we sing to the garden and we sing to the stars

Lillian Trevelyen befriends a rogue in Haven, as well as her four year old son, to the amusement of the rest of the Inquisition.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Haven was full of people, in a way that Lillian didn’t quite understand. It wasn’t that she’d never been in a place with lots of people, the Circle in Ostwick was full to the brim with mages and templars, but in Haven—

She wasn’t sure where all the people were coming from. Josephine had mentioned something about tents and pilgrims, but she wasn’t sure where those were. The only places she knew were only familiar due to the people there. She knew Varric’s fire, and Harritt’s smithy, and Flissa’s tavern, and the room where she woke up only six hours ago. But other than that, Haven seemed like a constant stream of people, all of whom gave her a strange look when she passed, and whispered when she walked by. Stabilizing the breach was apparently not enough for all of them to prove she was on their side, and those who had accepted her looked at her with a kind of reverence she wasn’t sure she liked.

Over the noise of the crowds, she could hear faint sobbing coming from behind the tavern, and she followed the sound to a small boy, sitting with his knees to his chest against a wall.

“Hello,” she said, as she approached him. “What’s wrong?”

He looked up at her, and she instinctively hid her Anchor hand behind her back. “I can’t find my mother,” he said, and she held her other hand out to him.

“I’ll help you. My name is Lillian. What’s yours?”

“Luka,” he said, and he stood up and took her hand. “I’m four. My mother’s name is Marian, but she left and I can’t find her.” He took a shaky breath before continuing. “I don’t know where she went,” he repeated, and she gripped his tiny hand tight.

“We’ll find her,” she said, and she walked with him to Leliana’s tent, where the spymaster in question was focused on maps, but looked up when she saw Lillian approaching.

“Sister Leliana, this is Luka, he’s lost his mother,” Lillian said in a rush, still not quite comfortable with talking to the Left Hand of the Divine.

“Marian. What does his mother do?” Leliana said, still looking at Luka, but talking to Lillian.

“He said his mother’s name is Marian,” Lillian continued, and Luka held her hand as tight as she thought he could.

“Hm. Marian. What does his mother do?” Leliana said, still looking at Luka, but talking to Lillian.

“Okay, Luka. Let’s go see if that’s your mother,” Lillian said, and Luka followed her to Cullen’s side of the yard.

Lillian lifted Luka up to sit on her hip, so that he can see the faces. He wrapped his arms around her neck, and searched each face in the crowd. “Mother!” he shouted, face turning from abject sadness to pure joy.
One of the knife wielding rogues turned to his voice, and pulled back from the fight she had been in. “Luka?” she said, questioningly. Lillian set him down and he ran towards his mother, who scooped him up and dodged a hit from her sparring partner.

Lillian smiled at the reunion until her hand flared green and painful. Cullen walked up to stand beside her, and she kept herself from flinching at the presence of a former Templar. She knew good Templars, she was friends with good Templars, but still. She didn’t know Cullen.

He smiled at her, and she smiled back, a faint hesitant smile, but a smile nonetheless.

“He was lost?” Cullen asked, and Lillian nodded. They stood in silence for a moment, as Marian and Luka made their way towards them.

“Sorry, Commander, I need to take him back to the Chantry,” Marian said, hoisting Luka up on her hip.

“Of course. Do whatever you need,” he said, and he moved to correct another soldier’s grasp on a dagger.

“Thank you, Herald, for bringing him. He was supposed to stay in the Chantry with the sisters but he decided that wasn’t his ideal way of spending the day,” she said, poking Luka in the stomach. “I’m Marian, by the way.”

“Lillian. Nice to meet you. You know, if he doesn’t want to stay in the Chantry, I could watch him for a while?”

Marian shook her head, but then took a second to see the sincerity in Lillian’s face. “Really? You don’t have to, you’ve probably got more important things to do?”

Lillian shook her head, and grinned without realizing it. “I don’t really have anything to do. Not for the next week, at least.”

