well as a pair of warm looking calf high boots.

After pulling on the new ensemble I surveyed the end result in the mirror that hung on the inner face of the wardrobe. I realized that it was the first time I had gotten a good look at my reflection since the crash. The events of the last few weeks certainly hadn’t improved my appearance. I was paler than had been, and I looked drawn. But I was clean and the clothes looked good.

I owed Josephine a MASSIVE thank you for literally putting clothes on my back, and I should probably stop by her office to figure out exactly what being the Inquisition’s lead engineer entailed.

My last act before I left my room was too pull my solar chargers out of my dry bag and set them on the table on my porch. Now that I had furniture it was time to get my electronics up and running. Dagna would blow a gasket when I showed her my laptop and smartphone.

When I left my room to search for Josephine I was in an ebullient mood. Real bed, hot bath and clean new clothes. I felt like a new person.

As soon as I walked into the ambassador’s office that feeling came crashing down around my ears.

Josephine was staring at a missive, eyes wide, hand clasped over her mouth clearly distraught. Leliana stood by her side stone faced an arm gently patting Josephine’s shoulder.

“Lady Josephine?” I asked my voice pitched with concern. “Are you alright?”

Her distress concerned me. Josephine was composed to a fault and tough as nails to boot. There was a reason that Varric had put her in the running with Leliana and Cassandra for toughest Inquisition advisor.

“Yes.” She said with a deep shuddering breath. “Forgive me I received some terrible news.” Her
face began to smooth into a cool mask. “Ahh, I see you found your new uniform. It looks good on you.”

I frowned. I got the distinct impression that how my clothes looked on me was the least of her problems at the moment. “I umm… Yes I came to thank you… What’s happened?”

Leliana threw me a dark look, “We should continue this conversation in the war room.” I looked around. The office was empty except for the three of us, making the move seem redundant to me, but knew better than disobey Leliana and moved through to door at the back of Josephine’s office to the war room.

When we stepped into the chamber Leliana closed the door behind us I heard a slight popping sound reminiscent of the sound the seal on a hermetically sealed container makes when it is breached. Leliana noticed my quizzical frown.

“This room is warded. No conversations we have hear can be overheard, even with magical aid. Any highly sensitive conversations you need to have should be held in here.”

“Clever.” I said genuinely impressed. It was like the magical version of a SCIF “But what happened that would need a ‘highly sensitive’ conversation?”

“My messengers, the ones I hired to take the documents restoring my families trading status to Orlais, they are dead and the documents are missing.” Josephine said in a taught voice.

“Oh, Josephine I am so sorry.” I said, my stomach clenching with guilt. “If only I had said something, remembered sooner.”

“No, you misunderstand. They received my missive, with your warning. They returned to Antiva city, to await my instructions but… They were found in the house yesterday dead, and the safe where the documents were sealed was empty.”

I opened and closed my mouth several times in shock. I felt my stomach sinking through the floor. They had received my warning. Turned back, but had died anyway. I had acted, but changed nothing. “I … am sorry.” I finally managed.

“You are kind to say so Marin.” Josephine said.
“What we need to think of now” Leliana cut in pragmatically. “Is what comes next. If they killed your messengers even after they had turned back then I doubt they will hesitate to come after you, even though the documents are now missing.” Leliana gave me a pointed look.

“I have no more information than I did before. A long dead noble house put out the contract. In the story you learn that a Duke has information regarding the contract, when you go to meet with him you meet an agent from the house of repose instead who doesn’t kill you right away he just explains the unusual circumstances. You resolve the issue by either elevating a common offshoot of the noble family to nobility and having them annul the contract or having Leliana do some sneaky shit, and possibly kill some people.”

“I don’t remember who the noble family that put out the contract was?” Leliana asked harshly

I shook my head feeling helpless. Was it possible that I couldn’t change things. That the course was fixed, the future on rails?

“Well then Leliana we shall just have to investigate the old fashioned way.” Josephine said

“Indeed.” Leliana replied coldly.

I couldn’t help but feel I had botched my first major contribution to the Inquisition. I fought back against the fatalistic feelings that gnawed at me. There was no such thing as fate. There were choices and consequences, action and reaction. I just wasn’t in time to help this time. Next time would do better. This was my fucking hallucination after all. I could change things. I did have the power to make a difference.

I hope.

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Life in Skyhold began to fall into a pleasant routine. I spent most of my days ensconced with Dagna in the undercroft, and my evenings in the Hearld’s rest nursing a vinegary wine with Dorian and whom ever else happened to be around. Varric, the Chargers and Elton’s crew made frequent appearances as our drinking buddies. Although we lost Elton’s crew some time during week two, when the whole of Rylen’s company were shipped off to the Exalted Plains. I was occasionally called into the war room or into the healing tents to consult on one matter or another.
My new title as “Lead Inquisition Engineer” was mostly made up, something to impress visiting nobles and to justify my close association with the advisors and the inner circle. Basically I was given free reign to pick projects and do the work I thought would do the most good, although I did have to give complete reports on all my projects as well as write justifications for any resources I used, or any expenditures I made. I quickly became something of a thorn in the side of the Quarter master.

The part of my title that rang the most hollow was the “Lead” portion. There weren’t even really any other engineers for me to lead. Dagna after all was an arcanist not an engineer, although we sort of became partners by default and ended up working together on almost everything. Despite being the head of an empty department I never lacked for hands when I needed help. Baz in particular became a fixture in the undercroft. He and Harritt would constantly riff off each other, grumbling about those “crazy bitches”, a title that Danga and I took as a badge of pride. I think they rather meant is as a compliment under their bluster. They tended to grumble more when they were enjoying themselves. I also talked Blackwall into helping whenever we needed something made that involved wood. He seemed happy enough to help but became taciturn when he was alone in my presence. I suspect he was afraid of getting confirmation that yes, I did know his story. I didn’t push, it wasn’t like it was a conversation that I was eager to have either and I respected his boundaries. The wariness however didn’t stop us from beginning construction of my ukulele.

Dagna and I had had a long conversation about my “to do” list to figure out what to tackle first. My initial instinct had been to build a printing press, as quick decimation of information would be key not just to the Inquisition but to Thedas as a whole. Thedas, to my relief, was already equipped with printing presses. Although I had to suppress a shudder of horror when Varric described movable type face as “cutting edge”, in a genuine attempt to boast about the advanced way in which his novels were printed. I quickly added building a typewriter to my ‘to do’ list.

With printing not being an issue, Dagna and I decided our to make the creation of pens and microscopes, our first projects. I thought these items would both be useful and relatively simple, and would allow me to get familiar with the kinds of materials and tools I would have available to me in this archaic setting.

It didn’t take me long to figure out that a microscope, while more complicated in design than a pen, actually would be easier to construct with the tools at hand. The main obstacle with microscopes was the lenses. Glass of optical quality was available it Thedas but it wasn’t plentiful. There was a glass smith in Val Royeaux however that would be capable of doing what we needed. After a conversation with Josephine, we determined that it was best to ask the man here to Skyhold, communicating what we needed was going to be very difficult to do via correspondence. Plus fostering a good relationship with the man would be important to bring many of my inventing plans to fruition.

Crafting pens was proving much more challenging. A quick chat with Harritt made it clear that it
would be nigh on impossible to craft a fine enough ball-and-socket to make a ballpoint pen with a fine enough tip for writing on paper or parchment. The precision machining required to make a ball and socket joint that fit well enough deliver ink evenly to a page, and not clog or overflow just didn’t exist in Thedas. I suspected that this was going to be a recurring problem for me. If I wanted to build even a fraction of the mechanisms that I wanted too, I was going to need to improve or make the tools necessary for crafting them first. Making a micrometer was now high on my list of priorities.

With ball point pens off the table, my next available option was a fountain pen. A metal reservoir filled with ink, that had a feeder and nib on the end that drew the ink out through a combination of capillary action and gravity. Crafting the nib and feeder properly so air could flow back into the pen allowing the ink to move properly and NOT leak all over the place was a problem. I spent three full days covered in ink; and after taking my soiled shirts to a frustrated washerwoman, several days running, aprons and sleeve covers mysteriously appeared in the undercroft. I also soon learned that most pen inks here were corrosive, and set about testing samples of different alloys and inks to head off that long term problem. In the meantime, I was able to present Josephine with a prototype, to show off to nobles and so she didn’t have to haul her inkwell with her everywhere. She was absurdly proud of the contraption, despite my warnings that It was a prototype and likely to leak all over her silk dress at some point.

Josephine had decided that my lectures should be a biweekly occurrence. A prospect I was quite excited about. I wanted to give Vivienne a knowledge of chemistry, and give the healers a better grasp about physiology. I wanted to teach Dorian about systems of government to aid his future fight in reforming Tevinter. I wanted to teach Solas about the civil rights movement (introducing him to philosophies of non violent protests and giving historical examples of their efficacy seemed very important.). Since Varric had implied that Wells as a powerful tempest mage I wanted to see what he would do with knowledge of the physics behind storms, pressure, fluid dynamics, electricity. I started however at the beginning, and my first lecture after germ theory introduced Thedas to the beautiful thing that was the scientific method.

***

As predicted Dagna was absolutely fascinated by my electronics. I was hesitant to let her operate them at first, after all there was no electronics shop to have things repaired or replaced if they broke, my laptop and phone were the only computers in Thedas, and when they broke or wore out I would be well and truly stuck in the dark ages. Not to mention I was loathe to risk the precious repositories of my photos and music, those tenuous connections to home. The benefits however out weighed the risks. I after all had electronic copies of many of my textbooks from my grad school days on my laptop and giving Dagna access to these was an opportunity too good to pass up. Any worries I had over the care my things would receive in Dagna’s hands however were misplaced. She treated them with a reverence I doubt any human being on earth could have mustered, even offered to place preservation runes on them, so they were less likely to ware out.

The electronics also sparked a deep interest in electricity and power in Dagna and together we set about investigating the possibility of creating batteries here in Thedas.
This investigation, was the cause for the small explosion which had just occurred in the undercroft.

I poked my head out from underneath the worktable I had dove under and shouted “Is everyone OK? Sound off”

“Fine.” Harritt called. *So Harritt was ok.*

“Crazy Bitches.” *So Baz was Ok.*

A giggle came from under the table next to mine and Dagna called “Hahaha… KABOOM!” *So Dagna was ok.* I tried and failed to control an exhilarated fit of laughter. Joining Dagna in her mirth.

*My job is pretty awesome.*

“Crazy Bitches.” Baz grumbled again, fondly.

“ummmm… I’m ok too.” Said a shaky voice from the doorway. I whirled around to find a pale faced of a terrified scout standing there.

“Hey Jim.” I responded, perhaps a little too brightly. *Poor Jim he never did seem to catch a break, did he?* “What can I help you with?”

“Umm… The glass maker from Val Royeux has arrived. To speak with you.”

“Ahh perfect. We should probably clear out from here anyway, let it air out a bit.”

“That’s probably for the best.” Dagna agreed. “We need to rethink that titration apparently.”

Jim lead us to the court yard where we were greeted by a young dark skinned elven man, who bowed low and said in a think Orlesian accent. “Master Anton has gone to meet with Madame de Fer, he should be back momentarily.”
“Are you an apprentice of Monsieur Anton?” The scarring on the young man’s hands clearly indicated he worked with glass. He seemed to flush.

“No Mademoiselle, but I oversee the master’s shop.”

I frowned confused “Monsieur Anton, does not make the glass himself then?” That could be a problem.

The young man shuffled nervously. “Not for many years my lady.”

“Well perhaps you could answer a few questions for me. We have need of glass with specific technical specifications.”

His eyebrows quirked, intrigued, but still anxious. “I suppose I could”

I gave him a warm smile. “Thank you, may I ask your name?”

“It is Dain, My lady.”

“A pleasure to meet you Dain, you may call me Marin.”

“And I am Dagna, Arcanist Dagna.” Dagna smiled.

We fell into a deep conversation about glass. It didn’t take long to get Dain to come out of his shell. It was immediately apparent that he was an extraordinarily bright young man, and had a strong grasp on his craft.

“So are suggesting that we increase the lead content…” Dain’s eager question was interrupted by the approach of Vivienne. She was accompanied by a masked man in a very puffy shirt, whom I assumed was Anton.
“Madame de Fer” I answered with a cordial smile.

“Marin my Dear, may I present Monsieur Anton. The preeminent glass maker in Orlais. Monsieur Anton, Engineer Marin Alvarado. The Inquisition’s lead engineer and Arcanist Dagna.” I nodded my head respectfully. I suppose a proper lady would have curtsied. I wasn’t even entirely sure I could do a curtsy correctly. Master Anton’s eyes darted between myself and Dagna. If I was a betting person I would have put money on the fact that a contemptuous expression lay beneath that mask.

“Enchanté Mademoiselles” He stooped to kiss my hand and then Dagna’s. “I must say, you are not at all what I expected” The way he said it made something inside me bristle.

“Yes these young ladies are novel, in the best possible way. The Inquisition is fortunate to have their brilliant minds at our disposal. They are quite innovative. I am sure you have much to discuss.” Vivienne said in what was clearly her court voice.

“I have not doubt of their … originality. But I am skeptical that the art of glass is a field that needs innovation. My art is quite refined, but I would be happy to enlighten the Inquisition’s crafts people on it’s finer points.” His voice went from saccharine to vicious in an instant as he turned to the elf. “Dain, leave us and go find some useful employment for yourself.” Dain seemed to shrink, he paled and stepped several paces back. Master Anton turned back to Dagna and I. “I do hope he wasn’t bothering you.”

“Actually” I said forcing a smile. “Quite the opposite in fact. Your apprentice and I were enjoying a very informative conversation. I would welcome his input in our discussion.”

Anton actually laughed at that. “My Apprentice? You must be joking, my lady. This knife-ear is a simple worker in my shop.”

I felt my jaw tighten. I took a deep breath trying to push a back at the anger that rose up inside of me. We needed his glass for so many of our inventions. I threw a glance and Dagna her face was perfectly composed but I saw the steel in her eyes.

“Excuse me?” I said as politely as I could manage, although even I could hear how strained my voice was. I looked at Dain. He looked like a completely different person than the enthusiastic and inquisitive craftsman I had been talking with a moment ago. He had shrunk in on himself his body language was positively concave. It was like sitting at thanksgiving dinner trying to ignore the homophobic slurs my grandmother so liberally employed, and watching Leo slowly crumble beside of me.
“He can be of no use in our conversation, Engineer. I apologize if he gave you a false impression of his skills when he spoke to you earlier, but you know these elves, so rarely are capable of telling the truth. It is simply not in their natures, you understand.”

I opened my mouth to say something diplomatic, and just couldn’t do it.

“Wow that is super fucking racist.” The whole group froze, shock registering on all of their faces. Then Vivienne closed her eyes in a fleeting gesture of exasperation and Dagna suppressed a snort of laughter.

“I beg your pardon!” the Orlesian man spluttered.

“I would like to offer you an official position here with the Inquisition, we could use your skills and sharp mind.” I said ignoring the glassmaker’s outburst.

“You think that I would consider working for you, leaving my prestigious business after you offer me such insult” Anton raged.

“I wasn’t talking to you.” I snapped at the glass maker and practically turned my back on him as I turned to face the cowering elf. “Dain, would you consider joining the Inquisition’s engineering team?”

“Me?! Join the Inquisition.” Dain said in disbelief. Wonder was breaking over his face.

Dagna smiled understanding my plan. “I can personally tell you that you will not find more interesting work elsewhere. Not to mention that it is for a good cause, and has decent pay. The Inquisition treats it’s people well.”

“You can not be serious.” Anton spat. “Madame de Fer!” He rounded on Vivienne, looking for support.

“I rather think they are serious Monsieur.” She replied coolly. In that moment I felt a surge of appreciation for Vivienne. She was without a doubt a cold elitist bitch, but she had our backs. In my book, any woman who could get the Iron Bull to call her ma’am was a force to be reckoned with.
Vivienne had my respect. Well behaved women seldom make history

“This is outrageous! Preposterous!” Anton fumed. “Dain you will not—“

“I accept.” Dain interrupted his master. Looking strait at me, a smile creeping over his features. I smiled warmly back

“I am glad to hear it.”

“How dare you!” Anton screamed. His little tamper tantrum was now drawing attention. Every person in the garden was unabashedly listening to the conversation. Nobles began tittering behind their hands. Dorian and Varric who had been reading lazily on a bench and writing letters, respectively abandoned their work and began walking swiftly towards us.

“Monsieur, pray stay composed you are embarrassing yourself.” Vivienne chided the glassmaker musically. An amused smirk pulling at her lips.

“May I ask what the ruckus is about, it is quite disruptive.” Dorian said, as him and Varric joined the conversation.

“Lord Pavus, Master Tethras, this is Monsieur Anton. Monsieur Anton this is Lord Dorian Pavus, The Inquisition’s Tevinter Ambassador and Varric Tethras, renowned Author.” Vivienne said formally as if nothing was amiss.

As for myself I was enjoying annoying the irate craftsman further by ignoring him entirely. “Dorian! Varric! I have just offered a position to this young man, and Dain has accepted. His expertise in crafting glass should be extraordinarily useful.” I said cheerfully.

“Well that is wonderful news” Varric said catching on, and extending a hand to Dain who shook it shyly. “Welcome to the team!” Then as an after thought. “Monsieur Anton, How do you do.”

Anton was significantly outnumbered and positively incensed “I have never been so abominably treated in my entire life.” He spat venomously “The Inquisition will get nothing from me!”
“I don’t think we require anything from you Monsieur.” I said coldly.

“You foolish little girl! Actions have consequences!” He sneered at me.

“They most certainly do.” Vivienne replied, a haughty and dangerous edge in her tone, that brought Anton up short. Madame de fer after all was not a person to trifle with in the great game. “Perhaps it is time you take your leave.”

Anton opened and closed his mouth several times indignantly turning on his heal with a huff and storming away.

“Au revior” Dorian called cheerily after him, with a chuckle.

“Charming Man” Varric said sarcastically

“Marin darling did you need to insult him so thoroughly? I will never be able to get any thing from his shop again, and I had some excellent pieces in the works.” Vivienne said lightly.

“Well he is asshole and bigot.” I replied, with no apology in my voice

“My dear if we cut ties with all our allies that who annoyed us or held racial prejudices the Inquisition would crumble.” Vivienne laughed.

“Well there is a reason I deal with machines and not people.” I huffed. “Plus I am sure Dain will be able to get you any glassware that you require. Did you know high and mighty master Anton hasn’t crafted a piece of glass in years? He just lets his minions do it and takes all the credit.”

Vivienne raised her eyebrows. “Indeed I did not know he had come to rest so much on his laurels. Perhaps we are better off having acquired this young man then.” Vivienne smiled at Dain who blushed. “Well I had best see that Monsieur Anton doesn’t do any damage before he departs.” And she floated away.

“Come on kid.” Varric said “Now that that is over, and you are staying on with us. We should get you properly situated.”
“Thank you Lady Marin. I … Thank you so much.” Dain said looking dazed

“You do not need to thank me Dain, your place here is due entirely to your merit.”

Dain smiled warmly as Varric lead him off towards the keep, As Dorian, Dagna and I headed out of the garden, back towards the undercroft.”

“Do you even have the authority to hire people?” Dorian asked amused.

“No idea” I replied, with a glance at Dagna who shrugged. Dorian’s laugh echoed in narrow confines of the stone staircase.

Suddenly there was a strange buzzing noise filling the air around me. I froze on the steps causing Dagna to nearly collide with my backside. “Do you hear that?” I asked.

“Hear what?” Dagna asked

“The buzzing”

“I don’t hear anything.” Dorian confirmed.

There was definitely a buzzing sound. In insistent vibration, almost like a low rumbling crackle. The hair on the back of my neck began to stand on end. There was something familiar about the sound.

Then my stomach dropped out from underneath me, and I had the sudden sensation of falling, although my feet were planted firmly on stone of the stairs beneath me. I whirled to face Dorian and Dagna their eyes wide with … shock maybe… or fear. If they were saying something It was lost in the warbling din around me. Their faces became blurred, distorted like the shimmer of hot air that rises off a hot road in the summer time. I felt a force hook me, around the navel and pull.

“Qué carajo” was all that had time to pass my lips before I was swallowed in a green darkness.
“Marin… Marin are you alright?” A distant voice called out.

I was flat on by back, up to my ass in mud. I was soaked to the bone. The smell of rain, wet earth and salt spray were heavy in the air. The sea? Was I back in California? If I had finally woken up… I tried to open my eyes against the splitting pain in my head to see.

The world was a green and grey blur and something dark loomed in front of my face. It took a couple blinks for it to resolve itself into Well’s face.

“We need to stop meeting like this.” I japed, smiling to cover both my headache and the fleeting disappointment. *Still in this fucking hallucination.*

I heard a bellowing laugh from Bull. And a snort from someone who could only have been Sera. *When had they returned to Skyhold?*

“Andraste’s Ass Marin, this is not the time!” Wells said with a frustrated growl. “You ok?”

“Think so. What happened? Aren’t you supposed to be on the Storm Coast?”

“We ARE in the Storm Coast.” Solas said.

... *Well Fuck*

Chapter End Notes

Writing this fiction leads to the strangest google searches, like the history of the ball point pen.

Anyway, you all are so encouraging that I posted this chapter a little early. It is long and I haven't edited it as much as I would like, but my field schedule means another update might not come for some time, so I wanted to get this out there while I could! Please let
me know if you see any typos or error of any sort. Also I love your comments and feedback so keep them coming, and forgive any delay in responding. I am deep in the middle of fieldwork in a remote local so internet isn't always available.

Thanks and Enjoy!
Ch. 11- The Faraday Effect

Chapter Summary

Also known as Faraday rotation, the Faraday effect is the rotation of the plane of polarization of a light beam caused by a magnetic field. The phenomenon is named for its discoverer, English physicist Michael Faraday.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains violence and graphic descriptions of gore. If you are the kind of person who looks for trigger warnings proceed with caution.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“We ARE in the Storm Coast.” Solas said.

The calm in his voice belied the alarming nature of that statement.

“What? No, I was at Skyhold!” My eyes flew wide and I sat bolt up right. Getting up was a bad idea. A wave of intense nausea hit me. Clearly my inner ears had not caught up to the rest of my senses.

Bull was the first to see it. “Police your boots!” he said taking a step back. The others following suit. I slapped my hand over my mouth and took a deep breath, then another. Willing my gut to calm the fuck down. It worked, my lunch stayed in my stomach.

“I think I am good, now.”

“Piss Marin, you turned a right ugly shade o’ green there.” Sera said.

“Sorry about that, my head is spinning.” I said looking up at the faces crowding me. Solas was right. We definitely weren’t in Skyhold. The sheer peaks and icy rivers of the Frostbacks were missing, instead, we were in a forest. It might have been a redwood forest in Northern California but for the lack of actual redwood trees. The canopy was dominated by tall evergreens and the underbrush by various species of ferns. The sight of it gave me a slight prick of homesickness. The sky was a slate
grey and it was pouring rain. “How the hell did this happen?” I glanced between Solas and Wells, the two mages would be the likeliest to have an explanation. They both opened their mouths to respond but took a little too long to consider their words and Sera beat them to it.

“We needed to close a rift but it spawned the usual baddies. Demons. Ugh. Their little asses were swarmin’ us. Then the Inquisitor does some shite with his glow hand thingy. And some breachy rift piss appears. Sunned the lot o’ them but then you come tumbling out, and pass out right in the mud. Weird.”

I blinked at Sera as my mind worked to translate her particular idiom. I felt a little slower than normal. Solas grimaced in they way he always did when he was trying to collect his patience, which was all of the time whenever Sera was around.

Wells shrugged and gave a nod. “Weird would be the appropriate adjective.”

“There is more too it than just breachy rift piss.” Said Solas with some consternation. “But that was a fairly accurate description of what happened. If not how it happened.”

“Well let’s table the how discussion for when I am slightly drier and my head isn’t ringing like a bell. Was I out long?” I was racking up a frightening number of head traumas. Repeated concussions were notoriously good for your health.

“Naa, Less than a minute.” Said Bull as he offered me an arm up “You’re a tough little nut professor.” I took his arm and he pulled me to my feet.

“Indeed, it seems you have been pulled through the fade, and are suffering remarkably few ill effects.”

“She passed through what?!” Said Sera looking terrified.

“Later Solas” Said Wells with more heat than was called for, laying a protective hand on my shoulder.

“I’m going to be fine Wells, really.” I said, not looking at Solas. I had no idea if that was true or not but I couldn’t stand the anxious look on Wells’ face.
Despite myself I had started to shiver. The storm coast wasn’t as cold as the mountains around Skyhold but the air was still chilly and every single article of clothing I had on was completely soaked. A sudden wave of heat washed over me and I felt the water that had soaked my clothes siphoned off. I looked around confused and noticed that Wells’ face was screwed up with concentration.

“Better?” Wells asked

“Yea, thanks. That’s a really handy trick.” Wells returned my warm smile. I was much more comfortable than I had been a moment ago. Then again two moments ago I was miles away in Skyhold. I winced imagining the panic my disappearing act was likely causing in Skyhold right now. “People at Skyhold are going to be shitting bricks.” I mentioned.

“Red and the Ambassador will keep the rumors under control.” Bull said “Nothing we can do about it now, we will get word out with the first bird.”

“Did anyone see you leave?” Wells asked.

I nodded “I was in the undercroft. Dorian and Dagna both witnessed … whatever happened.” Wells nodded darkly, his teeth worrying at his bottom lip.

“Ha! I bet the ‘vint literally shit his pants.” Bull laughed.

“No.” I countered. “Dorian wouldn’t do anything to ruin his very fashionable pants.”

Bull grinned. “Wanna bet?”

I pulled at my empty pockets. “Afraid I have no coin Bull.”

“There are ways around that.” Bulls face was twisted into a mischievous one sided smile.

“Oh you are both terrible” Wells spat, but even I could tell he was trying to hide a smile and some of
the worry had eased out of his shoulders. I wondered if that hadn’t been Bull’s intention in the first place. *Ben’hassrath*

My stomach made a loud and undignified rumble. I flushed. Sera chortled.

“Best get the lady back to the camp before she perishes of hunger. We can go back now that the rift is sealed and we have cleared out the demons.” Wells grinned.

“Ugh do not call me that.” I whined.

“My lady or demon?”

“Either.”

The walk to camp took us about an hour, by which time the sun was beginning to set. We were greeted at the entrance by a diminutive figure in Inquisition garb.

Lace Harding, was just as adorable as she was in the game, more so if possible. She had sparkling green eyes, a wicked smile and a charming splash of freckles over the bridge of her nose.

Her bright voice bubbled “Inquisitor welcome back! Camp is setup and secured. I have scouts in the surrounding area, so we shouldn’t be caught unawares.” Then her eyes found me. “Oh hello, you have a guest.”

“Ahh yes this is Marin Alvarado.”

“Nice to finally put a face to the name.” The scout smiled and shook my hand. “But if you don’t mind me asking, how did you get here?”

“That is an excellent question Lace” I responded.

She gave Wells a quizzical look and he replied “It is hard to explain, if we even can explain it. In the mean time we are in desperate need of dry clothes and warm food.”
“Of course Inquisitor. Right this way.”

“By the way Inquisitor did you go telling people my name?!”

Wells glanced up at her “Lace, you wound me!” He said putting his hand over his heart in mock shock. Harding threw her head back in an open and honest laugh, which Wells reciprocated. It was one of the few unburdened smiles I had seen on him.

The pair continue to laugh and banter as she led the way through camp.

An extra bedroll and a warm dry cloak were acquired for me, and after a little shuffling and a minimum of debate it was decided that I would bunk down with Sera.

Dinner was rabbit stew and served around a smoky campfire. Scattered spots around the fire had awnings fashioned out of treated canvas to keep the those sitting around it mostly dry. Although “dry” was a relative term. The rain and sea air gave this place an indomitable dampness. At the very least the tarps kept most of the rain off. After an afternoon of being dragged through rifts, mud and rain, the food tasted like a gourmet meal. I was sitting on a log next to Iron Bull. Scout Harding and Wells were still happily chatting on the far side of the fire. What was Harding saying that had Wells laughing so much?

I wasn’t sure where Solas or Sera had got to. I got the distinct feeling that talk of the fade had freaked Sera out and she was now giving me a wide berth. My eyes were drawn back to Scout Harding and Wells. They looked well together.

“Hey Bull, what’s your read on that?” Nodding towards the chatting pair.

“The Inquisitor and the Scout?”

“Yea”

“What about ‘em?”
“Well you know are they…” And I raised my eyebrows, trying to imply as hard as I could.

“An item?”

“Yes” I answered. Glad he was quick on the uptake.

He gave me a long studying look. Before saying slowly “They are friendly. They flirt. Less now than they did before.” Before what? I wondered, but before I had the chance to ask. Bull continued.

“But I don’t think it is anything to set store by. Nothing deep on either end. Why?”

“Curious. I’m bad at reading people but they seem like they would be a good pair. She is tough, clever, upbeat. And they look like they get on.”

“Yea, people may not be your best skill.” Bull replied, raising and eyebrow and fixing me in a piercing look, that was surprisingly effective, given he had half the usual amount of eyes to do it with. Damned if I knew what he was trying to find out with the look though. “The scout is a good kid regardless.” He released me from his gaze with a shrug towards Harding.

“She is.”

“Speaking of skills. You have any kind of combat training? You may want to be prepared to see some action since you're stuck here in the field.”

I squirmed uncomfortably “No not really. I went to a kickboxing class most Saturdays and I took an archery class in college. I might be able to hit the broad side of a barn if pressed, or land a punch if someone was not expecting me not to fight back. The classes were meant more to teach light self defense and provide exercise not prepare one for … war. In actual combat…” Yet another reminder of how ill prepared I was for this world.

“Hmm… maybe we can scrounge you up a crossbow, don’t need much training to use one of them, plus that way if we end up in a scrap you can stick in back, stay covered.”

“Great I just love needing defending.” Might as well have worn a princess gown, and brought in a fainting couch for all the damsel-ing I was doing.
“Ah don’t be so hard on yourself. Not your fault you never needed to fight.”

“You’re just trying to make me feel better.”

“Hey, Ben’hassrath remember. I AM good at reading people. You have got grit and a good head on your shoulders. You just ‘gotta use it. Just treat fights like one of your little inventions. Its just problem solving. Find the worst problem, the one that ‘gonna kill you first, and fix it.” I nodded. Not panicking, problem solving, triage, I was good at that, I could do that. “And by fix it of course I mean kill it.” On second thought… “Come on it will be fun! We will find you a weapon in the morning.”

What could possibly go wrong?

***

We were up with the sun the next morning, so we could get the birds sent off to Skyhold, with the message that I was with Wells and alive, as soon as possible. I didn’t feel particularly refreshed. The night had been restless. Partly because the unanswered questions from the day before keep running around in my head, but mostly because Sera snored.

Breakfast was tea, hard cheese and dried fruit. Solas refused the tea. I had to suppress the urge to begin bombarding him with questions. I was rather curious what sort of theories he had concocted about how I had worm-holed my way here, but it seemed that there was an unspoken agreement among the team that it wasn’t a topic to be breached within earshot of the miscellaneous Inquisition scouts and soldiers in the camp. So I bit my tongue.

“Guess what I found?” Iron bull drawled, approaching the campfire holding one hand behind is back.

“Your eye?!” Sera exclaimed with mock enthusiasm.

“No.” Bull dead panned.

“Solas’ hair?” Sera tried again.
“No.”

“Wells’ … wait Quizzy what you missing?”

“My pinky toe.” Wells replied instantly not even looking up from his breakfast.

“Wait? No. Really?!”

“No not really.” Wells confirmed.

“Ahh… you’re no fun.” Sera grumbled.

“Anywaay” Bull interjected pulling out a crossbow from behind his back. “I found Marin a weapon.”

I eyed it nervously. My archery class in college had been with recurved bows, with sights and still targets. Not medieval crossbows and living, breathing moving targets. “Umm… Bull I have never shot one of those before.”

“Ah there is nothing to it. We can give you a few lessons as soon as you’re finished eating. You got some pretty good marksman to learn from.” Bull said indicating Sera and Harding.

“Sera?” Solas broke into the conversation “If you eschew all things elven, why do you not use a crossbow?”

“Ugh… too winchy”

“Ahh… winchy-ness, a point I not considered.”

“Well I would be happy to teach you Marin!” Harding chipped in.
“That’s the spirit!” Bull said.

Fifteen minutes later I was aiming the crossbow at a log that Sera had strategically placed moss and plant cover on so that I could “Shoot at Coryphi-spit”. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that her log barely resembled a face, much less the face of the ancient darkspawn-magister.

The crossbow was heavier than it looked. The mechanism was relatively simple, this was no Bianca. A bolt slotted into place and was fired when the trigger was pulled, at which point the string could then be levered back into place to fire again. The tinker inside of me really wanted to take the whole thing apart. The engineer in me wanted to put the whole thing back together with an improved design. What I needed to do was to shoot the damn thing.

“Ok, now relax your shoulder” Harding coached while Wells, Bull and Sera lounged on logs in the background, enjoying the show. “Put the target in your sights, exhale slowly and pull the trigger.”

I methodically did as she instructed, letting out a measured breath and squeezing the trigger. With a thwack the bolt was released from the crossbow and went sailing clear over the log.

“Good job Marin! Now try hitting the target.” Sera sniped

“Oh was I supposed to hit it?” I asked feigning surprise. “That’s I great idea, I will try that this time.”

I fumbled with pulling back the string, to reload the thing, it was awkward and took a lot of strength. Doing it in the middle of combat was going to be a nightmare. I loaded another bolt in the crossbow and fired again.

It scraped along the side of the log and ricocheted off into the bracken.

“Hey that was closer.” Harding said encouragingly. Sera snorted.

My third shot managed to hit the log.
“Great now I just need to convince my opponents to stand still and let themselves be shot!” I said as the others clapped my achievement.

Wells and the team eventually headed out chasing rumors of Red Templars, and I continued to systematically lower the Inquisition’s supply of crossbow bolts with my target practice. I gradually got my eye in a bit and was able to consistently hit the log, and a few other targets that Lace set up for me. But all of my targets were stationary and polite enough not to rush me while I reloaded. Which would definitely not be true if I ever had to use this thing for real.

The team returned around mid-day, just in time for lunch.

“I think we may have narrowed down the location of the Templar hide-out,” Wells said. “And I believe we found some useful employment for you Marin.”

“Oh?” I asked. Eager to do something to pull my weight instead of just wallowing around camp.

“Yea we found a cabin that looks abandoned but there is a tricky lock. Could use an engineer’s touch.”

“Sera couldn’t pick it?” I asked surprised.

“Oh piss off.” Sera protested as best she could with a mouth full of lunch.

“Well I am not exactly a lock smith myself, so I don’t make any promises, but I will take a crack at it.”

“Going stir crazy without a project huh?” Bull remarked, a little too correctly.

“Something wrong with wanting to earn my keep?” I asked

“Not at all Professor. Good to be eager.” Bull chuckled giving me a slap on the back that nearly caused me to face plant in my bowl of stew.
“We didn’t encounter any hostiles this morning, but better bring that new crossbow of yours anyway.” Wells said to me with a smile.

“Just in case we encounter any dangerous logs?” I japed.

“Well you never know!” He smiled back then went to find scout Harding. Presumably to discuss whatever they had found out regarding the Red Templars.

When lunch was finished, I clipped a quiver of bolts to my belt, slung the crossbow across my back and set out with Wells and the gang to confront the problematic lock.

The weather was misty and miserable, but the scenery was pretty spectacular. The rocky hills were exploding with green in the form of grasses, ferns and towering conifers. We had to scramble over granite boulders and ford icy streams. If it weren’t for the crossbow, and my Qunari and elf companions, I could have mistaken it for a weekend hike in the Pacific Northwest. Our walk was broken by sporadic and thoroughly entertaining banter between the party.

“You can make magic anywhere Solas? Ever piss it by accident?” Sera inquired.

“No!” Solas said decisively then hesitated. “Wait…” Then after a long pause. “No”

Sera stared at him gob smacked. “How would you not remember something like that?”

“We were all young once?” Solas said with a shrug.

I laughed so hard Bull had to put a hand on my shoulder to keep me upright.

After about an hour and a half of walking we ended up in a clearing on the top of a rise. At the center of clearing was a derelict looking building, replete with rotting timber. I eyed it skeptically.

“Couldn’t you just kick down the door?” I asked “Or the wall? The wood doesn’t look particularly sound.”
“It’s warded.” Wells replied.

“With magic?” I asked “Why would an abandoned cabin be warded?”

“It happens more often than you would think. Latent magical protections on lost or forgotten items or buildings. Especially with the chaos of the mage/Templar war.”

“huh” I shrugged “well let’s go check out this lock then.” I said walking toward the moldering structure.

Suddenly a loud whoosh came from behind us, and the group turned to find a fireball flying right towards our faces, curtsey of a robed and hooded figure that had just immerged out of the tree line.

“INCOMING!” Bull roared as the group scattered. Bull and Solas broke left. Sera leapt to the right, doing a neat little tuck and roll. She spun out of the roll, came to her knees and lifted her bow to fired at our attacker. It was all done in such smooth motion that I could have blinked and missed it. “Take that you mangy git!” She cackled.

I, meanwhile, was rugby tackled to the ground by Wells. The fireball roared over our heads and found myself nose to nose with the Inquisitor for half a heartbeat, our bodies pressed together, before he rolled off of me an shoved me towards the cabin.

“MOVE!” He said in a tone I had never heard him use before, and that brooked no argument. I scrambled to my feet and was hauled towards the cabin by Sera who shoved me behind the cover of the inner edge of the door jam. While she took up position on the other side. I saw Solas throw up barriers in time to block another fire spell from hitting Wells and Bull, who had drawn his axe and gave a bellow that was positively frightening.

Varric had named Wells aptly when he called him Storm. Leaves on the ground and began to dance, as they were caught up in the eddies of wind the buffeted around his feet. The slate grey of the misty afternoon seemed to condense around him; water and wind whipped up into a frenzy. Electricity crackled and was hurled at our assailant. It was like watching a thunderstorm roll over the plains of the Midwest. Or like standing on a jetty in the pouring rain watching as storm lash at the sea, waves breaking over rocks, throwing water up into fans and arches, foam tumbling along the sand. It was beauty and terror. Grace and chaos. It was sublime.

Well I had better do something to contribute here. I thought grimly as I ducked out from behind the
wooden door frame, raised the crossbow, and clicked the trigger. The bolt found only air. Sailing three inches to the left of the mage’s ear.

“Fuck.” I hissed under my breath. My mouth and gone bone dry and my heart was hammering in my chest. I ducked back behind the doorframe, my wet and clumsy fingers fumbling to load another bolt. Stupid impossible thing. The first thing I was going to do when I got back to Skyhold was to take this bloody thing apart and FIX the piece of shit. I clicked another bolt into place and glanced over my shoulder to the back to the battlefield. Sera had gotten off several shots in between my failed first shot and when I had finished reloading. I swiveled around the doorway put the attacking mage in my sights and let my second bolt fly. It hit home. Or it would have if there had not been a magical shield in place over him. Instead of finding purchase in the mage my bolt bounced off harmlessly.

Shit. I ducked back behind cover and loaded a third bolt, catching my finger in the mechanism and drawing blood. Shit. Shit. I manhandled the unwieldy thing into place and notched a third bolt. I looked once again over my shoulder to get a lay of the battlefield.

Bull was directly in front of the mage with Wells and Solas flanked slightly to either side. Sera had ducked out of the door to get a good angle from the back ranks. I watched her loose an arrow that broke through his flickering barrier and stuck him just under the collar bone. He roared, taking his eyes off Wells and turning in Sera’s direction with a snarl. Bull rushed at him axe raised, but his swing missed as the mage took a step and disappeared with green shimmer. Everyone stopped gazing around the battlefield searching for where he would reappear.

I saw him first. I had an advantage. Tucked as I was behind the door frame of the cabin, he popped directly into my line of sight, materializing behind Wells and Bull, only a few feet behind and to the right of Sera.

His staff was raised and with one clean slash, a fireball was lobbed strait the the blonde elf’s head.

“SERA!!” I screamed lunging for her arm, dropping the crossbow and throwing myself forward, whipping her behind me just in time to watch the fireball break over me like a wave.

This was it. This was how I die. I cringed as a felt the heat of leading edge of the fiery mass hit my cheek. I braced for the searing pain that would melt my flesh. The image of the wounded refugees of haven blinked into my mind, their skin warped, blackened, bubbling, blistered.

But the searing pain never came. The heat hit, but it didn’t burn, it flowed over me, and passed. Leaving me untouched. The warmth of the spell giving way to the chill of the rain on my cheeks. I turned and stared the mage point blank in the face, for several long beats we blinked at each other.
“What are you?” he growled.

*What was I.*

The mage was swept off his feet by a ferocious thunderbolt from Wells. A bluish shimmer blinked in front of me as Solas threw up a barrier, then hurled some sort of spirit energy at the mage. Who shuttered under the attack. The mage tried to get to his feet but Sera ducked out from behind me and loosed an arrow at him, hitting him dead in the chest. Bull rushed in to confirm the kill, and I managed to tear my gaze away so that I didn’t see the moment his axe found its mark. The horrible squelching sound it made, however, left no doubt at to the efficacy of his hit.

The chaos of and clamor of battle was suddenly silent. Only the sound of the rain filling the grey landscape.

Sera spun me around to look at me. I reached up to my face to feel my unburnt skin, to confirm that it really was alright. “Watcha go and do that fer?! Jumping in front of me like that?” She all but yelled at me. I noticed the ends of her bangs were smoking slightly where the fire spell crested over me and had reached her. I thought, stupidly, that the damage wouldn’t make much difference to her already disheveled hair cut. “You could’ve gotten yourself killed.”

“I …I don’t know” I answered honestly. “Seemed like the thing to do at the time.”

“Did you know you wouldn’t turn into a crisp?” She demanded of me. *No. No I didn’t know.* I shook my head.

“Marin!” Wells rushed over to me grasping my shoulders and staring at me with a searching gaze. “Are you ok?” His thumb brushed across my cheek bone, finding a fleck of something to wipe away. Mud or blood or rain. *His eyes were the warmest shade of brown.*

“Yea of course. Fine.” My tone was casual, flippant, but I could hear the slight quiver in my voice. I was buzzing. The adrenaline coursing through my veins made me feel high. More of a rush than I had ever gotten from skydiving. Except skydiving was fun, and this was... well not. I avoided looking the corpse lying in the grass.

“You sure?” He breathed his eyes still fixed on mine. I nodded. “You’re bleeding.”
I glanced down and looked at my hand which had wrapped itself around Well’s strong bicep, and saw that my finger was indeed bleeding. “It’s nothing, I pinched it in the crossbow I think.” I replied softly. Bloody thing. There was no way it was going to escape being dismantled, and overhauled.

Solas cleared his throat and Wells took a couple steps back. “It would appear that your ability to resist magic, has some useful practical applications.”

I let out an unrestrained laugh. For some reason the whole situation seemed supremely funny, in that moment. “You don’t say Solas?” I said through my mirth.

Bull gave a chuckle along with me. He was holding up a bloodied key on a heavy ring. “You got guts Professor. But, I hate to break it to you, it looks like you didn’t need to make the trip after all.” He said shaking the ring in my direction.