Marian smiled at her. “Okay, then. I’ll be done with this in about three hours? Could I meet you for dinner?”

“Dinner!” Luka said, and they both smiled at him as Lillian nodded and Marian set Luka down.

“Great,” Marian said, and she started to turn back to the yard, but stopped. “Lillian. I’m—” She took a breath. “I don’t know anyone else here,” she said, and she took a second to try to fish for the rest of the sentence.

Lillian smiled again. “I could use a friend, if you’re offering.” She tried not to show how much she hoped that Marian would say yes.

Luka clutched Lillian’s tunic as the two women smiled at each other.

“I am,” Marian replied, and then turned back to the yard. “See you at dinner,” she said over her shoulder, waving at Luka as he took Lillian’s hand and smiled up at her.

“What’s your favorite color?” he asked, and it was such a different question from all the others that she’d been asked that it caught her off guard.

Being the Herald didn’t seem to be quite as difficult now as it had before.

Lillian looked at Luka and smiled, and as she walked away towards the Chantry with Luka, she
noticed from the corner of her eye that Cullen was watching her walk away, with something that looked like a smile on his face.
“We were attacked by four bears. In an hour! It was awful,” Lillian said, and Marian laughed beside her.

“Did you bring me one?” Luka asked, and both women turned to him questioningly.

“One what, Luka-loo?” Lillian asked.

“A bear!”

They all laughed, even Luka, though he didn’t know why.

“Sorry buddy, we had to leave them. They wouldn’t fit in my backpack,” Lillian said, and Marian put her daggers down from where she was sharpening them, and the Herald, the rogue and the little boy turned when they heard a knock on the door.

“Yes?” Lillian said, and the door opened slightly.

“Herald, could you come to the war room for a moment? We’re finalizing details about your trip to Redcliffe tomorrow,” Cassandra said, poking her head in the door.

Lillian stood up, and sighed. “I’m guessing the Commander wants to argue once more that we should go to the Templars.”

“Among other things,” Cassandra replied, and Lillian followed her through the door.

“I’ll be back in an hour or so,” she said as she went through the door. She stuck her head back in the room. “Uh, I know it’s Luka’s bedtime, so I’ll see you guys tomorrow,” she said, and Marian swung Luka onto her shoulders.

“And Marian shook her head. “Loo, as good of a fighter as you are, there aren’t any toys where we’re going.”

“I can bring some!”

“Oh, but we wouldn’t want the great captain Elmo to get hurt, would we?” Marian asked, and Lillian couldn’t stop smiling. “What do you think, Herald?”

“Sorry, Luka, your mom is right. But how about this?” she asked, determined to think of some sort of alternate gift for Luka. “I’ll bring you back a special, uh, rock! A special rock.”

Luka looked skeptical. “A rock.”

Marian caught on to what Lillian was trying to do.
“A very special rock! A rock for princes!” Marian added, and Lillian grinned.

“Yes, exactly,” Lillian said, and Luka seemed to accept it.

“Okay,” Luka said, and he went back to grinning, and Marian and Lillian exchanged a smile. A trip with friends that might end in a fight? Who wouldn’t be excited?

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Lillian had to fight a magister, and basically the only thing that she could think about was that her only friend who hadn’t accused her of murdering the Divine was down. She had to fight a magister, but that magister had stabbed her friend, and while Cassandra and Dorian and Varric fought the magister, Alexius or whatever the hell his name was, she was crouching beside Marian, trying to work any healing spell at all to fix the damage that had been done.

Her hands were shaking.

Her hands were shaking and she was low on mana and she couldn’t fix it. A tear dripped down her nose and splashed onto Marian’s bloody torso, but Marian reached up to the necklace spattered in blood around her neck.

“Give this- to Luka. It was-” she took a breath. “My mother’s. Take care of him. Tell him I love him. And I’m sorry.”

“It’ll be okay, Dorian could heal you-” she said quickly, until she realized Marian wasn’t breathing anymore.

So Lillian stood up, eyes rimmed with red, and cast every spell she could think of at Alexius, until she found herself flung back in time with Dorian and unable to stop the steady stream of tears from her eyes.