“Well at least I got a nice walk out of it.” I said with a smile.

“Well, lets see if this was worth our time, shall we?” Wells said practically, taking the key from Bull and walking into the cabin, and clicking open the door to the basement.

He opened it slowly carefully. Sera peaked her head around the door and looked down the stairs and Solas held up his hand, an arcane shimmer briefly visible.

“I don’t see any traps.” Sera said

“Nor do I detect any arcane dangers.” Solas confirmed.

Slowly carefully we snuck down the hallway. The first sign that something was terribly wrong, was the smell. A horrible putrid odor. Death with an undercurrent of mildew.

The scene we found at the bottom of the steps was worse than the smell. There were bodies. Too many of them, in various states of decomposition. Some were just skeletons, bones picked clean. Others were… not so neat. Sacks of bloated and half-liquefied flesh sliding of the bones. They swarmed with writhing maggots and carrion flies. It took everything I had not to gag.
“Ugh…” Sera said. Effectively putting the disgust I felt into a single sound.

“This place is unpleasant.” Solas said. A statement I would have thought worthy for entry into an ‘understatement of the age’ competition.

“Yea this place is creepy.” Iron Bull confirmed.

“Why?” I asked in hollow voice. “Why would someone do this?”

Wells was staring at a ratty piece of paper on the desk, before crumpling it in an angry fist tossing it aside. He shook his head at me thin lipped, but gave me no answer. There was probably no good answer.

The others continued to loot the room, while I stewed in thought.

*What are you?* He had demanded of me. The person who had done this. The monster responsible for this grizzly scene had looked me dead in the eyes, and was repulsed, scared of what I was. *What did that make me?*

Well it made me not dead for one. I thought defiantly. As to what else it meant…

“Solas… I think it is time to have that conversation now.”

****

Missives between Skyhold and the Field:

**
Storm,

Fidget is MIA. Cause unknown. Seals are closed on the matter, but won’t hold for long. Magical attack possible.

- Nightingale

**

Nightingale,

The Professor is here, secure and not any worse for the ware after her unanticipated jaunt into the field. Chuckles has some theories on the matter, but it is unlikely foul play was a factor. She will return from sabbatical once we complete our mission here. Rift in the region closed. Investigating rumors of Red Templars. More soon.

- Storm

**

Sparkler

(L. H. Said pseudonyms only in missives sorry) I managed to get my hands on a bird so I could tell you in myself that I’m fine. Turns out I’m a weirdo that weird shit happens to. I’ll (try to) explain when I get back. Sorry for probably scaring the living crap out of you. If I literally scared the crap out of you tell me because I’ll owe Tiny money (on second thought don’t tell me.)

Tell D. I’m sorry, she is greatest, and to keep working on the project while I’m gone.

Don’t drink all the wine while I’m not there, you ostentatious asshole.

-Fidget

**
I look forward to hearing chuckles theories on the professor’s expedition. Do we have any leaks I need to know about now? Please advise.

Curly says R. reports positive progress from the exalted Plains.

Ruffles first guests have begun arriving. Be prepared to glad-hand on your return.

-Nightingale

**

Fidget,

You complete and utter ass. You nearly gave me a heart attack! I will thank you to provide a full explanation when you get home, and then NEVER do that again. Please inform that horned ox that despite my shock I did not soil my pants, thank you. Although soiling might actually improve his pants. They are truly horrific.

D. is eagerly working in your absence, and the new guy is settling in. D. said to ask you about the focal length of simple lenses. Whatever that means.

I drank all the wine… its all gone. Every single drop. There will be none left for you, you silly shrew.

I’m not signing off with the dwarf’s preposterous nickname.

D.P.

**

D.

To answer your question. \( (1/f) = (1/n) \left\{ (1/R1)- (1/R2) + \frac{(((n-1)d)/(n R2 R1))}{(n R2 R1)} \right\} \). We should be aiming for a refraction index (n) of about 2.65.

Make sure the new kid uses protective gear. Exposure to heavy metals has serious long term health consequences, and his former master didn’t strike me as a proponent of worker safety. Don’t blow up the undercroft while I’m gone. Explosions are only allowed when I am present to partake in the fun.
P.S. Tiny has asked for secondary confirmation that Sparkler did indeed, not shit his pants.

**

Chapter End Notes

Another long chapter. Posted in celebration of the fact that I have officially completed the field work portion of my months long research trip. My next chapter will likely be my first posted from home! I love traveling but I also love coming home. Its all bitter sweet, but I will be back in the field soon enough.

This chapter contains some banter pulled verbatim from the game. In case it needs to be said, all rights for everything dragon age belong to Bioware. I am just happy they let us play in their universe.

As usual PLEASE let me know if you find any typos or errors, and forgive a busy traveling grad student for slow updates and/or comment responses. Know that I love your comments and feedback! They keep me writing.

Thanks for reading and enjoy!
Chapter Summary

In physics, string theory is a theoretical framework where one-dimensional objects called strings replace the point particles of particle physics. The vibrational state of these strings determines the mass, charge and other properties of fundamental particles. String theory is a broad theory, and is yet unproven but is a contender for the “theory of everything” as it potentially provides a unified description of both gravity and particle physics. String theory also implies that our universe should be just one of many in a multiverse.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The group had left the gruesome scene in the basement and were sitting sprawled in the main room of the cabin. All looking at Solas expectantly.

My palms felt sweaty, despite the cool damp of afternoon. The rebel mage’s question ringing through my head. What are you?

Solas, hopefully had the answers.

“Before I left Skyhold I was able to run the tests I mentioned on your scarf” Solas began “As I feared there is none of it left to return to you, my apologies.”

I nodded. Wells narrowed his eyes in confusion. “Your scarf. The one you… I mean the red one.” His actual question hung in the air. The scarf you used to bind my wounds? The one you said was your favorite. Your dead mother’s scarf. I nodded again. “You gave it up? Why?”

“Solas needed to run tests.” I shrugged. “And I needed answers.” Wells frowned at that but didn’t press further.

Solas’ eyes flicked between us, trying to decipher the subtext of our exchange. He continued.
“While the scarf was perhaps marginally less mutable than something of our own world would be, it nonetheless could be effected by magic. Nor did I read anything particularly unusual about it’s fundamental structure.”

“What is why Cole could read pain from my scarf, but not from me.”

“Precisely.” Solas replied. “Am I correct in assuming that you were wearing the scarf when the accident that brought you here occurred?” I nodded. “So we can safely deduce that whatever process occurred only effected you, and not the items you were wearing or, indeed, any of the items that were brought with you from your world.”

“Or perhaps” I countered. “Whatever occurred only affected living things.” With Leo missing there was no other living thing that we had to compare with me and therefore could not discount that hypothesis that anyone, having undergone whatever it was that I went through, would have these abilities. That the difference was between living and non-living. It was an idea that I much preferred to the notion that I was some sort of chosen one.

“Practically it makes little difference.” Wells put in. “You are the only one with these abilities.”

“Speaking of…” I prompted Solas. “What exactly is our explanation for those?”

He took a deep breath then stated slowly and clearly. “I believe that you are linked with, and your life force infused by the veil.”


“What?!” I finally managed to stutter.

“You must understand that the veil is not a physical barrier. It does not exist in three dimensional space as we know it. It is more akin to a magical vibration, that separates the waking world from the fade.”

This was all starting to sound like a magical pseudoscience-y version of quantum physics. I half expected him to start talking about gravitons and branes.
“And containing this vibration, makes me immune to magic?”

“In a manner of speaking, It would be more correct to say that being infused by the veil makes you immutable and immune to the manipulation of the fade.”

“So I am like a Faraday cage for the fade?”

Solas cocked his head like a dog. “That would depend on what a Faraday cage is.”

“Never mind.” I said pinching the bridge of my nose, trying to wrap my head around what Solas was telling me.

“What does this mean practically for her abilities.” Wells said cutting back to the heart of the matter.

“Yea. Why does a heating rune warm me but a magic fireball not burn my face off?” If the energy in the form of heat waves could reach my skin, why couldn’t I be burnt? It didn’t make any sense.

“Perhaps a demonstration is in order.” Solas said. He turned his palm upwards and a bluish flame emerged from it. Without warning he lunged, grabbing for my wrist with his free hand, and shoved my arm into the open flame.

I gasped. Everyone else, jumped to their feet. Wells and Bull were shouting. Sera actually drew her bow, arrow notched and half raised it in Solas’ direction.

“I’m fine!” I shouted into the din. “I’m okay!” I was. A lifetime of experience that taught me fire burns had made me expect horrendous pain when my hand was shoved into the fire, but no pain came. Instead my hand felt warm, like it had been shoved into a steaming hot water bath, and it sort of buzzed.

“What does it feel like?” Solas prompted professorially.

“It’s warm.” I said. Bull gave a snort that said obviously. “But it doesn’t burn… and it sort of tingles…The heat is actually kind of nice, in this damp weather.”
Both wells and Bull eased back down into sitting, the alarm on their faces having faded into some version of awe. Sera lowered her bow, but didn’t sit back down. She growled. “You better watch it elfy… if you go hurting miss smarty pants I will put one in your eye.”

I gave her a quick smile, Solas ignored her entirely. “The tingling you feel could very well be the vibration of the veil itself as it interacts with the magic of the spell. Now if you could, please close your eyes and concentrate on not feeling the heat. You want your hands to be cold. Will the heat away.”

I snorted. “That’s not how shit works. Objective reality, for example, energy released as heat, isn’t affected by will or what I want.”

“The fade is not objective reality. Close your eyes.” He insisted patiently.

I suppressed an eye roll, we really needed to have a chat about empiricism and epistemology at some point, but did what I was told. I closed my eyes and wished my hand back to ambient temperature. For several heartbeats nothing happened. Then the heat in my hand disappeared, and I let out a small gasp of surprise. I opened my eyes, half expecting to find the flame extinguished, but it burned happily in Solas’ palm, just as it had before.

“Well?” I uttered quietly

“I don’t feel the heat any longer.” A smug smile passed over Solas’ lips. I stared at my hand in the flames. It was the strangest case of cognitive dissonance. What I was feeling was so completely at odds with the visual information I was getting from my eyes.

“Is the tingling sensation still present?” Solas asked. I nodded. He lowered his hand and extinguished the flame.

I ran my free hand over the unburnt flesh. My eyes were not lying to me, my flesh was indeed unburnt. “So I can control this ability with my will?”

“To an extent. This demonstration confirms my suspicion that you have the ability to marginally extend the area of affect. You can decrease it so as to feel the heat and energy of a heating rune or allow wells to siphon water off your wet skin, as he did yesterday. Conversely you can extend it to say prevent your clothes from being burnt off by magical ball of flame.” I looked down at my unsinged attire. “However I do not think that any amount of will could ever make the core of your being mutable. No fire spell would ever be able to burn you, whether you wished it too or not. Nor could a healing potion ever be persuaded to heal your damaged tissues.”

Well that sucked. There were plenty of mundane dangerous lurking around Thedas I could manage to get myself killed by. “So immune from magical attacks, but I still need to stay clear of the pointy ends of swords” I summarized. Solas nodded.

“Okay but how did she get here? None of that explains why she was plucked out of Skyhold and pulled to us in the Storm Coast.” Wells asked.

“I believe you are responsible for that Inquisitor.” Solas replied.

Wells frowned. “I opened a rift…” He glanced at his palm where the anchor marked him with a sizzling green scar. He looked at it with such an expression of guilt that I had to suppress the urge to reach out and take his hand.

“And I fell through” I finished for him.

“Whatever process caused this ability in Marin, it has marked her as much as you are marked Inquisitor, and these marks are inextricably linked. They are polar opposites, inverses, of one and other.” The north and south poles of a magnet, or a boson and a fermion. “Your mark Inquisitor can both stitch and open the veil. Marin, for all intents and purposes is the veil. When you rip it open it would seem she rushes in, to fill the gap.”

“Like water being pulled through a siphon.” I said.

“In a way.”

“Wait!” Sera burst in “Shouldn’t it be the other way around. He fills her gaps… because you know parts.” She giggled to a collective groan.
I had absolutely no response to Sera’s quip so instead I asked. “Could I close existing rift?”

Sola’s brow furrowed, “I am inclined to think not.” Wells was nodding in agreement, apparently there was some underlying magical theory at play that I was missing. “It is more likely that your ability would allow you to pass safely through an existing rift, and walk into the fade without any harm coming to you. Provided of course you encountered no demons.”

“Actually your ability might help you there as well.” Wells supplied. “If Cole can not hear your then it is reasonable to assume no spirit and by extension, no demon can. You may even be able to resist some of their attacks.’

“Fucking demons.” Bull grumbled.

“Could Coryphaeus use this?” I said slowly. Everyone stilled, the horror of that thought breaking on them. “He went after Wells’ mark, but the anchor is permanent. Does this change that? What about my mark? If I could walk through a rift into the Fade, could Coryphaeus take it? Use it to walk into the Fade?”

Solas shook his head. “No. Wells’ mark is fixed and forever out of Coryphaeus’ reach. As is yours.”

“Is there ANY way he could use this against us? If I am the veil or linked to the veil is there a way he could use me to pull it down.” I stared hard into Solas’ eyes and he meet my gaze. This was a dangerous question. Solas would know I wasn’t just asking about Coryphaeus. I was asking about him.

Solas thought long and hard before he answered slowly “I can not say.”

“You can not say or you don’t know?” They were not the same. Solas rarely lied but he did use the vagaries of language to obfuscate, and I was not going to let him slip out of answering this question.

Solas eyes were burning holes into mine. It was ten times more terrifying than the mages fireball. But I matched his gaze. “I do not know.” Solas confirmed slowly and deliberately. “There are many unknowns. This magic is complex and it may be used for good or ill in a way I can not foresee.”

I nodded, satisfied with that answer. I still had questions I needed to ask him, but It would be unwise to ask him here with an audience. It might be unwise to ask them ever. Not that that would stop me
from asking, I had the bad habit of asking too many questions. Couldn’t help myself.

The rest of the group seemed oblivious to the tense moment that had passed between myself and the elven mage, with the exception of Bull whose eye was darting between Solas and me, his brow slightly furrowed.

Well spoke up “Well let’s make figuring out if it can be used against us a top priority. I don’t like the idea of Coryphaeus using Marin for his own ends.”

“I mean I am hoping to avoid getting into his clutches regardless.” I laughed

“Better safe than sorry though.” Bull said pragmatically.

“Right are we done stayin’ in this creepy cabin and talking about creepy magic shite now? ‘Cause I’m hungry.” Sera said practically bouncing towards the door. As the others trickled out I pulled lingered and pulled Solas back.

“Solas I still had a few questions that I thought it unwise to ask in front of the others.”

“Very well da’len” I frowned at the unfamiliar elven dripping off his tongue. “I will be happy to provide answers in exchange for an explanation of what a Faraday cage is.”

His response startled laughter out of me. Trust Solas to be intensely curious about a piece of modern technology I had mentioned in passing. “I can agree to those terms.” Solas then crossed his arms and looked at me expectantly. My mood sobered immediately. “You mentioned, in the story, that the mark will eventually kill the Inquisitor.”

*The words echoed in my memory “ultimately only I could have borne the mark and lived.”* But the Inquisitor did live. I thought suddenly, almost vindictively. They lost the hand but they lived. We wouldn’t loose Wells. I would make god damn sure of it.

“Yes.” Solas answered slowly carefully.

“My mark… is it also fatal?” Wells could lose the hand, but I couldn’t cut the veil out of my tissues. I
was stuck with mine. If it was going to kill me. I was going to die.

“I currently have no reason to think so. Again this is complex magic. I did not anticipate…” He paused then, catching himself from speaking too plainly “I can not be certain, but I have no reason to think you should fear.” I nodded slowly building up the courage to ask the next question.

“And what happens to me if the veil comes down? Is destroyed?” I wasn’t sure that It mattered, really, if such a thing were to come to pass I was likely die in the chaos that followed regardless.

But some sort of morbid curiosity in me wanted Solas to answer the question. *Would his bringing down the veil kill me? Would he have to kill me, to accomplish his end goals?* I was under no illusion that he would hesitate to do so. If it came to it. But I wanted to hear him confirm or deny it.

His gazed at me long and hard. Not threatening, but probing. A contest of wills done with a look. “There are two possibilities. If the veil falls either you will be unaffected, a walking pocket of veil…” he paused

“Or?” I prompted

“Or, as the veil is linked to your life force, the destruction of the veil would rent you apart.” *Well shit.* “I do not know at this stage which of those is scenarios is the more likely.”

I nodded. It was an answer I shouldn’t have trusted, considering the baised nature of the source. But I believed him. “One final question.”

“Ask away.”

“What does Da’len mean?

A smile ghosted across his lips. “Its literal translation would be young one or child. It is term used by elven elders to address young members of their clans.”

I frowned. That sounded slightly patronizing. Then again Solas was how many thousands of years old? He certainly would qualify as my elder.
“And the appropriate response?”

“Hah’ren”

“Thank you Hah’ren. Now… a deal is a deal. Let’s talk about the life and work of a certain Michael Faraday.”

It was a much easier subject to discuss.

***

The walk back to the camp seemed to take less time than the walk out had. My mind was churning with the implications of the previous conversation. For some reason it had made me feel very alone.

That night before we turned in Wells found me by the fire.

“This whole misadventure then seems to be my fault.” His tone was light hearted tone but there was regret in his eyes. “If I had not used the mark you might be safe and sound in Skyhold.”

“Don’t apologize Wells.” I said. “No harm done.”

“Well, I will try to refrain in future.” The remark hit me like a blow to the stomach. *What if he hesitated to use the mark because of me?* This was an important ability that could help him survive. DID help him survive. I closed my eyes and pictured him falling at Adamant.

“NO!” I said with a little too much force

“But...”

“No!” I cut him off severely. “Let me worry about keeping myself safe. You must NEVER hesitate to use that mark when you need to. NEVER. Promise me.”
“Marin…” He said sounding a little taken aback by my vehemence.

“Promise me Wells!” I said giving no ground.

“I… I promise.” He said looking concerned. I relaxed a fraction. We sat in silence for a long moment staring at the fire, before wells spoke up. “How do you plan to do that exactly?”

“What?” I queried, confused.

“For keeping yourself safe? If I use the mark it is going to be because we are in a scrap which means you likely to fall directly into some ugly situations if I use it.”

“Oh” I replied then, brandished the crossbow. “I am going to make this less of a monstrosity

“Another Bianca?” Wells said grinning.

“Sort of… I actually probably need something a little different, but Bianca is not a bad starting place.” A repeating weapon would be a must, reloading that crossbow was awkward and stupid slow to boot. But If I had to be prepared to be sucked out of my every-day life at any moment. I would need something that wouldn’t be awkward to carry around at all times, which means I had a size and weight limitations. Maybe a single handed weapon? With a pistol grip? It would also would need to be rugged, since it would need to work after I took a tumble and landed on my ear in mud, or snow or rock whichever place I got popped to.

“Wait Bianca is a starting place?”

“Sure, I mean the design of Bianca isn’t that complicated.”


“Umm… well yeah.”
Wells chuckled “NEVER say that in front of Varric.”

I smiled. “Don’t get me wrong, she is an incredible feet of engineering. I don’t know that I could build Bianca, with the tools available here. I certainly couldn’t do it without help. But I could design Bianca no problem. I worked as an engineer in a technologically advanced civilization. My last project actually involved designing technology that could go into outer-space. I can wrap my head around a cross-bow.”

Wells was smiling and shook his head and chuckling under his breath. “You're something else Marin.”

I decided that he meant it as a compliment.

Chapter End Notes

A bit of a shorter chapter. Sorry it has been a while since I updated, I am finally back home after months of travel abroad and am slowly adjusting back to state-side life.

As usual this chapter is probably rife with errors so please let me know if you find typos or spelling/grammatical mishaps. Please forgive a busy grad student if I am slow to update or respond to comments. Thanks for all the love and enjoy!
Ch. 13- Archimedes' principle

Chapter Summary

The Archimedes principle, states that any object that is submerged or partially submerged in fluid is acted upon by and upwards, or buoyant, force equal to weight of the fluid it displaces. This law is named for it’s discover the Greek mathematician and inventor Archimedes.

Those who look for trigger warnings take note, this chapter contains violence.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“She’s the cleverest and most surefooted of our mounts.” Scout Harding smiled at me, gripping the reins of a fully tacked and saddled horse that was eyeing me as skeptically as I was eyeing her.

We had stayed on the storm coast for another two days. To allow the team to clear out an infestation of Red Templars lurking in a Dwarven port in the area. I mostly lurked around the camp being useless. I did manage to get a lot of target practice with the crossbow in under Scout Harding’s tutelage.

Now we were about to begin the journey home. A journey that was to be made on horseback.

The horse Scout Harding was offering me was undoubtedly beautiful, lean and strong, with a glossy grey coat that faded to into white spotted hindquarters that reminded me of a Dalmatian. But I would much have preferred a means of transportation that involved wheels, or an engine.

“umm…” I stalled as the group eyed me expectantly.

“You do know how to ride? Don’tcha.” Sera said from astride a lithe horse that was the same shade as her hair.

“I have ridden before … a few times.” I said, trying to put more confidence in my voice than I felt. I had ridden a handful of occasions, on vacations and such. I wasn’t exactly sure if that meant I KNEW how to ride or not. “Most normal means of transportation where I from are more… mechanical.” You got this Marin. You will not be a 21st century damsel needing to ride tandem on someone else’s horse.
“HA…” Bull Barked out a laugh as though he could hear my internal monologue and was as convinced by it as I was. “Well when you build a clockwork horse you can ride that! For now…” and he left the rest of his sentence hanging as he scooped me up and deposited be on the back of my mount before swinging himself up onto his own absurdly large black warhorse.

Right. Okay... Where was the gas pedal on this thing again?. Ahh right I dig in my heels to go. Now I just need to remember how to brake.

“Ok horse, don’t screw this up for me and I promise to give you half of every apple I get my hands on.” I said leaning down to whisper into the animal’s ear, giving her a brief pat on neck.

***

The first several days of travel weren’t eventful. We rode hard and made good progress towards Skyhold. Despite my lack of riding skills I did my best not to slow the group down and keep up with their hard pace. My mount was skilled and largely forgiving of my rookie riding blunders. Since the horse held up her end of the bargain, I held up mine and snuck the horse treats of apples or carrots whenever I could. I had started to call her Mae, in my head, after NASA Astronaut, engineer and general badass Mae Jemison.

Despite Mae’s excellent behavior my body felt the toll of the sudden onslaught of this new and unusual exercise. My whole body ached and muscles in my thighs and ass, that I was convinced were previously non-existent, suddenly decided to make their presence unpleasantly known. To top it off I quickly acquired chaffing in some awkward areas. Every time I dismounted I felt like I had to relearn how to walk.

My companions seemed to take pity on me and took on most of the rigors of making and striking camp, always putting off my offers of help with one excuse or another. So instead I filled my limited down time improving my marksmanship with the crossbow.

When the riding pace slowed enough for conversation, the team took part in their usual bantering manner. Sera made jokes, Bull made them back. Wells and I talked about meteorology and electricity and would whisper quick corrections whenever I made a horsemanship gaffe. Solas engaged me in detailed discussions about the way earth worked. He wanted to know how people lived, how the economy worked, about the government. Half the time I felt woefully unqualified to answer his questions. How does once accurately represent a diverse and complex world? And how do I do it in a way to encourage him not to tear this one apart? Our current topic of conversation was the French Revolution.
“But you see no matter how noble the intentions, they tried to change everything too fast, and what the got was the reign of terror. Instead of bringing positive change, the society collapsed quickly into anarchy, which benefited no one, or at least not very many people. When order and was restored, they had done a full 360, there wasn’t a king but there was an emperor, which amounted to the same thing, really.”

“So your assertion is that it is impossible to crate lasting changes to a society in short periods of time?” Solas said, with an unreadable sort of smile that made me fell uncomfortable.

“Well, I think that earth’s history demonstrates that attempts made to change the world overnight with violence, however well intentioned, usually fail, and result usually only in excessive and unnecessary bloodshed.”

“I see… but I wonder if the non-violent means of protest and reformation you have mentioned before would work in a society that does not have certain freedoms already in place? Didn’t you say that your own nation fought a revolution for its Independence?”

“Yes … Firstly I am not arguing that my country is an any way perfect … Secondly, well the American revolution was different from the French in that it never really attempted to completely restructure the society. Despite the fact that the society fell far short of the ‘all men are created equal ideal’ ideal that the founding fathers supposedly espoused.”

“Yes, You said that many of your founding fathers owned slaves?”

“Shamefully, yes. But the constitution and the framework they set up checks and balances, peaceful transitions of power and built a framework through which future generations could fight for their rights. For example, the civil rights movement.”

“I see, so slaves were eventually able to sue for freedom and abolition was achieved through peaceful means.”

I hissed “Well… no…” I hesitated trying to figure out how to tackle the Civil war. *I was really terrible at this promoting non-violent philosophies thing.* I was saved the trouble as a boisterous conversation between Sera and Bull, interrupted.

“So I had a thought, next time we run into a line of enemies. I will pick you up and throw you.” Bull said
“Get off” the blonde elf’s called back.

“No this could work. I loft you over the front ranks, you land behind them to flank, mayhem ensues.”

“I can’t fly you daft tit.”

“Think of the mayhem Sera… mayhem.”

“I would get a wedge-up something fierce.”

“Look you and Varric are the only ones who are small enough and he is …. pretty dense.”

“Well do some bloody presses.”

My snort of laughter, was disturbed by a sudden shushing noise from Solas whose eyes were darting back and forth, looking at the dense forest on either side of the road. The trail we were currently riding on was in a small gully with sloping hills to either side. Low ground.

Bull let out a peel of laughter, that rang quite false, and went on chatting to Sera about something silly. They were clearly trying to make it appear as if nothing was amiss, but something was. There was a tightness in their voices. Bull’s hand lay casually on the hilt of his axe, and Solas’ on his staff. Wells nonchalantly wheeled his horse so that he was next to mine. And smiling said under his breath.

“When I say run… put the horse into a gallop and …” he didn’t get to finish his sentence.

The tree line exploded with shouts and arrows. Bandits. Wells slapped my horse on the flank and Mae gave an alarmed whinny.

“NO!” I shouted. Not sure whether I was protesting being made to leave the group when they were in distress, or being made to cling to a galloping horse. My objections where all for naught however, Mae set off at a break neck gallop, and I wound my fingers in her mane, desperate to stay mounted
as the first sounds of battle rang out behind me.

We didn’t make it far, however, before a bearded blur on my left took a flying leap off a pile of rocks and tackled me clean off the horse.

I landed hard in the dirt, with the wind knocked painfully out of me. But then again so had my attacker, who I could see scrambling to his feet a few meters away. Struggling to pull air into my lungs I rolled to me feet, and faced my assailant. He wasn’t a pleasant looking fellow, rough, dirty, and leering. I felt fear twist in my gut, my crossbow lay several feet away, I wouldn’t be able to get to it in time. I was vulnerable and unarmed, and my attacker knew it. He drew a dirty and cruel looking blade and closed the distance between us, with a sadistic chuckle. He swung his knife at me in a wide arch. If it were a punch, instead of a slash, I would have called it a haymaker. Years of Saturday thai-kickboxing classes kicked in, almost without me having to think about it. I tucked up my wrists next to my ears, throwing my elbows forward and took a quick step ahead towards my attacker. I caught his nose with one elbow and the soft tendons of his knife arm with the other. He gave a grunt of surprise and pain as his knife fell into the dust. Moving on muscle memory, I started to flow through the next steps of the combination, I clinched the head, and drove my knee into his face. I could feel his nose give way with a crunch. The next step was to move my the foot back, pulling him along to and get him off his feet, but before I could move there was a tingling hiss, and my opponent was turned into a block of ice beneath my fingertips, as though dipped in liquid nitrogen. I stared, trying to wrap my head around the reality of a fucking popsicle person.

Then I saw it. In his off hand, barely in inch from my unarmored ribs was a small blade. I had been milliseconds from away from death, and never saw it coming.

Fuck.

I looked over my shoulder to get a lay of the land. Wells had his staff raised in my direction, the source of the ice spell. He and the others where clustered in the center of the path with bandits swarming on them from all sides. Solas, and Sera were still mounted, while Bull and Wells were on their feet, I had no idea where their mounts had gone.

Wells clearly had to have been keeping a particular eye on me, to have noticed my distress from the center of the fray, and it had cost him. The blue barrier around him began to flicker and die and several men were closing on his position. Without thinking, I dove for the crossbow in the dirt. Came to a position on one knee, wrenched the lever back into position, slotted in a bolt, aimed, and pulled the trigger. The bandit closest to Wells crumpled midstride amid a blossom of pink mist, his momentum caring him through a skid, to stop at Well’s feet.

But I didn’t have a lot of time to think. Wells had quickly been engaged by another two bandits and my well placed bolt had drawn the attention of a third bandit. He wheeled toward me and with a flick of wrist sent a hatchet hurtling through the air in my direction. Time seemed to dilate. The axe wheeled slowly though the air. My movements were slowed as well; like a nightmare where your legs are too leaden to lift and run away from the monsters chasing you. A perverse part of my mind started to do the calculations, tracking the parabolic motion of the axe as it wheeled through the air. Angles, air resistance, velocity, mass.

I had only enough time to bring the crossbow up in front of me like a shield before the axe hit, catching the thick wood of the underside of my weapon causing it to lurch backwards into me and pushing me on my back into the dirt, with an oompf.

I tried to right myself but found my assailant looming over me, my field of vision completely filled with sky and his grimy face. He roared as I tried to struggle backwards, but his cry was interrupted, as an arrow shaft ran strait through his neck. Confusion passed across his face as his wheezed, and stumbled. Another Arrow took him through the chest and the warrior collapsed on top of me, Pressing me to the earth. I heard the hiss and gurgle as blood filled his air cavities. He was heavy and I had to buck my hips and roll to lever him over and get out from underneath him. The chaotic battlefield was suddenly quiet and still. I gulped in breaths, like I had nearly drowned, and scrambled back away from the corpse, whose blood was smeared all over me.

“Is everyone good? Wells you Ok?” I managed in a voice that sounded shaky and thin in my ears.

“Yea fine, you?” Wells said, breathing heavily after the fight.

“Yea of course.” I said with a forced smile. I pulled my eyes away from the fresh bodies in the road.

Bull walked over and reached a hand down to me, pulling me to my feet. “That was a nice move you did professor” I must have given him a confused look because he clarified “You know the one with the elbows, on that first guy that came at you.”

I shook my head. “I got lucky, took him by surprise. He didn’t expect me to fight back, and even so, I didn’t notice him draw the blade with his off hand. If I had continued with the combo, if Wells hadn’t intervened, I would be dead. Same with the last guy and Sera’s arrows.

“No worries.” Sera grinned. “Now we are even for you jumping in front o’ that fireball.”
“Yea you returned the favor to me too.” He nodded towards my now ruined crossbow, with a hatchet buried in it. “It was a good shot, your practice has been paying off.”

“A good shot…” I echoed numbly.

“We will make a fighter of you yet Professor!” Bull said triumphantly. Then separating the hatched that nearly killed me from the crossbow, he gave it a casual throw and the bandit that was doing his best impression of an ice sculpture shattered into a thousand frostbitten chunks of flesh.

The group began to loot the corpses of the fallen bandits, while I wandered off to retrieve Mae. The brave, or perhaps reckless, horse hadn’t wandered very far, I found her grazing on the side of the road about 100 meters from where I had fallen.

“Thanks for not leaving me Mae” I muttered, petting her nose. Trying to bury the feeling of being adrift and displaced. Ignoring the drowning sensation that was rising up inside me. “I would hate to be lost out here.” Or had I already gotten myself very lost.

***

We diverted off the road to make camp by the shores of a pretty, but glacial stream that had several naturally formed swimming holes perfect for bathing in.

As the others stripped to begin getting themselves clean I slipped out into the forest. Behind a tree and leaned back taking deep slow breaths, searching for calm. Rain began to fall and I let it hit my face, running in rivulets down my neck. I tried to let it cleanse the haunting images in my head. I kept reliving the moment my finger tensing on the trigger, I saw the spray the spray of pink mist as the bolt found its mark, and a life vanished. Suddenly my stomached heaved, I leaned over and retched onto the forest floor. Fuck.

“Wells is looking for you.” I almost jumped out of my skin. I spun around my small boot knife in one hand to find Bull looking down on me.

“Four fucks on a stick. Bull don’t do that!”
“Just working on your situational awareness.” He grinned. “How you doing?”

“Fine”

“You’re a shitty liar Marin.”

“I just needed some air.”

“You’ve never killed anyone before.” It wasn’t a question.

“No.” I said hoping that would be an end to the conversation, but Bull pinned me solid look from his one eye.

“You gotta talk about it Marin, get it out in the open otherwise it is going to eat a hole in you.”

I paused trying to articulate why I was wrapped in knots. “Its not the blood, I’m not squeamish.”

“I know. I saw you in the aftermath of Haven. In that blood mage’s basement. No one would call you fussy.”

“It’s just, they’re alive and then I pulled the trigger, and they’re not. They were people. Bad people maybe, but you know they had plans for tomorrow, and favorite foods, secret insecurities, and people they fancied. This whole rich inner life and then” I snapped my fingers. “They just don’t, they are gone and there is just a corpse.” I failed to forced down another wave of nausea, the stomach acid burning the back of my throat and sinuses. “Shit, Sorry Bull.” I said feeling very self conscious. I must look so fucking feeble.

“Ahh, don’t worry about it professor. I’ve seen worse from guys twice your size.” He said handing me a canteen. “Here, help get that shit out of your mouth.”

“Thanks” I said. I took a swig from the canteen, and nearly spit it out. It wasn’t water. It was some sort of alcohol and it burned like shit, but after swishing it around in my mouth, the taste of bile was gone. “Doesn’t the Qun condition its soldiers to be cool with…” killing, murder, death…The words stuck in my throat. “This sort of thing.” I finished lamely, handing back the canteen.
He shrugged. “They do, but the success rate isn’t perfect. Anyway worked with plenty of fighters
not from the Qun. ”

I remembered in game talk from Bull about how he coped. “In Seheron you learned to
compartmentalize. You make them not people, when your fighting them. I… I don’t know if I can
do that.” I wasn’t sure I wanted to do that.

“You will land on your feet Marin. First step to feeling better, a bath and hot food.” He handed me a
towel.

“Yea… right, Thanks Bull”

I wasn’t sure I felt better about it. I was killer now. Plain and simple. No amount of conversation
would change that. I felt numb. My life with Leo, my sweet normal life that I worked so hard for, the
one where I had a job I spent too much time at, and car and a crappy apartment; it felt like a million
years ago. Even Dagna and Dorian and the undercroft at Skyhold felt impossibly long ago. I wished
desperately for home, wherever or whatever that was now. Or maybe I didn’t. The thought of home
also brought some dark feeling of dread with it for some reason.

I was probably just tired. Tired of… well… just tired.

I joined the others, bathing in the glacial lake. Spending the last of the weak daylight soaking wet
and shivering, as I tried and failed to clean all of the blood out from my hair and from underneath my
fingernails.

As I dried off I took a deep breath and once again began to add to the mental blue-prints for my
personalized weapon. Calming and flooding my mind with the familiar comfort of gears and levers
and numbers.

I bet I could whip up a stethoscope for the medical staff, and maybe some cement would be useful
for the builders, and artificial rubber. If I could manage to make artificial rubber the potential uses
were limitless…

At the end of the day, Bull was right, things seemed better once I was clean and on the right side of a
hot meal.
So I have replaced my Apology/ Update with a proper chapter. Sorry for those people that's comments got deleted in the process. Know that I am very grateful for you messages of support! For those of you who missed my note here is a reprise:

Hello!

I know it has been a long time since I have updated. I haven’t forgotten about you guys I promise. In my defense I do have a series of excuses which include but are not limited to:

- Grad school
- Writers block
- A bitch called Irma (not a person)
- Preparing for more travel and fieldwork
- Actual travel and fieldwork
- Spending weeks at a time in remote locales with no internet
- Spending weeks at a time in locales where my shower is bucket and rainwater
- a bout of what may or may not have been, but probably was, Dengue Fever
- Did I mention grad school?

The truth is though my life and my real-life science took precedence over this fictional world and fictional science. I want to tell you all that it won’t happen again, but it definitely will. In future, I will try to give you all more warning so I don’t just go dark. Everyone here on AO3 has been crazy supportive, and I can’t believe this fic, that I never intended to write much less share, has gotten as much attention as it has. Thank you.

If my list didn’t tip you off I am abroad again, so internet access is spotty, but spending time on boats seems to get the writing juices flowing. Double edged sword I guess. Please let me know if you find any typos or have any feedback. Cheers!

P.S. If you like my writing, I have started another fiction. It is a WWII AU. Because, you know, I didn't have enough to do. So feel free to pop over and check it out.
Chapter Summary

In ecology, a keystone species is a species whose effect on a community is disproportionately large relative to its abundance. Classic examples include sea otters, who release kelp and associated fauna by predating on Urchins who are grazers, and Sea stars in the genus Pisaster, who increase species diversity in Pacific intertidal zones by consuming mussel species who are otherwise competitively dominant, and without limitation will exclude other species.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The rest of the journey was thankfully much less eventful. Wet forests turned into rolling hills turned into steep mountain passes, and then we were at Skyhold.

Our return to the keep was one of the most surreal experiences of my life. The horses, knowing their home stable was close, came up road and cleared the gate house in at an excited canter. (A term I had learned applied to the gait between a trot and a gallop during the past week’s crash course in equestrianism). As we thundered up the causeway I could feel the power in the animal underneath me, the rush of the cold mountain air tearing at my cheeks and hair, the beautiful scenery streaking past me. It was like the first time you drop in on a wave while surfing, or carve through fresh powder on a pair of skis. You harnessed nature’s power, tasting freedom while skating on the edge of losing control.

Horns greeted our entry to the main keep as we spilled in through the gates in a clatter of hooves.

“You know I think I could get used to this whole horse thing.” I said with a smile. This felt like something strait out of Lord of the Rings ... Epic.

“So no clockwork horses in the works for you then?” Wells said as he swung off his own mount.

“No” I laughed. “No I don’t think I will make any clockwork horses. Although…” Wells moved to help me off my horse “Maybe a bicycle.” I slid off my and as my feet met stone I staggered and nearly fell over. My body was still sore and unused to riding and I was buzzing on the adrenaline high of the ride, I was a little shaky, but Wells strong arms caught me around the waist and steadied me. “Yea I should definitely make a bicycle!”
“What’s a Bicycle?” Wells asked but any answer I would have given was interrupted. As the rest of the party’s horses had arrived the occupants of Skyhold had come out to greet the returning Inquisitor.

“Marin Alvarado! You little harpy!” Shouted a raffish voice to my right “I will have you know that vanishing in the middle of a conversation is considered is quite rude!”

“Dorian!” I said turning to face him. I never thought I would be so glad to see that absurd mustache.

“Inquisitor!” Dorian said with a little bow towards Wells. “Glad to see you managed to get her back here in one piece.”

“She is rather hard to break Dorian.”

“I trust you two have a good explanation for Marin’s remarkable disappearance.”

“We have an explanation. Whether it is a GOOD explanation or not I will leave to your judgment. I will call a war council tomorrow morning so we can recap to the whole crew.” Wells said. “For now I think everyone needs to rest up. We rode hard.”

“Splendid!” Dorian said.

“Until then.” I smiled at him.

Wells locked eyes with me then with a quiet “Marin.” and a nod of his head he drifted off into the crowd to see to the myriad of people that required his attention. The day was far from over for him.

“I should go to the undercroft, and see Danga and Dain.”

“Absolutely not.” Dorian said, linking arms with me possesively “As per the Inquisitor’s orders you will rest. First I you need a bath and a change of clothes, then I think a heavy meal and a strong drink.”
“Dorian!” I protested.

“No don’t ‘Dorian’ me, miss. You smell like horse. Plus, if you go to the undercroft now no one but Dagna and Dain will see hide nor hair of you until the morning, and you owe me a drink.”

“Oh I owe you a drink do I?”

“Yes in fact I would say that I am owed several drinks!”

“For..”

“Psychological damages.”

I tried and failed to suppress a snort. “But Dagna and Dain…”

“Will be there to greet you in the Herald’s rest, once you’ve washed up.”

“Very well you win.”

“I usually do!” Dorian grinned.

***

The ever faithful servant, Addie had a hot bath ready when I reached my rooms.

“Thank you so much Addie, you’re an angel!”

“You are welcome, my lady.” She said in her soft voice. “Everyone is glad to have you back safe and sound. You had some people very worried.”
I smiled. I could guess who those some people were. “You should join us, a big group of us is having drinks at the ‘Rest tonight. You should come.”

“My lady?” Addie said, a concerned expression passing over her face.

“What?”

“Well its… I’m a servant, my lady. Your servant.”

“Yes, and Seeker Cassandra’s, and Arcanist Dagna’s.” Although I’m sure she did a great many things in service of the Inquisition and Skyhold keep, Addie’s primary responsibility was taking care of the cluster of rooms that shared a washroom in this tower, and the occupants therein. We weren’t high maintenance ladies, but we were certainly eccentric by Theodosian standards. “Lord knows you have your work cut out for you taking care of the three of us, but you do an excellent job.” She said.

“Thank you my lady” She said still looking very uncomfortable.

“I have said something wrong haven’t I?”

“No miss… well it’s just… people don’t usually invite their servants to drinks”

“Oh” I said understanding my mistake. “You will have to forgive me. The class system where I come from is very different. There isn’t so much of a separation… well actually there still is a huge wealth gap but…” I stopped realizing I was starting to ramble. “Anyway that’s not the point. Sorry if I made you uncomfortable.”

“Its quite alright lady Marin.”

“But the offer still stands. Your welcome to join us. If you want to come. No pressure either way.”

Addie smiled shyly at me. “Thank you my lady.” Then she hesitated, saying slowly. “Do you know if Engineer Dain will be there?”

“Oh no… Nothing like that.” She said, her round cheeks turning pink.

“Well I do think he will be there.” I replied. A small smile passed over her features. “While we are on the subject, is there anything else I am doing wrong? Social protocol wise?” Addie’s face twitched with the effort of not breaking into laughter. *I guess I was doing a great many things wrong.* “Oh no, there is a list?!” I said earnestly.

She actually did laugh then “You’re just different from most of the noble ladies I have served in the past.”

“Well there is an easy explanation for that, I am not a noble lady.”

“Yes you are my lady.”

“No. I always have worked for a living, and my parents weren’t dukes or counts or lords…”

“You can make wonders out of nothing but bits of metal! You know how to fight sickness, and make things fly!” Addie said, her usual reserve lost in the strength of her conviction. “You were brought across realms to the Inquisition when we were lost, when we needed you most. Only the Maker and his bride could have made a miracle like that happen. And if the Maker saw fit to bring you here, then you are a lady, no matter who your parents were.”

I gaped at her. I had no idea how to respond to such a speech. I spent so much time in the undercroft with Dagna surrounded by test tubes and gears and equations that it was easy to forget, that the Inquisition wasn’t just an army, it was a religious movement. This wasn’t a war, it was a crusade. The thought made me deeply uncomfortable. After all the words *inquisition* and *crusade* were associated with some pretty bloody atrocities on Earth. Wells wasn’t just my friend and our leader, he was a divine figure, a prophet, and by association I had become seraphic as well. Another deeply uncomfortable notion.