“Herald, we can get back, I have an idea of how, we just have to keep moving,” Dorian said, standing above Lillian as she crouched on the floor.

“I’m sorry, I just- I need a second. I’m sorry,” Lillian said, and Dorian crouched beside her.

“That girl, the rogue. She was your friend,” Dorian said, and it wasn’t a question.

Lillian nodded. “Any way we can go back in time to before that happened?” She looked at Dorian, and sighed as he shook his head. “Not without breaking the Veil further.”

“Okay,” she said, took a breath, and stood up. “Okay.”

“Shall we?” Dorian asked, standing up and offering her his arm.

“We shall,” she replied shakily, and they walked out to kick Alexius’ ass together.

It took a lot of walking, a lot of running, really, from place to place, opening jail cell after jail cell, trying to ignore the fact that the people they had just left were dying of red lyrium, but they made it to the final row of cells, opened the first door and saw Cullen’s armor, covered in spikes of lyrium, and something hidden in Lillian’s heart that she hadn’t thought about much broke. Cullen wasn’t there, but she knew the cloak and armor were his. She knew that it meant that either Cullen was dead in this future, or a lyrium monster. Neither option was good.

“Nothing here,” Dorian said, and she followed him out of the cell.
He pushed open the door to the other cell, and his hands dropped to his sides, limp. “Lillian, you don’t want—”

She pushed past him. It was Luka. It was Luka and his eyes were glowing red, and he was taller, and older, and he was screaming at her.

“You did this! You left me! You left!” he was screaming, and his voice was hoarse and raw and she stepped forward involuntarily, and crouched in front of him.

“Luka, what happened? What happened?”

“You had my mother killed and you left me alone! How could you? How could you?!” he yelled, flailing his arms at her, trying to hit her through the bars.

Dorian pulled Lillian out of the room, leaving Luka in the cell, screaming at her.

“The last time I heard a child scream like that I had stolen his ice cream,” Dorian said, and Lillian couldn’t get herself to laugh.

“We have to stop this from happening. We have to go back,” she said, and her hands were shaking. She couldn’t stop thinking about the red in his eyes, the way that he hated her on sight.

“We will,” Dorian said, and she felt a wave of gratefulness sweep over her.

And they did. Not before seeing all her friends die. Not before losing everything and getting it all back in the space of a minute. They got back to the real present, and they stopped Alexius, and they went back to Haven. Marian’s body was burned in Redcliffe before they left, in a ceremony presided over by a Chantry sister sympathetic to the Inquisition. She didn’t cry during the ceremony, but Cassandra and Dorian stood beside her on either side so she knew she could. When they left on Dennet’s horses, Dorian and Varric traded stories back and forth until she’s at least smiling. But she didn’t say anything beyond what she had to until she got back to Haven. Luka was waiting for her, standing by Cullen, both of whom make her heart sink.

Dorian patted her on the back as she got off her horse, and she walked over to Luka.

“Where’s my mother?” he asked, and her face fell.

“She’s not coming home, buddy. I’m so sorry.”

Luka looked at her. “She left?”

“She got hurt, uh, she died. She told me to tell you she loves you, and asked me to take care of you, and I will, if you want me to.”

“She’s gone?” Luka asked again.

“Yes. I’m so sorry, Luka,” she said again, her voice breaking. Luka started crying, loud wails that she knew wouldn’t stop until he was tired. She hugged him tight despite his sobs echoing in her ears, and kept on holding him until he went limp in her arms, even when the sun set and all the other people had gone back to the rest of Haven. Except Cullen.

When Luka had quieted and was close to falling asleep in her arms, she looked up, and Cullen was still there.

“Herald, I—” he started, and she looked at him. “Did she have any other family?”
Lillian shook her head as she stood up with Luka on her hip. “No. Died when Luka was a few months old.”

He nodded. “How can I help?”

She stared at him for a moment, and then pointed at her bag that she’d tossed to the side when she’d told Luka.