“I… Thank you.”

“I am proud to be your lady-in waiting”
I smiled “You will have to give me some time to adjust to the idea of needing a lady in waiting.”

“If you don’t have to do your own washing and scrubbing, you have time to do all the things the Inquisition needs you to do. You may not need me my lady, but the Inquisition does.”

“Wow… thank you. That helps actually.”

“You don’t believe, do you?” She asked. “That the maker sent you here?”

_No, No I didn’t believe. Not in any of it. Not in Andraste not in the Maker, not even that any of this was real. “No. I am sorry.”_

“That’s okay. We believe for you, my lady.”

“Thank you Addie, Truly.” I said with a smile. Something about that notion was very comforting. “I don’t suppose there is any way I will be able to convince you to drop the ‘my lady’ and just call me Marin.”

“No I don’t think so, my lady.”

I sighed factiously. “Very well. Will I see you at the ‘Rest later?”

“Yes. I think you will.” She said with a smile and then she dropped into a curtsy and turned to leave. “Oh and My Lady.” She said turning over her shoulder as she reached the door. “You should check your end table. I believe Lady Montilyet left something there for you that you will appreciate having at the ‘Rest tonight.”

***

“Wait so how many coppers in a silver?” I was sitting at a table the ‘Rest with Dorain, Dagna, Dain, Varric, and Baz. Iron Bull and a handful of the chargers were sitting at the adjoining table. The _something_ the ambassador had left for me turned out to be my first paycheck, and I was partway
through discharging my debt of alcohol I had incurred since arriving by buying rounds for everyone who had bought me rounds in the past. The only problem was I had no idea how Theodosian money worked. “Why can’t you guys use decimalized currency like a civilized people.” I whined.

“Wait people decimalize currency?!” Dain said. “That’s brilliant!” He had transformed in the weeks I was gone. The shadows were gone from underneath his eyes, He had filled out slightly, or as much as elves fill out. He stood straighter, was quicker to laugh, and was so eager to discuss everything that happened in the undercroft in my absence that his drink had barely been touched. “Why don’t we do that?”

“I will propose it to the merchant’s guild; See how many heart attacks I can cause at once.” Varric grinned.

“Well it would definitely be easier if...” I said fiddling around with the coins.

“Here let me…” Dorian cut me off, reaching for the bag.

“Na-ah-ah” I said slapping his had away playfully. “Dagna you tell me.”

“What don’t you trust me?!” Dorian said feigning shock.

“With my life, with my honor, just not with my coin Lord Pavus.”

“HA! Sparkler she has you there.” Varric said, causing Dorian to glower.

“Don’t pout Dorian! I’m just trying to figure out how much to pay Cabot for the bottle of wine that I owe you!”

“Bottles, dear, bottles” Dorian chided, emphasizing the plural.

“aaand that might be why she doesn’t trust you with her coin.” Krem called across the table.

Meanwhile Dagna had been dutifully sorting out the proper amount of currency to pay my tab to
Cabot as well as to cover the drinks I had bought for the table so far.

“There you go Marin!” Dagna said. “and I can make up a conversion chart for you!”

“I don’t know what I would do without you Dagna!”

Just then Addie walked in and looked around timidly. “Speaking of people I don’t know what I would do without!” I said motioning her over. “Everyone this is Addie! Addie this is everyone!” I turned the the bar, putting down the amount of coin that Dagna had parsed out. “Cabot, This should cover my tab, also, can we have a drink for the lady? Please and thank you…. Wait now how much more is that.”

While I sorted the details out with Cabot the gang had made space for Addie, who was introducing herself properly to everyone. I noticed that despite the fact that Dain had been seated on the far side of the table people shifted so that he was now seated next to Addie.

Dorian sauntered over to me, and leaned against the bar. “That my dear” He said indicating Addie and Dain “is what mutual pining looks like. Chaste blushes, bashful longing looks, just in case you were curious.”

“Ahh” I said. That made a few things make sense. “Good to know. When did It all start?”

“Almost as soon as he got here. Addie helped to take care of him when he first arrived. He was in a shockingly neglected state. I hate to think the conditions that vile master of his had him working under. He has adored her since, and visa versa.”

“Well that’s nice, this bloody world could do with a little more happiness in it.”

“Indeed.” Dorian said suddenly sobering “Marin. I notice you haven’t said a word about what happened on the road.”

“You will get all the important details at the war council tomorrow.” I said lightly.

“Marin, are you okay?” He said almost pleadingly, his eyes full of concern.
“Fine.”

He gave me a skeptical look. “Marin…”

“What?” I snapped irrationally annoyed by his solicitous tone. *I was fine. Why wouldn’t I be fine.*

Dorian opened his mouth to respond, but whatever he was going to say was lost when another voice cut in.

“If you are buying drinks ma’am I believe I am owed one.”

I looked around “Elton?!” It was indeed Elton. “You’re back!”

“I am miss. So is the rest of the gang.” He said with a nod towards Lillian, and his brother Eaton who were behind them. “You are back too, although no one can seem to tell me why or how you left.”

“What can I say I go where the Inquisitor needs me.”

“But HOW though, It’s like you vanished in a puff of smoke.” Lillian insisted

“Well there wasn’t any smoke.” I said. “At least not on my end, was there any smoke on your end Dorian?”

“No smoke.” He replied.

“See! No Smoke!” I bought the Elton and the crew a round.

“But wait aren’t we missing someone? Where’s Scab? I owe him a drink, unless I am very much mistaken.”
I asked. The looks on their faces when I mentioned his name was like a bucket of ice water had just been dumped on my head.

“He was badly wounded in the ‘Plains and…’ Elton said, and I felt my stomach drop to the floor, and I felt incredibly guilty suddenly. My little outing had been a minor skirmish, a bar fight. Everyone else was off fighting and dying an actual war. What right had I to any complaints? Marin you’re a weak piece of shit.

“Is he…” I began, not wanting to have to finish my question

“No he is in the healing tent.” Lillian said quickly.

“Jesus Christ, lead with that next time Elton.” I said. Exhaling my anxiety with a sigh, although I wasn’t able to get rid of all of it. In the healing tent didn’t mean out of danger.

“Who is Jesus Christ?” Cutlass asked, having extricated herself from the chargers to come and stand next to Elton. Their hands found each other, almost automatically.

“Never mind.” I didn’t have time to cover that thorny question at the moment. “How is Scab?”

“He will recover thanks to you.” Elton said

“Thanks to me?”

“Yea” Lillian nodded earnestly. “Bolt went clean through his thigh. Got all kinds of muck and stuff up in there.”

“We thought rot would set in for sure.” Elton took over but we remembered what you said in the lecture and we cleaned it with water that had been boiled and alcohol, and made sure we sterilized all the bandages and changed em’ regular.”

“And he made it, home. Healers say he is doing good.” Lillian finished.
“Thank goodness for that!” I said unable to suppress my smile *I had helped!!*

Just then Sera’s raucous voice rose over the crowd. “And then up to her asshole in mud, she opened her eyes, looked right at Quizzy and said… ‘We need to stop meeting like this.’” Her voice dropped out of her usual accent to attempt a poor imitation my American intonation. “Get it… cause she fell out of the other rift before…” She cackled.

“Maker, Sera, I am not nearly drunk enough to believe a word your saying.” Blackwall said, through a chuckle.

“*HEY MISS SMARTY PANTS*” Sera shouted over the bar “Am I right or am I right? Were the first words out of your mouth ‘We need to stop meeting like this’?”

“The second words. I think the first word out of my mouth was probably ‘ouch’.” I shouted back to a general uproar

“Welcome back my Lady” Blackwall shuffled.

“Thanks Blackwall and it is just Marin.”

“If you say so.” He said, he was holding his hands behind his back concealing something. “I actually have something for you.”

I frowned at him confused.

“Oh!” Dain nearly jumped out of his seat excitedly.

Dagna got to her feet too. “We wanted to have something to give you when you got back.” She said

“So…” Blackwall continued. “These two helped me complete the design that you gave me and…”

From behind his back he produced a finished Ukulele.
“Do you like it?” Dain asked shyly

“Like it? I LOVE it. I am so moved. I can’t believe you finished it! We had barely started when I left. Thank you!”

“What is it exactly?” Elton asked.

“Nothing important really…” I said suddenly embarrassed I had tasked resources to a project that was so frivolous “Its an instrument. Similar to a lute. My brother taught me how to play, he could play everything.”

“Play us something Fidget.” Varric said.

I picked up the instrument and strummed it, having to adjust it a bit so it was in tune. Then cast my mind about for the right song, then an idea struck me. “Wait I have a better idea. Do you think Scab is asleep?” I said shooting a look at Elton.

He grinned catching on to my idea. “No, I am sure he would love a visit.”

“But we are going to need someone to run interference, Cora has her staff well trained. They are like Mabari the way the guard that place. She’ll have our hides.” Lillian put in.

“Music makes us more.” Cole said appearing in the crowd. “Sounds that soothe and make sick souls soar. If you go now, no one will stop you.”

I didn’t need to be told twice.

***

“Scab?” I said quietly as I peeked my head around the flap of the infirmary.
“Marin?” Someone that wasn’t Scab answered back. Apparently the reason why no healers were there to stop us, was because Wells was making the rounds, visiting the wounded.

“Oh hi, Wells.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Well since not everyone is healthy enough to join us at the ‘Rest we thought we would move the party in here.’ Nearly everyone, which was well over a dozen people, who had been with us at the ‘Rest filtered in behind me. Wells eyebrows went up. “Is Scab here?”

“That is sergeant Scab to you Alvarado!” Said a weak voice to my left.

“Sergeant. You got a promotion. Well done!” I grinned, moving towards his bedside. He looked tired and a little feverish, and his leg was raised up and neatly bandaged. “Should I call sergeant Du’vall lieutenant when I see her?” I asked. The faces around me fell. “Oh I’m sorry I didn’t know.” The green eyed Orlesian woman had seemed so indomitable…

“Its alright.” Scab said “Now if you brought the party here, where is my beer?” Evoking a ripple of laughter, the other half dozen or so patients also chimed in that they would take a pint.

“NOOO, no absolutely not.” Wells said. “Its one thing for me to get you a reprieve from being watched over like hawks, but if Cora finds out I gave you alcohol I think she would literally kill me.”

“You could get away with it, you’re the Herald of Andraste!”

“That would absolutely not stop her.” Wells retorted. “The Maker himself couldn’t come in between Cora and her patients.”

“Sorry to say I did not bring booze.” There was a groan of disappointment from the crowd. “But I did bring the latest contraption of mine, which Blackwall, Dagna and Dain were good enough to construct as a surprise for me while I was away.”

“Really what is it?” Scab asked eyes alight.
“It is an instrument.”

“Will you play it?” Asked a pale brunette in the back, who was missing a leg.

“Only if you promise to forgive my lack of musical talent. I am an engineer after all not a bard. I can’t replace Marydan. All my meager skill is due solely to the hard work of a dedicated and very patient brother.”

The crowd eagerly agreed, while Dorian said haughtily. “Well I make no such promises.”

“Shut up ‘Vint!” Bull said. “Play us a song Professor!”

I grinned, and with an affectionate look at people around me, knew instantly the song I had to play.

I careful plucked out the opening cords to Renegades by the X-Ambassadors

“Run away - ay with me
Lost souls in revelry
Running wild and running free
Two kids, you and me

And I said hey,
Hey, hey, hey
Living like we’re renegades
Hey, hey, hey
Hey, hey, hey
Living like we’re renegades
Renegades, renegades
As I wrapped up the chords to the song and looked around at the crowned I was met with awed faces. The tent was completely silent. Wells was looking at me like he had never seen me before, I felt suddenly caught in his burning gaze, as though it were a tractor beam.

“Marin…” Dorian said quietly. He sounded strangely emotional. “That was…”

“Lack of musical talent my ass!” Scab said loudly cutting over Dorian. “You can croon with the best
“Well you’re wounded, so I will forgive your lack of taste.” I quipped back

“No Marin, the right self deprecating joke to make is ‘You just think it’s good because all you Fereldens are used being serenaded by your dog’s howls’” Elton commented, eliciting riotous laughter, from the crowd and a pillow in the face from Scab.

“Well I for one would like to hear her howl again.” Said Krem, to a course of general agreement…

“No I…” I tried to demure but was immediately shouted down.

I caught Wells eyes and he gave the smallest of nods, that inscrutable expression still on his face. “Ok alright …” I said. Beginning to strum the chords to “Upside down” by Jack Johnson.

***

I slept fitfully that night, despite the exhaustion of the road, and the drowsiness induced by Cabot’s liquor. Maybe I was developing insomnia. When the sun broke over the mountains, I decided to give up on pretending to sleep and rolled out of bed.

I snagged three apples as I rolled through the kitchens. One for me, one for the stable lad, and one for Mae. I murmured ‘pardon-me-s and thank-you-s to the kitchen staff as I passed. Though most of the castle was asleep, the kitchen staff was already well into their working day.

“Hey girl.” I whispered to Mae, as I arrived at her stall, “Got you a treat. Don’t tell Master Dennett.” I offered up the apple to her in the flat of my palm as I stroked her blaze. There was something calming about being around the horse that I liked.

I heard a soft shuffle behind me and turned to find I was not alone in the stables. There was a man standing behind me. Pale with dark black hair and beard, and a pair of blades on his shoulders.

“Holy mother of…” I said with a gasp, starting badly.
“Sorry miss! I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“I didn’t hear you come in.”

“Yea that happens.”

“I haven’t seen you around before.”

“I just arrived. I was wondering, by chance if you could point me to Master Tethras.”

I frowned. Who would ride in quietly to the keep this early in the morning, asking for Varric? “That depends who’s asking. You’re not from the merchant’s guild are you?”

The man let out a bark of laughter. “No I am not. And well done. Now I know for certain that you know Varric, Miss…” He paused fishing for a name.

“Marin, Marin Alvarado.” I said extending my hand, slightly skeptically. He grasped it.

“Ah, the engineer. It’s good to meet you. Varric has told me a few things. Half of them seem too far fetched to be true.”

“Well knowing Varric, the things that seemed too far fetched to be true are the only bits he didn’t make up.” The man gave a chuckle. “But I am sorry I didn’t catch your name…”

“Hawke, Garret Hawke at your service.”

****

*Whose to say
what’s impossible, but they forgot*
this world keeps spinning and with each new day
I can feel a change in everything,
And as the surface breaks, reflections fade
But in some ways they remain the same
And as my mind begins to spread it's wings
There's no stopping curiosity

I want to turn the whole thing upside down.

...

Is this how it's supposed to be?
Is this how it's supposed to be?

- **Upside Down- Jack Johnson.**

Chapter End Notes

Here in the middle of the Pacific there are high winds and swell, which is awful for fieldwork, but means you all get a chapter early. As usual, please forgive a waterlogged grad student slow updates, I am working my butt of in places where internet is not a given.

If you are craving more of my writing. Pop over and check out my other Dragon Age Inquisition Fiction. Its new and I am excited about it. It is a World War II AU, so you can learn a little about history if you have had your fill of science in this fic.

Please leave a comment and let me know what you think (or if you find any typos or other boo-boos. I know they are lurking in there!). I love to hear your thoughts. Cheers!

Links to the songs featured in this chapter
Renegades by the X-Ambassadors : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8j741TUIET0
A wonderful Ukulele cover of Renegades: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyQ6Gjt_0yg
Upside Down- Jack Johnson: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqUdI4AIDF0
Ch. 15-- Ocean Acidification

Chapter Summary

CO₂ (aq) + H₂O ⇄ H₂CO₃ ⇄ HCO₃⁻ + H⁺ ⇄ CO₃²⁻ + 2 H⁺

Ocean acidification is the term used to describe the ongoing decrease of the pH of earth’s oceans due to the absorption of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Oceans act as a carbon sink, absorbing about a quarter of the CO₂ that humans release into the atmosphere through industrial and agricultural activities. As a result, the chemistry of seawater has changed over time, as dissolving CO₂ in water increases hydrogen ion concentration and thus lowers the pH. Ocean acidification has many detrimental consequences on marine life and communities including depressing metabolic rates in some organisms, contributing to coral bleaching, and inhibiting the ability of organisms to create calcium carbonate structures (like shells & skeletons in hard corals).

Chapter Notes

YOU GUYS!!! Guess what?!!! I have a Beta!!! Thank you to the amazing MiliusPrime (http://archiveofourown.org/users/MiliusPrime/pseuds/MiliusPrime) for patiently sorting through all of my typos and grammar boo-boos. Any remaining errors are entirely my own. (if you find some let me know so I am not sitting here with metaphorical egg on my face.)

:)
for this sort of witty repartee, and I said so. “Oh, it is way too early for this.”

“Indeed? And here Isabella lead me to believe that early morning... ‘rendezvous’... were the best! I clearly have been lied to.”

I groaned. “Maybe I should just let the Seeker find you.”

“Oh. Right! Yes, coming with you.” Hawke said quickly stepping to my side. “Thank you for the tour.”

It was my turn to chuckle. “Cassandra’s alright really, but she does have a temper and a right hook that could flatten a rhino.”

“I assume whatever a rhino is, it is large and hard to flatten.”

“Yes... yes they are.”

***

Less than five minutes later, I was at Varric’s door. “Varric!” I hissed, knocking as loudly as I dared. “Varric!”

The door opened a crack. “Why, in the name of the Maker’s puckered asshole, are you awake and at my door this hour?” Varric enunciated carefully. His hair was out of its usual ponytail and strands fell into his face. Amusingly, his rumpled night shirt was unbuttoned to show off his chest hair, just like every other shirt he wore.

“Because, your bird is here.”

“What?”

“Don’t be thick Varric. Your bird has arrived.” I raised my eyebrows at him significantly. “I’m not talking about a raven.”
“Oh shit!” Varric said, suddenly animated. He shut the door and I heard shuffling sounds as he presumably got dressed. He reemerged a minute later looking fairly put together. “Where…?”

“Undercroft.” I replied succinctly. I had stashed Hawke there, leaving him in the care of a slightly star-struck Dain who was, for some reason, already awake.

“And we should --”

“-- Get Wells. On it.” I finished the sentence for him.

“I don’t know how to thank you Fidget.”

“We can talk about Bianca?” His eyes went wide for a second. “That Bianca.” I clarified pointing to the cross bow. “Although we might want to discuss the other Bianca at some point.”

“Not sure what you mean by that Fidget.” He said a trifle stiffly.

“Of course you don’t, but you might want to write your girlfriend a letter, sooner rather than later. Mention the red lyrium.”

He raised his eyebrows at me. “Is that a friendly suggestion, or one of your creepy foresight warnings?”

“I mean… are they mutually exclusive?” I said with a grimace.

He gave a frustrated sigh. “Shit is never simple with you is it.”

“No… it probably isn’t.”

“Andraste’s tits. You’re in rare form this morning.”
“Thanks. So, about Bianca…”

“Later Fidget, just… later, okay?”

“Right, yeah. …Sorry. Meantime… undercroft. I’ll wake up Wells.” I turned on my heel before he could respond and took the steps two at a time up to Well’s tower room.

“Inquisitor?” I called as I knocked on the door. “Wells?”

The door opened almost immediately. Unlike Varric, Wells was fully dressed and clearly alert. He had apparently already been awake. I wonder if he was having trouble sleeping too. *I wonder if he was having trouble sleeping too. Now why would that be?* I didn’t pursue that line of thought however, since I didn’t have a ready answer as to why I couldn’t sleep.

“Do you ever sleep?” Wells asked, apparently having a similar internal monologue.

“I could ask the same of you.” I quipped back, earning me a grin. “Well, it’s a good thing you’re an early riser. There is someone who needs to speak to you, preferably before the rest of Skyhold wakes up.”

Wells eyebrows shot up. “Intriguing.”

Then we made our way to the undercroft. I found Dain standing over what looked like a completed microscope, enthusing to Varric and Hawke, who were exchanging confused and amused looks.

“Color is just different wavelengths of light being reflected off objects back into our eyes! And the light we see is only a small part of the overall spectrum of wavelengths that exist in what Marin’s books call the ‘electromagnetic spectrum!’ Imagine all this invisible light bouncing around that we can’t see.”

I paused at the door way, listening to him gush. Feeling proud, without any right to the feeling.
“-- But you can observe it in other ways. For instance, there is a temperature difference in each of the bands of colored light thrown out by a prism, cooler at the blue end and hotter at the red end, and the pattern continues after the visible light ends, it is even hotter past the red!”

“That band of the spectrum is called infrared.” I interrupted.

Three heads swiveled to look at me in unison, then, as though coordinated, their gaze slid over to Wells. There was a brief moment where I could see Wells and Hawke sizing each other up, before Varric broke in. “Not a very creative name, infrared.”

“Well you know us dry scientific types,” I snarked, then turned back to look at Dain. “You’ve been reading? And you recreated William Hershal’s experiment?”

He shifted uncomfortably looking like he had been caught-out. “Well, Dagna showed me how to work the machine and said I could read it, so…”

“That’s brilliant! And it seems you are picking things up quickly! If you have in interest in light and heat there are quite a few projects I have in mind!”

Light bulbs for starters, and a proper mercury thermometer, with a scale. The only thermometers they had here were crude -- really more thermoscopes than thermometers. They lacked scales and used air to displace alcohol or water which had the disadvantage of meaning that they also were subject to fluctuations in air pressure and thus made them unreliable as both barometers and thermometers… actually, I bet Dain could whip up a barometer as well.

Hawke cleared his throat, and I remembered why I was actually here. “-- But I’m being rude, not everyone here has been introduced.” I added, with a glance at Varric.

“Inquisitor, may I present the Champion of Kirkwall.” Varric said to Wells.

“Although I don’t use that title much anymore.” Hawke joked lightly.

“I thought you two might have a few things to talk about.”
“Well, I do know a good spot on the battlements. I would hate to get in the way of scientific progress.” Wells glanced pointedly in my direction.

“I hope it has a panoramic view!” Hawke enthused flippantly.

“I’m sure we can work something out.” Wells said. He gave my shoulder a squeeze in farewell, and climbed the stairs out of the undercroft, followed by Varric and Hawke.

Hawke paused as he passed me on the stairwell. “You can tell a lot about someone by what those underneath them think…” Hawke said in a slow drawl, glancing back at Dain. It was the first thing that he had said since I had meet him that didn’t sound like a jape. “It seems Varric didn’t exaggerate about you after all.”

Bereft of anything to say to that, I watched as he followed Varric and Wells up the stairs.

I suddenly understood how he could inspire Varric to such loyalty, why he was the center of a novel and a game, and how he fit the title he had earned. The Champion of Kirkwall.

There was a fifty percent chance he would die, and soon. And I wasn’t going to do a thing about it.

Because it had to happen.

_I wonder if I was always this shitty of a person._

“So, what projects did you have in mind?” Dain said, nearly bouncing on the balls of his feet in anticipation.

***

Before I moved on to any new projects. Dain, and Dagna when she arrived a little while later, gave me the rundown of what had been happening in Undercroft R&D™, while I had been gone.

It turned out the Inquisition’s very own skunk works had gotten a lot done in my absence.
They had a prototype for a microscope up and running. It was entirely functional, and good enough to give to the healing staff to let them start playing with. I only had a few recommendations for improvements for the next models.

Dain also had whipped up medical glassware that could be easily sterilized at the request of Cora and Lady Vivienne, who had also put in orders for a few decorative pieces, for herself. I was quick to tell Dain that decorative requests were to be shuffled to the bottom of the priority list. If Lady Vivienne had a problem with that, simply to tell her to take it up with me. I didn’t want Vivienne bullying my staff into vanity projects. If an ornamental vase was absolutely critical for the Inquisition, and was needed immediately, then Vivienne could damn well tell me that herself.

My prototype pen, as I had predicted, had exploded ink all over Josephine’s dress, but Lady Montilyet had loved it so much she had asked for not only for a new one but for several more. Apparently, the gadget had so impressed the nobles Josie dealt with on a daily basis that she wanted to be able to give the pens as gifts to ardent Inquisition supporters. Ostensibly, the humble fountain pen showcased the Inquisition’s technical prowess, or some such nonsense.

Dagna had duplicated my design, for Lady Josephine’s request, but had improved it by using the combination of ink and alloys that had proven the least corrosive in the materials tests I had run before I left. She also added some runes to prevent wear and tear for good measure.

I secretly wondered if she had whipped up a few versions of the flawed design, the one that would eventually explode ink on its user, for Josephine to give to some of her… less pleasant contacts. I suspected that was the case, given the two ladies in question. Neither Josephine nor Dagna were women I would trifle with. Or maybe I just hoped that they had. The idea of a stuffy Orlesian shithead covered in pen ink was quite satisfying, in a Sera-ish sort of way.

Dagna also had several projects on her plate, mostly requisitioned by members of the inner circle, that involved Lyrium working and runeinging that where totally beyond my ken. As quick as Dagna had been to pick up elements of my field, mathematics, physics chemistry, etc… I still struggled with even the most basic of arcane theories. A fact that only confirmed my suspicion that if Nobel prizes existed in Thedas, she probably would have several under her belt already. She was the cleverest person I had met in either world, Thedas or Earth.

After catching up on what had been happening in the undercroft, I described some of next few projects I wanted to tackle. First up was my enhanced crossbow concept. I would need a working model of that as soon as possible.
This, of course, lead to a discussion on why I needed a weapon, and what exactly had happened when I had vanished from the undercroft. Dain looked alarmed, and a little disappointed at the news that my long absences from the undercroft might be a regular occurrence. Dagna looked positively fascinated that such a thing was possible.

“You were pulled physically through the fade? And Master Solas thinks you have Veil stitched into your tissues?”

“Something like that.”

Her eyes went wide, “Whoa… can I have a sample?”

Baz and Dain looked shocked at the request but I shrugged. “Sure. You want hair, skin tissues, or blood?”

“Oooh… all three please.”

I quickly set about giving her a lock of hair and a cheek scraping. For the blood, I didn’t even have to prick my finger, I just had to open a scab from one of my scrapes earned in the scuffle with the bandits.

“Aren’t you worried about giving away your blood?” Baz asked.

“Why would I be?”

“Oh, I don’t know… sinister things, blood magic and stuff.”

“Hey Dagna, don’t do any sinister blood magic-y things with my blood okay?”

“Sure thing Marin!” Dagna bubbled.

“Crazy bitches.” Baz mumbled.
“Also let me know what your findings are, Dagna. I am still really confused about it all.”

To Baz, I explained the concept of cement. He seemed intrigued and hopeful that such a substance would be useful to the still ongoing repairs to Skyhold.

Other projects on the priority list were stethoscopes and thermometers for the medical staff. I was hoping to look into making rubber or medical plastics.

“Oi! Marin!” I heard a voice that could only be Sera echoing down the stairway to the undercroft, interrupting our conversation.

Sure enough, the blonde elf came hurtling down the stairs two at a time. “I need one of them cone thing-ies for pouring stuff in? You got one? I would nick the kitchen’s, but already stole the custard from them so…”

“What?” The whole undercroft was staring at Sera.

“You know the cone things for pouring shite into small places.” She replied, unfazed.

“A funnel?” I asked.

“That’s the one!”

“Why?” Dagna and I asked at the same time.

“Oh… no reason.” Sera giggled impishly. I narrowed my eyes at her. “Pfft don’t worry it isn’t for you.”

“I’m confused.” Dain said who was staring slack jawed at Sera.

“Who is it for?” I asked before changing my mind. “You know what, never mind… I don’t want to
know.” I said.

“Well I do!” Dagna said, arms crossed. It was the first time I had ever heard Dagna sound gruff about anything. Her protectiveness of the undercroft, or I suppose in this instance, the undercroft’s tools, was a little heartwarming.

Sera rolled her eyes “Ugghh alright but don’t go tellin’ no one or it’ll ruin it.” Dagna nodded skeptically, and Sera pressed on. “It’s for miss metal britches. She’s pissed at Varric, because of the Champion or what not. …”

“Oh shit, she found out about Hawke already?” I said. I had hoped my discretion this morning would have bought a little time at least.

“Yea… might have strangled Varric if Wells hadn’t stopped her… But she is also pissed at herself, ‘cause of reasons. And she if she gets all up in her own head about it any more than she already is, there won’t be no training dummies left to hit, and she will have to start on Cullen’s soldiers, which won’t do anybody any good.”

“But what do you want the funnel for?” Dagna insisted.

Sera chortled. “Custard. In the training dummy, so when she whacks it, ppfft!” She mimed getting splashed.

“Oh no.” Dagna said frowning. “That won’t do. That won’t do at all.” Sera made a derisive noise but Dagna wasn’t finished. “You won’t get the spray you want if you just fill the dummy with custard.”

“Well ‘ur no fun… wait wha’?” Sera said, confused when she didn’t get the rejection she was expecting.

“If you want a proper spray you will need either high pressure in the dummy, or an accelerant of some sort, otherwise all you will get is some drips and slight spatter.” Dagna continued on like it was the most natural thing in the world. Sera gaped at her. “Also, you will need to line the dummy with some sort of more impermeable material. The burlap of the normal training dummies is far too porous.”
“Oh right… yea, well brilliant… who are you?!” Sera stumbled.

“Sera meet Dagna, Dagna meet Sera.” I introduced. “Dagna is the arcanist and possibly the most brilliant mind alive on Thedas today. Sera is a member of the inner circle and…” possibly insane “…really good at shooting things with arrows.” Smooth, Marin.

“Pleased to meet you!” Dagna chirped.

“Yea, Say that bit about gettin’ the spray right again?” Sera replied

Dagna was two steps ahead of her, already dragging over a blackboard, and drawing a design for a prank dummy that had a certain Rube Goldberg quality to it.

“Dain, how do you feel about lunch?” I said, hoping to find an excuse to get out of the undercroft.

“I’m still confused.” He replied, eyes volleying back and forth between Sera and Dagna.

“Just trust me on this one, when it comes to Sera, some plausible deniability is a good thing.”

***

I didn’t return to the undercroft after lunch as I had to attend the war council. The whole inner circle was there for this update.

Wells gave a run-down of the events of his last outing, including my transport to the Storm Coast, the encounter with the blood mage, and the bandit attack. Solas jumped in to provide his explanation of my abilities. Everyone present looked as shocked as I had felt when Solas first gave us the explanation. Dorian looked particularly concerned.

“If Lady Marin is going to be pulled into the field again, we need a plan to keep her safe.” Cullen said.

“I am already working on creating some weapons I can use so that I can be prepared the next time
this happens, Commander.” I replied. “I may need permission to use some of the training dummies in
the future to test the weapons, and also some clear space, as one or two of the ideas I have in mind
may be explosive and I don’t want to test them in the undercroft.” I replied.

“Of course, come to me with the specifications and I will get you the resources that you need.”

“Thank you.” I replied.

Wells was giving me an odd look. I had only told him about my idea for a modified crossbow. But I
didn’t want to tell too many people about my other idea for a weapon.

Because really if I needed a weapon, and I did, the truth was the type of weapon that would suit me
best was a gun. It was small and transportable, easy to operate and would be a lot more effective at
keeping me alive than any crossbow, no matter how advanced I made it. I was a modern girl, with no
combat experience stuck in the dark ages, who would now, be constantly drawn into the most
dangerous of battlefields. I needed something to help keep me alive. A gun would do that best.

I didn’t doubt that I could make effective firearms. Flint lock pistols, or muskets would be easy. The
biggest roadblock there was the gunpowder, and I was fairly sure that I could get the formula down
for that with some trial and error. More advanced firearms would be difficult, but not impossible, the
primer and precision machining needed to make bullet cartridges would be the main handicap there.

On earth I had turned down jobs at defense contractors because the last thing earth needed was better
ways for people to kill each other. The jobs paid better, but it wasn’t what I wanted to spend my life
doing. Thedas wasn’t any different. This was a violent world, making it easier to kill each other
wasn’t one technological development they were in need of. It would be easy to say that my making
a gun was just the next step in the arms race, after all they already had black powder. But it was a
long road from powder to a gun, and a very short road from something I could make to some truly
dangerous weapons, Gattlan guns or machine guns.

Could you imagine a Theodosian battlefield with a Gattlan gun? Sickening…

No, if I was going to do this -- and I think I at least had to try -- I would have to be very careful to
keep it from getting out. Plans under lock and key, or better yet on my laptop under a password
protected file. Only three people in the world could even operate it, and only I could access it.

Leliana’s cold voice brought me out of my reverie. “If these, sabbaticals, are going to continue, we
should also warn the scouts, that way they are prepared to accommodate you.” Leliana said, giving me a chilling look. My disappearing act had not endeared me to the Spymaster at all.

The group then moved on to talking about Wells’ next move, going to Crestwood to find Hawke’s contact.

“I don’t know if you have been to Crestwood before,” I offered, “But in the game, there is a rift at the bottom of the lake and there are undead coming out of it, so be ready for that if it is not a problem you have already seen.”

Judging by the slack jawed expressions in the room, I guess they had not.

“Well shit, should we set off right away then?” Wells said, after the room had breathed for a tense moment. “I was hoping to spend several days here at Skyhold to attend to matters before shipping out again.”

“There is quite a bit of business here that needs attending.” Josephine supplied.

“I… I don’t know. The timing of things in the game, story was … well things weren’t always in same order…” I said/mumbled, my stomach writhing. *I never have enough information to be helpful. I am so useless.*

Leliana waved down my excuse. “Our scouts there have not sent any reports about it, although one of my informants there missed their last check in. Lace and Charter were on their way to check it out.”

Wells ground his teeth. “When do we expect to hear from them?”

“Three days at most.”

“Well then we can wait until we hear their initial report before we set out. That way we don’t ride in blind.” Wells said.

“Any other useful foresight, Lady Marin?” The Commander asked. He said it kindly enough, but I
flinched at the word ‘useful.’

“The Wardens are looking for Hawke’s contact. They have labeled him a traitor, so he should make sure to stay hidden.”

“You know who this contact is?” Leliana asked.

“I know who it could be, there are three potential candidates.” Although I had only ever seen two of them in Leo’s play-throughs. Stroud and Alistair. Leo didn’t like Loghain at all, although he never fully explained to me why.

“Who?”

I shifted uncomfortably for a moment, but could see no downside to giving them this information now. “Alistair is a warden in Fereldan right? Not king?” I could feel mouths in the room falling open around me. “Remember there was a previous… story following the Hero of Fereldan? The choices made in that story affect this one. Alistair is alive yes? And not king?”

“Correct, Anora rules in Fereldan.” Leliana answered without much of her previous venom. “It could have gone either way at the Landsmeet I think, but Alistiar didn’t want to be king and… he and Elissa were quite in love by that point.” I smiled at that. One of the few things Leo had told me about Dragon Age Origins was how cute an Alistair/Warden romance was. He also mentioned that Zevran was hilarious. “He did not want to have to set Elissa aside, as he might have been obliged to do if he was king. Anora made no complaints about assuming the throne.”

“Then Hawke’s contact will be Alistair.” My stomach squirmed again.

The other man who might die. And Leo hated having to choose between Hawke and Alistair. I literally found him crying in front of the TV one evening.

“And you know the information he is going to give?” I nodded again. “Then why not just skip to the end and save us the trip?” She asked coldly.

“Leliana!” Wells said sharply. I was surprised at the vehemence with which Wells defended me. So, apparently was Leliana. “We have discussed this before. Among the dozens of valid reasons Marin has to withhold her knowledge from us, we cannot rely on her information alone, as many things
might have changed."

“Not to mention if there is a rift in the region. The Inquisitor will need to go anyway.” The Commander said, in a consolatory way.

I opened and closed my mouth several times, trying to find the right thing to say, and came up blank. “It will rain a lot in Crestwood.” I said finally after several long moments.

The group nodded and people continued with the war council. Josephine discussed her dealings with several noble houses, the Commander talked about troop movements.

“We also now have the personnel resources to send scouts to return to Haven, to see if anything is salvageable.” Josephine said. I felt my stomach go cold.

“We should try to give the remains of those we lost a proper burial, if we can.” Cullen said.

“Should I task the scouts?” Leliana asked Wells.

“Do it.” Wells answered. “Does anyone have anything particular that might be useful to us now that was left back in Haven?”

We went around the table, each person giving an item or two. Vivienne had some alchemical ingredients, Dorian some obscure magical texts. When they got to me, I answered slowly.

“If you are able to get to the tunnels under Haven you will find a white thing that resembles a metal carriage with glass windows. Any and all parts you can salvage from it would be incredibly useful. Feel free to rip it apart if you have to, although if you can arrange to transport the whole thing that would be even better.”

I could get my hands on rubber, plastics, 21st century glass, electronics, and a car battery. The potential uses were incalculable.

“In the back there was a suitcase, belonging to Leo. If nothing else, I would like to get my hands on that.” I hesitated, not sure how to phrase this particular request. “Also, if you… if you find… a body.
Male, about four years younger than me. There is a strong family resemblance, though he is a few inches taller. His clothes would be pretty distinctive; they would be from Earth. Look strange like mine. He was wearing dark blue pants like the ones I was wearing when I got here, and a grey sweater, and black shoes. He has a birthmark on his right shoulder blade and a scar on his left knee.” I trailed off, realizing I was starting to ramble and my voice had gotten high and thin. “Well um… that’s Leo. My brother. If you could… just let me know if you find him. I have pictures if that would help.”

“Would you like his remains brought here?” Cullen asked gently.

“No… its fine. Whatever funerary customs are well… customary in Thedas, are fine. I just I would like to know… if it’s not too much trouble.” I worked to keep my voice even. You’re fine Marin. Mind over matter. None of this weak dramatic shit necessary. This isn’t even real. You are hallucinating.

“Of course.” Wells answered.

When the meeting was over I returned to the undercroft directly, without talking to anyone. I didn’t have anything to say to any of them. Or maybe I lacked the courage to say it.

Either way Marin, you are a chicken shit.

The undercroft was blissfully quiet when I returned. Dagna and Baz had gone, and Dain was engrossed in his work, whistling some unfamiliar tune.

I buried myself in my work too. I had a lot to do.

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Chapter End Notes

So… I talk about guns in this chapter. It is an arc that is going to last a while. If you have a problem with this, I am sorry. It was not meant as commentary on the ongoing debate about guns, nor was it in reaction to any of the far too numerous tragedies that have occurred over the past weeks/months/years. It was a very natural outcome of putting a modern engineer in a dangerous and pseudo-medieval setting. I honestly didn't even
think about how sensitive the topic might be at first, and when I did I almost pulled the whole story thread. … But without this thread some things might start to unravel… so here we are. I have tried, and will continue to try in the upcoming chapters, to approach the subject with respect and realism (insofar as that is possible in an MGIT fic.) I appreciate any comments you might have about the topic, but please keep any discussions respectful. Thank you.

On a lighter note, thanks again to my amazing beta MiliusPrime, and please forgive slow updates. I am waterlogged and working in some far flung places in the Pacific and though exhaustion is a constant companion internet is not.

As always please let me know what you think. Your comments and feedback keep me writing! <3

Also, I am going to shamelessly plug my other DAI fic: HEY I HAVE ANOTHER DAI FIC! I am excited about it. Go check it out: (http://archiveofourown.org/works/12623712/chapters/28762596)!
Chapter Summary

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish inventor, chemist and engineer. Although he held 355 patents he is most well known for being the inventor of dynamite. The death of his brother caused several newspapers to (in error) release sharply critical obituaries of Alfred, including one which was entitled “Le marchand de la mort est mort” [The merchant of death is dead]. Nobel was horrified at the thought that this was the legacy he would leave and posthumously donated the majority of his wealth to establish the Nobel Prizes.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I remained buried in my work for several days. I was still plagued by the insomnia, and funneled the extra time that gave me into my new projects.

My idea for the gun was essentially to make a flintlock pistol with a rotating barrel so that I could fire several shots before having to reload, which, with a muzzle loading weapon, would not be a fast process. I had hidden my orders of sulfur, charcoal and saltpeter (known to me as potassium nitrate), to make gunpowder, in with my order for other minerals and chemicals including those I would need for the cement when I requisitioned them from the quartermaster. It would take a while for the chemicals to arrive before I could begin experimenting. Which I was fine with. In the meantime, I intended to work on my crossbow design, which would be simpler on several levels.

My crossbow idea went from drawings on a page, to real life with astonishing speed. I was helped by Dagna in this regard, who was instrumental in helping me select the appropriate metals and materials to use, since Theodosian metals were different from Earth’s, or at the very least had different names, and with the physical smithing of the components which I was shit at.

What I had designed was essentially a compound crossbow, with a levering system of cables and pulleys to bend the limbs, which gave me a mechanical advantage. Even still, I had to make the bow longer than I had originally envisioned, so that I had could get the levering system right. I needed to be able to physically allow to cock the bow, without losing too much stopping power. The finished product was slightly longer than my forearm, and I would be able to carry it with one hand while holding it by the pistol grip near the front, while the body of it rested on my forearm. I could even secure it there with a little leather strap. To reload, I had a slider to cock the bowstring back into shooting position, not unlike a bolt action rifle.

I was unsatisfied that I hadn’t come up with a workable solution to the repeatability problem. Any
attempt I made at a magazine, or even a revolving mechanism to reload bolts, was bulky and mechanically over-complex, and too likely to break in the field. Remember, I had to carry this thing around me with literally *everywhere*, since I would never know when I would be pulled into action. Plus, this thing needed to be able to take a beating when I *fell* into whatever place Wells happened to be.

My worry about this was eliminated when Dagna dumped a quiver of bolts on my desk in the undercroft. Some of them were mundane, some of them were not. They included incendiary bolts, armor piercing, and of course, explosive bolts.

Magic is awesome.

After I had completed my first working prototype I set about to testing it.

“Uhhh… Marin, what are you doing?” Asked a voice I recognized to be Elton’s from behind me.

“Stress testing!” I said. I was lying down on the cobblestones of the inner battlements with my head hanging over, getting ready to toss my crossbow down into the grass below.

“Really? Because it looks like your lying on the battlements throwing shit into the courtyard, like a crazy person.”

“Also accurate.”

“Okay…” He said, bemused. “Well, you’re blocking my patrol route, so…”

“Oh right, sorry. One second. *Look out below!*” I called, and dropped the crossbow. I got up and ran down the stairs to go inspect the damage.

I picked the battered instrument off the grass, and gave a wave to Elton who was not even attempting to hide the fact that he was laughing at me. I flipped him the bird, to which he cheekily flipped it right back and continued on his patrol.

I brushed as much mud and grass off the crossbow as I could and cocked the string, loaded in a bolt,
and loosed it into the nearby training dummy. It functioned fine, but when I went to do it again, the thing jammed.

“Me cago en todo lo que se menea!” I cursed under my breath. I don’t think the cam is sitting right.

“You curse quite colorfully in Antivan, did you know?” Dorian said, appearing behind me.

“Oh! Hi, Dorian!” I unwound the crossbow string and began fiddling with the cam. Then I belatedly processed his statement. “I don’t speak Antivan.”

“Hmm, well certainly you curse in it.”

“That was Spanish. An Earth language originating in Spain. My father was originally from a country that spoke it. I tend to only be fluent in it when I am either very drunk, or very tired.” I reseated the cam and began to rethread the string though the elaborate system of pulleys.

“Ah. Well, here we call it Antivan, as in the language originating in Antiva.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. Why would they be the same language?”

“You do speak Common.”

I loosed the bolt. “No, I speak English.” For some reason, this line of questioning was getting under my skin. “And the fact that they are the same language doesn’t make any sense either.”

I cocked the bow, slotted a bolt into place and loosed it, trying to let my frustration out on the helpless training dummy. It didn’t work. “I mean, what do you call the puffy couch thing that has no back and you can sit on or put your feet up on it at the end of an arm chair?”

“An ottoman?”

“Yes, an ottoman! Why is it called that?”
“Because that is what it is called.”

“No, it… argh! It is called that because they originated in the Ottoman empire, an Earth nation state that no longer exists.” I growled in frustration. “None of any of this shit makes sense.” I loosed another bolt.

“I do think that dummy is dead. Also, I think you are missing the point.” Dorian stated.

“Oh? What is the point then?”

“Why are you tired?”

“What? I’m not tired.”

“You are speaking in Ativan, or Spanish if you like, which you said you only do when very tired or very drunk. And you’re not drunk. So… why are you tired?” Because I can’t sleep. But I didn’t answer him. “I think it is the same reason why you are avoiding me.”

“I haven’t been avoiding you!” I protested. He raised his eyebrows.

“Then I must have imagined drinking that wine all by myself at the ‘Rest last night, how embarrassing.”

“I have been working Dorian, not avoiding you, and I am sure you needed no help drinking that wine.”

“Then why are you tired?”

“I’m not-- ” I started but he interrupted.

“– The circles under your eyes and the knots in your shoulders are making a liar out of you Marin,
“You really know how to make a girl feel pretty, don’t you.”

“Please, if I tried to call you pretty and braid your hair you would be tempted to slap me in the face!”

“Fair point.” I conceded, and turned to walk away.

“Avoiding your issues, Marin?” He said, moving to block my path.

“No, I need to go see the tanner about getting some thick leather or something to cover the arms in so that I can protect them.” I said, holding up the crossbow. “I think this thing is about as rugged as something with this many moving parts can be, but since this will need to be combat ready basically twenty-four seven… you can walk with me if you like, since you are apparently so starved for my company.”

Dorian smiled at the concession and fell into step beside me. “Soon, it is you who will be starved of my company.”

“What do you mean?”

“We’ve received word from Scout Harding in Crestwood. The place is a mess apparently. Our oh-so-dashing Inquisitor rides out in the morning.”

“And you’re going with him?”

“Indeed, as well as Cole, Blackwall, and Varric of course, I doubt he could be peeled away from Hawke.” Dorian confirmed.

I nodded. “That’s a pity, you’ll miss my lecture on atomic theory.”
Vivienne had been rather miffed when I denied her access to Dain and his glass working skills for her personal use, so I had intentionally made my next lecture chemical in nature, to mollify her. I turned to take a shortcut through the main hall.

“In any case, it might be nice to put some space in between Varric and the Seeker.” I added “Tensions between them…”

“VARRRIC!!!!” Roared a voice that could only have come from one person. It was like it was timed to prove the truth of my statement.

“Oh dear.” Dorian muttered as Cassandra thundered into the great hall, covered in a yellowish substance I knew instantly was custard.

My hands flew to my mouth. “Oh no… they actually did it.” I breathed.

“Who did what?” Dorian whispered conspiratorially. “Is this one of your story things?”

I shook my head no, and opened my mouth to respond but was cut off.

“DWARF!” Cassandra bellowed.

“Seeker?” Varric asked, his voice pitched up in what was either amusement or terror, or maybe both.

“Is this your doing?!”

“I have no idea what you mean.” Varric said turning back to his writing desk and affecting a calm and indifferent tone, although how he could be calm with an armed and pissed Cassandra that close to him was beyond me.

“You little…” But Cassandra’s retort was cut off as Varric dipped his pen in his inkwell, only to have it explode ink all over his face.

There was a dreadful moment where everyone in the hall was deadly silent, as Varric and Cassandra
stared at one and other, both splattered in various substances. It looked like they were either about to kill each other, or start making out.

Then Hawke roared a huge guffawing laugh, pointing unashamedly at his friend’s marred face, literally falling off his chair in his mirth. Everyone in the hall burst into laughter following suit, even the some of the restrained Orleasian nobles where snickering behind their masks.

I had one hand over my mouth and my face buried in Dorian’s shoulder, in a completely unsuccessful attempt to silence the spasms of laughter that were rising out from me unbidden.

Cassandra and Varric considered each other. Then, with as much dignity as they could muster, rose, and left the hall in opposite directions. Varric made sure to kick the still prostrate Hawke for good measure as he left.

“I want to know everything you know about this little event, immediately!” Dorian said.

“You are an unrepentant gossip monger.”

“Yes, I am wicked, now spill.”

I considered him, weighing the consequences if Cassandra ever found out I knew a plot was in the works. “Okay, but I have two conditions. First, we can’t do it here because Josephine quote, ‘strongly encouraged’ me to limit my interactions with the nobility after the Anton incident. And two, I will only tell you if promise not to make any more comments about the circles under my eyes. You wound my vanity.”

Dorian eyed me completely unbelieving, before conceding. “Oh, very well. You could stand to be a little vainer every once and a while, so I will humor you and not mention the fact that you resemble a raccoon… now talk!”

***

I went to bed indecently late that night, like I had been doing almost every night since my return, but when I returned to my room I found a scarf lying on my bed side table.
And it wasn’t just any scarf. It was a burgundy color of red wine in the center, fading out to lighter sunset-red near the tips. Soft and beautiful. A near exact replica of the scarf I had used to fashion Wells a sling when we first met. My mother’s scarf. I stared at it, pushing back at the wave of emotion that threatened to overwhelm me. It was such a poignant reminder of the real world, of the time before this fevered dream. I also was incredibly touched. It must have taken so much time and money to find the materials and craft such a perfect recreation of my scarf back home.

“You did say I owed you a scarf…” I jumped as Well’s voice echoed from my doorway. I hadn’t even noticed him come in. “I have to admit Josephine and Vivienne may have had a hand in acquiring it.”

“Wells… I don’t even know what to say. Thank you… it is so much like the real one. I can’t believe you remembered. You do know I was just joking right, you didn’t have to? The resources this must have cost--”

“--Were a small price to pay to say thank you for saving my life.” Wells interrupted.

“Let’s not get carried away, I made you a sling.”

“That’s not what I was talking about.” He hesitated for a fraction of a second. Like he was searching for the right words. “When you fell through that rift Coryphaeus created in your ridiculous little white carriage thing--”

“Car.” I supplied.

“Right, Car. Well, you crashed right through the roof of those tunnels. Opening the entrance I used.

“That was hardly intentional.”

He plowed on as though I hadn’t spoken. “And after I released the trebuchet I had a fraction of a second to decide which way to run. And your voice was calling out saying ‘Over here, Over here’. That made my decision for me. I ran towards your voice.” It took a minute to assimilate the implications of statement. I had called out, and that had saved him? “Don’t you remember?” He asked, gazing at me searchingly.

“No. No, I have no memory of that.”
A look that might have been disappointment flashed across his face. “Well, you saved me. I would be buried in that avalanche if not for you.”

No. I thought. Viscerally rejecting the idea that he would have died, could have died. He lived in the story without my help. He would live.

“You know…” I hesitated. I didn’t wish to seem ungrateful, but he had to know that he did it all without me. “I was probably just calling out for help. I had just crashed my car, I had no idea where I was or…” I left the sentence hanging.

He smiled sadly and sighed. “Nothing ever does seem to crack that unrelenting logic of yours does it?” I just looked blankly at him. I felt like I was missing something. “Whatever happened, I am grateful for you. That you arrived when you did.” He walked towards me and took the scarf from my hands and wrapped it around my neck. “You have done so much for me, for the Inquisition since you …fell… into our lives.”

“Crashed into your lives might be more apt.” We both grinned at the bad pun.

He lingered there close to me for a long moment before stepping back. “You know, if this is your delusion, would it really hurt so much to let yourself be the hero, in your own story?”

Before I had time to respond he turned and quickly strode out of the room, leaving me alone, and riding on a wave of unfamiliar emotions.

This wasn’t my story. It was his. Wasn’t it?

Wells and the strike team rode for Crestwood the next morning, and had left Skyhold before the sun even properly rose.

I awoke early enough to see the party riding through the mountain pass in the fiery light of a rosy dawn. For some reason, the sight gave me the sinking feeling that I was doing everything in my life wrong.

***
Now that Wells had left, I was forced to carry my custom crossbow everywhere with me, and despite my efforts to make it small and as lightweight as possible, carrying it around 24/7 wasn’t all that comfortable. It tended to dig into spine and ribs at inconvenient moments and left me with knots in my shoulders. Plus, I had a quiver full of bolts clipped to my belt and secured to my thigh as well as a little tool kit with spare parts with which to do field repairs as needed. I kept scattering the bolts everywhere whenever I put my feet up on chairs, or put my boots up on the table. (I had the tendency not to sit on furniture in the designed way, which used to drive my mother crazy). This happened several times a day until Baz showed up in the undercroft one day with a little leather lid for my quiver, not dissimilar to the cover you would see on a golf bag, and handed it to me without a word.

Needless to say, I was looking forward to having a more transportable weapon, so when the ingredients for gunpowder showed up, I got straight to work.

I did most of my tinkering with the gunpowder not in the undercroft, but in a shed outside of Skyhold a few hundred yards away from the edge of the army encampment, an area Cullen had cleared me to use as a testing range. There was a possibility that I would fuck this up and blow myself to kingdom come, and I didn’t intend to take anyone with me. I had dug my sunglasses out of my backpack in the footlocker at the end of my bed, to use as a sort of eye protection (they weren’t lab goggles but they were better than nothing) and had some rags to stuff in my ears to function as crude ear protection (again, not great but better than nothing at all.)

I stored my materials in a strong box Dagna herself had constructed and therefore I had every confidence was more secure than Fort Knox. I never left the strong box in the shed but transported it back and forth from the undercroft every day, via a very calm donkey that Master Dennet had been obliging enough to lend me the use of.

I took me several long days that smelled of sulfur before I had a recipe I was happy with and ready to test. And several more days of testing before I settled on the final product.

Harritt helped me craft the metal components of my rotating barrel flint lock pistol design; mercifully he had grown so used to helping me with odd requests that he didn’t even question what this was.

It was maybe two weeks after Wells left -- the days had started to blur together -- that I had my first prototype functioning and ready for its field test.

I was smart enough to set up a rig involving a stand and a string, so I didn’t have to hold the thing
while it fired, in case it blew up in my face.

I also stole a breastplate from Harritt and a melon from the kitchens, so I had something to shoot at.

I was making my final set ups, and checks when I noticed that I had some company.

“Oh, hello Solas.”

“Good afternoon, Marin. I hope I am not interrupting anything critical.”

“No, I need to tweak things for a second. What’s on your mind?”

“I just was having a fascinating conversation with Engineer Dagna about your work with electricity.”

“Oh?” I said perking up. This could be promising.

“Apparently there is an incredible number of useful applications for such technology. I was wondering why developing these further is a priority?”

Huh… that was not the question I was expecting. “Oh, well, I certainly intend to delve further into it. But there are other projects that take priority. The Inquisition can win without batteries, but as I may be pulled into battle at any moment, I will need an improved weapon.” I said indicating the experimental tool in front of me. “Plus, I don’t want to introduce too many devices that rely on electricity until I have created a sustainable way to power them. I don’t want Thedas burning fossil fuels.”

Solas cocked his head. Looking very animalistic for a moment. “Fossil fuels?”

“Fossil fuels… coal, oil, et cetera…. Earth was… very reliant on burning these things to generate power. The advent of electricity and vehicles powered by these things completely transformed earth society, in large part for the better. Increased quality of life, reduced the need for manual labor, enabled us to transport people and goods great distances. Our whole society became built around it.
But burning these things had some pretty negative consequences. For starters, there is a finite supply of these things on Earth so we will eventually run out, getting to sources of these materials is increasingly difficult, and the practices used to extract them dangerous for both people and the environment. Plus, they pollute the air, degrade air quality, which is not good to breathe in high concentrations. They also release a gas called carbon dioxide. Over time increased levels of this in gas and other greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, causes less heat to escape into space from the Earth’s atmosphere.”

“Like the glass panes in a greenhouse. I understand.”

“Right well, this is causing Earth’s global atmosphere and sea temperatures to rise very gradually. A few degrees may seem small, but the environmental impacts are already bad and could become catastrophic.”

“Is there not a movement to find other power sources?”

“Yes, and the technology exists, with a concerted effort we could switch to more renewable sources and limit the damage but… well, people are people. And often loathe confronting difficult truths. It’s a pretty big issue back home… and one Thedas doesn’t need.”

Solas nodded slowly. “Then you are not simply making technology to try and recreate your home here on Thedas.”

I chuckled. “No, there are plenty of technologies and things that I am happy to leave behind on Earth. Hopefully, Thedas can learn from our mistakes.” I looked up and him and the mirth died on my lips. “Why did you think that’s what I was doing?”

The glanced meaningfully at the weapon in my hand. “You have made a very strong argument as to why the very thing you are doing at the moment is a bad idea.”

*That wasn’t fair, not at all.* “What am I doing exactly?”

“When you first got here and described earth to us you said there were weapons that could fire hundreds of rounds a minute and kill a room of people in seconds. Are you recreating those weapons?
“No. I wouldn’t be able to build them here anyway.”

“But you are building a progenitor of those weapons.” He stated. I pursed my lips, not wanting to confirm his words, but also unable to deny them. “Are they not something ‘you would be happy to leave behind’ as you put it?”

I ground my teeth, trying to control the anger that was rising up inside of me. “Yes, yes I would. I do not intend that anyone in Thedas gets their hands on a gun, or a firearm, which is what these are called by the way. I will never make one that is not for personal use. The only place the plans are stored is on a machine only two people in Thedas, know how to use, in a place only I can access.”

“Why make one at all? In Earth’s history is technology of this sort is often successfully contained?”

No. Once someone figures it out… my traitorous mind answered before I could formulate an argument. What right does he have to judge me? He did this all the time, he judged other people when he was the most ethically compromised person here.

“If we are talking about responsible handing of dangerous materials, then, man, you do not have the moral high ground. Someone here intentionally gave a weapon of mass destruction to a cult of mad men intent on conquering and subjugating the world, led by a functionally immortal hobgoblin who wants to make himself a god. And that person wasn’t me.”

“We were not discussing me.”

“Well that’s convenient for you.”

“You are feeling defensive, and are therefore turning the argument from your conduct to mine. The moral character or past actions of a debate opponent are irrelevant to the logic of an argument. I think you know this.”

He was talking about a Tu quoque logical fallacy or whataboutism. “This is not debate class Solas. Lives are in the balance.”

“Precisely. And what road might what you are doing lead Thedas down?”
I glared at him. The more I interacted with Solas, the more confounded I became. I could sympathize, I did sympathize with his pain and the plight of the elven people. But I couldn’t understand this gap in his moral compass. How could he not see the monstrosity and the folly in his plans? I wanted to change his mind to help him see; to save him, and perhaps more importantly, all the innocents that lay between him and what he wanted. I found that I was becoming more and more frustrated that the burden fell on me. Why was it my job to work out his shit? Everyone in the world made mistakes, lost things they thought they couldn’t live without. Everyone felt alone. That does not justify mass murder. It did not justify him.

“A lot less bloody one than the road you would lead Thedas down.”

He chewed on this for a while, and a long slow silence stretched between us. Finally, he said. “I am not cruel, I wish pain on no one.”

I let out a long breath out of my nose and tried to flush the bitterness away. “I know, but genocide is a funny way of showing it.”

“Genocide.” He washed the word around in his mouth. “An unfamiliar term. Can I assume it’s meaning is clear from its roots? Gen- meaning race or large group of people, and -cide, meaning to kill?”

“Yes. Generally considered to be among the worst atrocities a person or group of people can commit.”

“They have happened on earth then?”

“We wouldn’t have word for it if they hadn’t.” I finished setting up the rig to my satisfaction and took a few steps away, holding onto the string connected to the trigger. “You might want to cover your ears.”

Solas did as he was bid, and I put the sunglasses and earplugs back on. I fired.

The gun worked. The chest plate jumped, as the slug found it’s mark. I put down the gun and walked down range to inspect the damage. The chest plate had a clear hole clean through it. The melon behind it had a devastating crater in it.
“The high velocity of the projectile results in impressive carnage. Although it is not a stealthy weapon.” He observed academically, as though he had not been berating me for the weapons creation a moment ago.

“Impressive carnage… rather oxymoronic. Isn’t it.” I retorted.

“Not particularly.”

“Maybe it should be.”

“That is not the world we live in. This is a violent and imperfect place.”

_Aren’t they all._ “That is why I am making this.”

“That is precisely why you should not.”

He confused me so much. How could he vacillate so quickly between wisdom and rage? Between callous destruction of life and respect? Between pride and humility?

“Sometimes Solas, I think you are the only person who understands… and the next moment you are the most inscrutable and alien person here.”

He smiled. “I think I can say the same of you Da’len.”

We walked back down range to the gun. I reset the pistol and fired again. The shot fired but this time the barrel revolving mechanism jammed.

Of the two explosives on the field in that moment, Solas was the far more dangerous. And the far more confusing.
The next day I was back on my way to the range, with my strong box toting donkey, when two familiar figures greeted me at the gate.

“Marin! Just the engineer I wanted to see.” Elton said, accompanied by a smiling Lillian.

“Hey Elton! Lillian.” I greeted them. “How is guard duty treating you?”

“Same old, same old.” Lillian said with a hum.

“I was actually hoping to catch you.” Elton said, a look of concern passing over his face.

“Oh?”

“Yeah, there have been some weird rumors going on about you…” Elton said.

I blinked, trying to focus on his words, but a strange harmonic buzz filled the air around me, like the air was full of dozens of wasps, or I had suddenly switched to a radio frequency without reception.

Oh shit.

“Elton.” I cut him off. “I need you to take the donkey back to the undercroft and the box to Dagna. Don’t let anyone else touch it.”

“What? Why?” Elton asked

“Are you okay?” Lillian chimed in at the same time.

At least I think that is what they said. I couldn’t really hear them, they were muffled. Like they were speaking from the other side of a glass pane.
I thrust the lead rope of the donkey, who, normally so unflappable, was shifting uncomfortably, into Elton’s hands and locked eyes with him. “Promise me!” I implored.

If Elton had a response, it was lost to me, everything around me went out of focus as though obscured by rippling heatwaves. Then I was falling without my feet leaving the earth, and I was pulled into blackness.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter and the last were originally written as one chapter and I had hoped to post them close together but I have been without internet for long stretches and fieldwork has been kicking my ass. The good news is that I am about to finish up this months long trip, and will be able to make it home for the holidays, (with hours to spare.)

Thanks to my Beta MiliusPrime for heroically putting up with my dyslexic ass. Any remaining errors are mine alone. If you spot some let me know!

As always forgive an exhausted traveling grad student slow updates, and please leave a comment and let me know what you think. If I don’t get another chapter up before the holidays, I hope you all have a wonderful yuletide and happy new year, with the people that you love. You all are so amazing! <3
Chapter Summary

Bernoulli’s Principle is a principle of fluid dynamics which states that within a horizontal flow of fluid, increases in fluid speed occur simultaneously with a decrease in pressure or a decrease in the fluid’s potential energy. In other words, a fluid will speed up when there is more pressure behind it, than in front of it.

Ch. 17- The Bernoulli principle

Chapter Notes

Those who look for trigger warnings, take note, this chapter contains (canon typical) violence.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“MARIN!” Wells? I wasn’t sure, the voice was so far away.

There was a terrible taste in my mouth. I was lying on something wet and hard. And it was very, very loud. Why??? My brain whined, before the answer floated to the surface. *I had teleported again… and I was in combat.*

I sat up abruptly, opening my eyes reaching for my crossbow. The blurry world seemed to pitch and yaw as my head spun and I collapsed back to the ground with a groan.

“Marin, are you okay? Wake up!” I heard Dorian shout from my left, he sounded winded.

“Working on it.” I groaned, making another attempt to get upright. The world was stubbornly refusing to come into focus. I had managed to get to my knees, and was beginning to try and unstrap by crossbow from where it was secured on my back when a shadow to my right shouted. “Move, NOW!” I had just enough time to identify the voice as Hawke before I was pushed back by a rugby style tackle and Hawke and I tumbled several paces across the stone floor, knocking the wind right out of me and setting the world spinning again.

I looked up to see the space where I had just been sitting was now occupied by something terrible. It looked like slender man and a preying mantis had a gawky demonic baby.
“HOLY FUCK! What is that!” I shouted.

“That’s just Hawke, Fidget, don’t be alarmed, I know he is ugly but--!” Varric quipped, as Hawke rolled off me and melted back into the shadows. Bianca thrummed, and a bolt lodged itself in the spindly monster in front of me, then Hawke materialized behind it slashing viscously at it with daggers in both hands.

“Fuck you Varric,” Hawke retorted. “I am gorgeous.”

“Well I will fuck you if you insist, but Daisy will be so jealous!”

The creature drowned out any retort Hawke had. Dorian had caught the beast with a roiling ball of fire and it screamed as it withered away to ash.

“Nice of you to join us Marin.” Dorian said, pulling me to my feet. “Did you have a nice nap?”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, I did. Why did you wake me up?” I retorted, taking my first real look around.

We were in some sort of damp cavern, carved out of black stone, with towering pillars supporting the ceiling above us. In the center of the room a rippling green rift, crackled. Hawke, Varric and Dorian, were clustered near me, on one side of the rift. On the other side of the room Blackwall, Wells, Cole and a fourth figure, who could only have been Alistair were engaged by two gaseous creatures.

“IS MARIN ALRIGHT?” Well’s bellowed echoed around the cavern, as he hit one of the vaporous beings with bolt of lightning and it fizzled and disappeared.

“Fine…” I shouted back, He was asking after me while he was still fighting, the kook. The others in my group begun moving towards the rest of our allies. I scrambled to un-holster my crossbow and follow them, and managed to get it loose on the second go. I grabbed a bolt at from my quiver at random, and pulled up a red fletched fire bolt, and loaded it, ready to shoot.

“Umm…” Alistair began, “Does someone want to tell me…” But his question was interrupted when something HUGE burst from the rift in the middle of the room. It was fiery and it sort of flowed like
“Magmatic”... that was the word. More than anything though, it looked angry as fuck, and it was standing right in front of me, I could feel the heat radiating from it.

Without thinking I loosed the bolt from my crossbow. The creature was big and very close, and therefore hard to miss. The bolt lit on fire as soon as it was shot and went sailing into the beast sinking itself as far as the fletching. But the bolt didn’t seem to faze the thing at all. It almost seemed to enjoy it. Worse yet, I now had the creature’s attention, and it swung a massive arm at me and backhanded me across the face.

Its hand was hot, scorching. It should have burned, but it didn’t. What it did do was knock me clean off my feet and send me sailing a few feet onto the hard stone floor.

“MARIN!”

“Vishante kaffas!”

“I’m good!! I’m alright!”

“No. Nuts is what you are.” Varric quipped, he and Dorian had hung back protecting me in my prone position lofting bolts and spells at it from the back ranks.

“Do. Not. shoot fire bolts at rage demons Marin!” Dorian said, his words punctuated with exasperation. “They are immune.”

“Well how the hell was I supposed to know?” So this is what a demon looked like... I was fighting literal demons. That's new.

“Well you might have deduced from the fact that it looks like a fiery death slug.” Varric said, a bolt from Bianca joining the throng of spells and projectiles assaulting the rage demon.

I scrambled to my feet and fumbled to grab another bolt, this time taking more care to note the color of the fletching. Red was fire, white was ordinary, blue was armor piercing, black... was...

“What about explosions? Are these lava lamp looking mother-fuckers immune to explosions?” I
shouted over the din of battle.

“What the bloody hell are-- ” Dorian started but Wells interrupted.

“NO! They are not!”

I picked a black fletched bolt, cocked and loaded the crossbow and pulled the trigger.

The explosion that followed seemed to rattle around the entire cave. The top half of the creature popped like a rotten fruit. Bits of the demon peeled away and flopped to the floor with an obscene splashing sound.

“Maker’s breath.” Someone swore.

“Huh… that was louder than I expected.” I commented.

“Hey Varric, how come Bianca can’t do that?” Hawke asked.

“Don’t listen to him sweetheart.” Varric cooed at his crossbow, before he was interrupted as Wells gave a cry of pain, hand raised, and the rift crackled out of existence.

The cave was suddenly very silent.

“So um… hi.” Alistair finally said into the silence. “I have a serious and important question about the very normal and totally not weird thing that just happened.”

I braced for a barrage of questions. **Who was I? How did I get here? What was that weapon? How are you not a pile of ashes right now?**

“What is a lava lamp?”
There was another stunned silence before everyone burst out laughing.

Cole looked at Alistair, confused. “That wasn’t the question in your head.” Alistair cocked his head towards Cole, as the blonde boy continued. “Marin isn’t magic. She is… the opposite. A border, binding. The fade bounded by her balance, lashed by logic. Her and the Inquisitor are connected, marred by marks. The Inquisitor can split or stitch the seams, Marin is the fabric, flowing when he pulls.”

“Oh, well… thanks, that clears things up then.” Alistair said.

“Does it? Oh, good!” Cole said beaming, clearly not having caught the facetious tone in Alistair’s voice. I couldn’t help but grin at the blonde boy spirit, he was incredibly sweet.

“Hello! Nice to meet you Alistair.” I said extending my hand. “To answer your question, a lava lamp is a glass vessel containing colored water, and a hydrophobic wax based substance. When light from the bottom, the heat from the light source causes the wax mixture to decrease in the density and viscosity and rise up, past the water, to the top of the lamp where it cools and falls, creating the amusing bubbling visual that is reminiscent of lava…” I trailed off noticing that Alistair was giving me roughly the same expression he had just given to Cole. “They’re a novelty light fixture on my world, decorative … kind of kitschy.” I finished lamely

“Marin is the Inquisition’s lead engineer.” Wells said, as though to explain my awkward speech.

“She has a few other things going on as well.” Varric remarked dryly.

“It’s sort of long story…” I said apologetically.

“If you have your own ‘world’ and pop out of rifts on the regular, I imagine it would have to be.”

“Speaking of popping out of rifts,” I interjected. “How long was I unconscious?”

“About twenty seconds, give or take.” Dorian supplied.
“Hey, that’s less than last time! I am getting better at this.”

“Better? You got punched by a rage demon!” Hawke exclaimed.

“Just a love tap really.” I japed.

“Bullshit.” Wells said striding over and taking my chin in his hand, turning my head so he could inspect my face. I hissed involuntarily as his fingers brushed against the side of my face that had taken the blow. “You are lucky you still have all your teeth and a non-fractured skull.”

“Not to mention a countenance that isn’t seared like a steak.” Dorian added.

“Next time I’ll duck.” I responded.

Dorian made a skeptical hump-ing noise. “You had better. There are too few faces as lovely as yours. You should take better care of it.”

Wells’ hands drifted away from my face and towards my neck, where he plucked at my scarf, or rather his scarf, the one he had given me.

“You’re wearing it.” He said in a voice so low it was almost a whisper.

I nodded, unsure of how to respond. The expression on his face was unreadable. Suddenly, I worried that I shouldn’t be wearing it. It was undoubtedly a very expensive piece of clothing, and falling through rifts and tussling with demons in slimy caves might ruin it. “Have I soiled it? Maybe I should take it off? I don’t want to damage it.”

He shook his head. “No! ...No, leave it on. It suits you.” Then he took a step back and raised his voice to address the group. “Actually, I think there are a few questions our engineer here can answer for us.” Wells said throwing a dark look at the others, who all nodded understanding.

I was completely lost. “What questions?”
“You’ll see when we get there.” Wells responded. “Back to base?”

“And here I thought maybe we should make this a summer home.” Hawke snarked, with a gesture to the dank cavern as the group moved to follow Wells out.

After winding our way through a twisting series of tunnels, and around a few nugs, we made our way out of the caves and back to the surface. The surface was no more pleasant that the caves had been, less actually. We had to traverse our way through the ruins of the old town, which until very recently had been the bottom of lake. The going was slow and rough as we had to pick our way through muddy terrain, black silty muck that smelled of decay sucking at our shoes. A misplaced foot could mean being sunk up to your thigh in ooze.

The ruins of the town where depressing. The rotting building and ghostly trees were sprinkled with the detritus of the lives lost long ago. A children’s swing, hanging limp and lifeless from a tree. A hand-painted tea pot, a lute with no one to play it.

There were also the bodies. I was surprised they had not rotted away completely. I wondered if perhaps some magic was at play. Then of course some of them started walking around and attacking us, and that answered that question.

*Zombies and demons, this was turning out to be wonderful day. … At least it isn’t raining.*

As soon as I thought it, it started to drizzle.

*Fuck me.*

We had to put down several undead, and a couple of the wispy creatures, which I learned were a form of demon called wraiths, before we made it out of former lake bed/town. When we did, we encountered a group of Grey Wardens.

Instantly, I swiveled around to Alistair. “They can’t find him.” I hissed, slightly panicked. *Where could he hide? There wasn’t any cover nearby.*

“We’re aware, Fidget.” Varric said calmly. With a smile and wave to the approaching Wardens. I
was confused by his nonchalance.

“Afternoon!” Wells greeted them as they approached.

“Inquisitor! The lake is no longer glowing. I assume that means you were successful?” The Warden at the head of the patrol responded.

“Indeed, we were.” Wells replied. “Still looking for your fugitive?”

“Yes ser.” The Warden responded.

I looked around confused. Alistair was standing right there. Just behind Wells, plainly in the Warden’s view, but the Warden’s eyes seemed to skim right over the man, like they were being pulled away by some magical force.

Then I realized they were. Cole was holding Alistair’s hand, and his face was screwed up with concentration.

“Well, I will leave you to it then.” Wells told the Wardens with a smile, and the Warden’s party moved off, and we continued forward. When we were well away from the Wardens, Cole released Alistair’s hand with a gasp, as though taking his first breath of air after a long period underwater. Blackwall started slightly when he did so. Turning to look at Alistair as though he hadn’t noticed him by his side all this time.

“Thank you, Cole.” Alistair said, with a shudder. “That is very unusual sensation.”

“Well done Kid! I told you that would come in handy.” Varric smiled. “You okay?”

Cole nodded. “Tired, but yes, I am alright.”

“Well we will try to avoid any other patrols so we won’t have to use it again.” Wells put in, laying a comforting hand on the blonde boy’s shoulder.
“Wait, could you not see the pair of them this whole time?” I asked confused. I had thought that Coles trick had just made the wardens not see them, but the way that the group reacted…

“No.” Dorian supplied, eyebrows raised. “Could you?”

I nodded. “Yea.”

“Huh…” Wells said. “Interesting.”

It was another half an hour or so before we made it to what Wells had termed the ‘base.’ Which turned out to be a massive castle. Inquisition banners hung off the battlements and huge pyres burned outside the gates.

There was the unmistakable smell of burning flesh coming off them. A lot of burning flesh. I wonder just how high the body count was? The face of the bandit I had killed flashed in front of me before I pushed the feeling away.

“So, what was the question, the one you wanted me to answer?” I asked, wanting a task to focus on.

“Right this way.” Wells said weaving his way through the keep, which was occupied by a large group of Harding’s scouts, along with Harding herself, who were already well on their way into turning the keep into a proper Inquisition base. Wells greeted every person we passed by name. We moved out a door and along a path that traced over the top of a dam and into the backroom of a building. When we entered, I saw what were clearly the controls to operate the dam. Wells indicated to them with a flourish. “We need your professional engineering opinion.”

I gave the workings a once over. After the insanity and magic and monster the day had brought so far, gears and levers were immensely comforting. The system was simple but well designed, and looked completely functional.

“No problems that I can see. It’s solid craftsmanship. Probably could do with a little maintenance, and the addition of a hydropower system. I mean not even a water mill? To grind grain or run a hammer for a smelter or a smithy? Waste of infrastructure…” I trailed off. The looks on their faces clearly said that this what not what they had been interesting in hearing. “Am I looking for something specific?”
“Any evidence that the workings were damaged then repaired?”

I looked again. There were none that I could see. “When were these repairs supposed to have taken place?”

“Ten years ago, give or take.” Wells said.

I laughed. “Well that’s a long time! It would be very difficult to tell with that much time lapsed. Especially if they were minor repairs.”

“They wouldn’t be, they would be major repairs. Like cause a catastrophic failure of the dam and flood the town kind of major.”

Something inside of me ran cold. This was starting to sound familiar. “It would have to be REALLY major damage, and not just to the controls. The damage would have to be to the dam itself.” When the group gave me a confused look I continued. “The way this is designed most of the major failure points would result in the dam being locked in the closed position.” The group threw each other dark looks.

“And there is no evidence of repairs?”

“Not that I can see, all the gearing looks to be about the same age, but ten years is a long time.”


“You think the town was flooded on purpose?” I surmised.

“Mayor says darkspawn damaged the controls and flooded the town but…” Dorian trailed off.

Wells leaned in and lowered his voice so it wouldn’t carry to Alistair and Hawke, “What about your… other source of information… any leads?”

I shrugged grimly. “I’m not sure, but it does sound awful familiar… I think I remember Leo calling
the mayor a ‘son of a bitch.’ But I could be misremembering. Quite a few people end up before you for judgment.”

“But wrecking these controls shouldn’t have caused the dam to open?” I nodded my confirmation. “That enough for me, let’s go get him.” When I turned to follow him, he amended. “Marin, you stay here. You’re hurt.”

“I’m fi…” I trailed off from the word fine when everyone in the room shot me a quelling look. “Functional.”

“Yes, and I would like you to stay that way. You fell through the Fade, fought undead for the first time, and got the shit kicked out of you by a rage demon, so I would say you have earned a break.”

“Fine…” I said, half annoyed at the mollycoddling and half grateful to have an excuse to get out of my wet and muddy clothes.

“Alistair, you should stay too. We won’t need extra hands on this one and there are too many Wardens in town to risk the Cole trick again.” Alistair nodded. He looked a trifle disappointed but didn’t give any cheek like I had. I suddenly felt very childish.

Before the group left, Dorian flicked his wrist dramatically and conjured a flurry of chipped ice which he wrapped into a handkerchief and handed to me. “For the swelling. No need to thank me. I already know I’m marvelous.”

“Ass.” I retorted smiling, unable to fake any rancor.

Then Wells was off again, the whole team save Alistair and me in tow. We watched them disappear into the fog from the battlements of the keep. Just then there was a distant screeching roar and the silhouette of something massive with webbed wings in the grey skies above.

“Is that…?” I asked.

“Yes. Yes, it is.” Alistair answered not even bothering to let me finish my sentence.
Zombies, demons, and now dragons. Fan-fucking-tastic.

***

I had just wriggled into my fresh clothes, which were exactly my size (Which was either a minor miracle or a testament to the incredible capabilities of Lace Harding.) and pressed Dorian’s ice pack to my face, when there was a knock on the door and Alistair appeared.

“So… about that long story of yours…”

I told him.

Not all of it, obviously. A condensed version, who I was, where I was from, what I could do. I left out any mention of the game and the ‘foresight’ it provided. Potential futures for Alistair was not something I wanted to think about very deeply… or at all really.

Alistair was a good listener. In return, he answered some of my questions about the blight, and his adventures with the Hero of Ferelden, the woman who also happened to be his wife. When I asked if he knew where she was, he said no, but he had a sort of soft smile as he said it that told me, on the off chance that it was the truth, it certainly wasn’t the whole truth.

“You remind me a bit of her you know…”

“What?!” I said, shocked. How could I possibly remind him of the Hero of fucking Ferelden?

“Elissa also… well she is precocious like you. Tough, and too stubborn for her own good. You both could use lessons on when to quit, and could would shock a chantry sister to death with your language…”

“Well that started out very flattering…” I said affecting an offended tone. He laughed an open and honest laugh that took years off his face.

“Oh no!!! I have wounded the fair maiden, with my harsh words! Arrrgh what ever will I do?”
I was laughing now too, which sort of hurt my face, but I couldn’t help it. Alistair was a dork, and it was completely charming.

“You miss her, don’t you?” I asked when our giggles had finally died down.

“Yes.” The single syllable saying more than paragraphs could.

_He might never see her again._ A voice bubbled up in me before I pushed it back down.

“If you both don’t come soon you are going to miss dinner!” Scout Harding interrupted. “Alistair, we even managed to scrape up some cheese…”

The words were hardly out of her mouth before Alistair was on his feet and out the door. Shouting over his shoulder as he ran, “Cheese! You are bloody brilliant. If I wasn’t married I would kiss you!”

“Wow. He _really_ likes cheese.” I laughed.

“He really does.” Scout Harding chuckled, leading me out the door towards food.

_He is going to die… if Hawke lives he is going to die._ The voice bubbled up again.

Alistair was wrong. Elissa Cousland, Hero of the fifth blight, Arlessa of Amaranthine, Warden Commander of Ferelden was a hero. I was a miserable piece of shit. We were nothing alike.

Well… it was entirely possible we both cussed too much.

*****
Missives Between Skyhold & the field:

Storm,

The professor is once again on sabbatical. Please confirm arrival.

Nightingale

***

Nightingale,

We can officially downgrade this place from complete cluster fuck, to hot-mess. Fidget did indeed arrive here intact. Castle cleared of infestation, and rift under lake closed. No major casualties to report. Foul play involved in flooding incident, mayor implicated. He is currently at large. We should fix that. Evidence is being sent to you by runner, so it can be ready for when a trial can take place.

Area requires clean up. I will stay to complete and lay the groundwork for rebuilding and recovery efforts. Fidget will stay with me for this as her skillset may be useful. Butcher investigation still ongoing.

Main mission objective complete. Contact to be arriving at Skyhold within the next week, accompanied by the seeker’s favorite dwarf and a mouthy bird.

-Storm

P.S. High dragon was seen, by yours truly, in the region. Keeping an ear to the ground to see where it might have settled.

****

D.
I have arrived safely in the field. I hope my departure didn’t alarm you too much. E.A. or L. should have delivered my strongbox after I departed. I probably freaked them out. Tell them sorry and hello for me. If the box was not returned, we have a serious problem, please recover ASAP. Please keep the box safe, and away from sparks, open flames, and bee-loving blonde rogues in my absence.

As for our other projects; tell our favorite glass smith that when he needs to create a scale for his latest gadget, use the freezing point of water as zero and the boiling point as 100. It will save everyone headaches later… trust me.

I am also curious if the samples you took exhibit any interesting behaviors during/since my departure. Feel free to consult Chuckles. The mystery surrounding the samples’ source is an ongoing interest of his. Also, maybe apologize to Chuckles for me. I feel like I owe him one... what for, I have no idea.

Keep me updated on any new developments,

Fidget.

P.S. Your bolts are performing admirably under field conditions!! More will likely be requested upon my return.

P.P.S. Our resident word smith has decided to label you Fizz. When I asked him why, he said “because she is bubbly… also she makes expositions.” But honestly, I think he just liked the alliteration of ‘Fidget & Fizz.’

****

Fidget,

Your strongbox was returned promptly and unmolested by our confused and concerned friends, E.A. & L. The box was immediately secured, and will remain sealed and protected. The friends required ale to recover from their shock. I put it on your tab. They say hello. More specifically L. told me wish you well and E.A. gave me a detailed description of where you could shove your strongbox next time you scared him like that. Which I think was his way of wishing you well.
Consulted Chuckles about the samples. (He does not love that nickname). The samples are indeed interesting. They do not, however, exhibit similar behaviors to their source. For example, they are still in the undercroft. Also, they show no fireproof tendencies, from flames arcane or otherwise-- I checked. They do, however, show evidence of… scarring… let’s call it, that indicates contact with powerful magic. (Or the inverse of powerful magic?) Chuckles believes this is because the “mark” or “vibration” that infuses the source is linked to the source’s essence/vitality rather than their physical, three dimensional being. Although it certainly affects their physical being. I admit, I am having a hard time visualizing this, but Chuckles is an expert on the subject, and I have no evidence to contradict this hypothesis. It is all very exciting!

In other news. Our newest team member is calibrating his latest project. Your advice on scaling was noted.

Stay safe & all the best,

Fizz

P.S. Tiny & Co. want to know if you can invent something to make stuffed nugs fly? I didn’t think this was a priority but “Krem Cheese” offered up several drinks and some very interesting metal samples if I asked you… so I am asking. (He never told me that I couldn’t call him “Krem Cheese” when I asked.)

***

Fizz.

Glad to hear about the strongbox. Tell E.A. he can shove it and L. she is lovely, and buy them both another round on my tab. Better buy Scab one too, just for good measure (if the healers deem him recovered enough for booze, that is.)

I admit to also being slightly flummoxed by Chuckles’ explanation. Perhaps I am just poorly suited to the subject matter, or perhaps it is not the best discussion to have in brief, and intentionally vaguely worded missives. In either case we will discuss further when I get back.

Cheers,
Fidget.

P.S. Tell “Krem of the Crop” YES! The level of difficulty of this endeavor will depend on the manner of flight he desires. Gliding nugs will be easy, self-sustained flight will be more challenging. Perhaps I will use his question to build a physics & aerodynamics lecture around when I return. Practical demonstrations will be included of course. (Stuffed nugs only, no actual nugs will be harmed for scientific or entertainment purposes.)

P.P.S- [In Dorian’s hand writing.] Hello Fizz! We must have a detailed academic discussion on the runeing you put on Fidget’s bolts when I return. It is remarkable work. Well done. [In Marin’s handwriting again] Sorry, Sparkler is too lazy to write his own letter.

****

Nightingale,

Butcher KIA. We have a leak. L.H. will send details. Dragon located, might need to make a return trip to deal with it.

Storm.

****

Storm,

We have leads on your fugitive mayor. He won’t get far. Tiny is very excited about the dragon news.

That old friend of mine arrived at Skyhold safely along with the Kirkwall contingent.

The butcher news is disturbing. I will check our seals.

Nightingale.
P.S. What is this I hear about Fidget and flying nugs? Please explain.

****

Fidget,

NUGS ‘GONNA FLY!!!!

CA

[In Iron Bull's handwriting] A classi guy.

***

Chapter End Notes

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday season celebrating whatever it is you celebrate! You all gave me a wonderful holiday gift. I NOW HAVE MORE THAN 200 SUBSCRIBERS!!!! That means that when I hit the post button literally hundreds of people get a notification. Which is insane, and humbling, (but mostly insane). I am honestly not sure how that happened. I never really intended to write this much less share it and I am honored (and a little bamboozled) by the fact that so many of you want to come along on this crazy ride my brain cooked up. Thank you. Seriously. Thank you. You all are the best.

Okay back to you're regularly scheduled programing...

This is my first chapter posted from the good ‘ol US of A, in a VERY long time. Big thanks to my Beta, MiliusPrime for slogging through my spelling errors, any and all remaining screw ups are mine (if you find some let me know!) I know updates have been slow, but expect them to get even slower. I am back in the states, and now that the holidays are finished I have to dive data analysis into studying for my qualifying exams. So, ironically, I will have less time for writing than I did when I was constantly waterlogged and half crazed from exhaustion during my nearly year long stint doing
fieldwork abroad. (YAY GRAD SCHOOL!)

As usual please leave comments with your thoughts, comments, criticisms etc… They fill me with joy, and keep me writing!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!