He picked it up, and followed her to the cabin they’d given her, where Cassandra was setting up a tiny cot for Luka to sleep on.

She set Luka down on it, and pulled a blanket over him, then thanked Cassandra quietly. Cullen set her bag down on the table by her bed, and went to leave.

“Cullen,” she said, and Cassandra slipped out the door quietly when he turned to her.

“Thank you,” she said, resting a hand on his arm. “For everything.”

He nodded and blushed, even the tips of his ears turning red. “I'm sorry for your loss,” he said. “If there is anything I can do-”

She shook her head, and he bowed his and walked out, leaving her to curl up on her bed and cry, as quietly as she could.

Chapter End Notes

Small note: whenever Luka says "Lilan" it's not a misspelling, he's saying "Lillian" wrong. He's a cute kid and cute kids say weird things.
Luka seemed lost without Marian, in a way that Lillian didn’t know how to fix. So, she took him everywhere. He had followed her to the blacksmith and Dennet before, when she was his friend and not his guardian, but now he was a permanent fixture at her side or on her hip.

At the first war council meeting since she got back from Redcliffe, she carried Luka in on her hip and started the meeting like nothing was different. After a moment of no response from any of her advisors, she looked up from the table to see slightly confused faces looking back at her.

“What?” she asked, and Leliana broke the silence by coughing pointedly at Luka.

Lillian raised her eyebrows defiantly, and tilted her head at her.

“Herald, is it the best idea to have the child here?” Leliana asked, and Lillian brushed Luka’s bangs back from his face.

“I think so,” she said, and Leliana decided to push the matter to later.

Cullen was the first advisor to speak.

“Herald, the Templars we have in Haven have met to discuss proper treatment of mages now that the Circles are gone, and they have been notified that if there are any complaints, they’ll be dealing with my wrath, and potentially yours.”

“Definitely mine. How are preparations for closing the Breach?” she asked, handing Luka a extra piece on the table that he was pointing at.

“Everything on the forces end should be ready within the next two days,” Cullen said.

“I have no issues from the nobles that can’t be dealt with within the next two days or moved to afterwards,” Josephine said, as she

“If any problems should arise, I will take care of them,” Leliana said, and Lillian nodded.

“Good. I’m going to talk to Solas to see if he knows anything else about the Breach that I might need to know before I hold my hand up to it and hope that it closes,” Lillian said, and Luka clapped.

“Yay, Lilan!” he said, and she smiled at him.

After discussing a few more small matters, Lillian set Luka down, and prepared to leave the council meeting as everyone else walked away, but Leliana grabbed her arm gently when she passed.

“Herald. We need to talk about the child,” she said in a low voice.

“Sister Nightingale, he has a name. And if you’re worried about security, you have no need to be. He won’t tell anyone what he hears in here,” Lillian said, and Leliana sighed.

“There’s not exactly what I was worried about. The question is, what do we know about him? Are there people who know about him who would deign to manipulate the Inquisition because he’s here?”

Lillian shook her head as she watched Luka run around the Chantry.
“No. His father’s dead, and Marian never mentioned any other family. If they’re out there, I doubt
they know about Luka.”

“Were they married?”

“I honestly don’t know, Leliana,” Lillian sighed. “She didn’t like talking about him.”

“Does the boy know?”

“I don’t know, and he hasn’t cried as much today, so I’d rather not ask him,” Lillian replied icily, and
Leliana pulled back.

“I am sorry for your loss, Herald. Marian was a good soldier,” Leliana said, and Lillian dropped her
head.

“She was a good person. Her fighting wasn’t why I’ll miss her. She was honest, and kind,” and
Lillian’s voice cut out a little bit. “Is there anything else I can do for you, Sister Nightingale?” she
asked, turning back to Leliana.

“No, thank you, Herald,” Leliana said with a bow, silently resolving to speak with the other advisors
about this new development. So she walked to Josephine’s office, where she found Cullen and
Cassandra discussing final Breach closing details. She closed the door behind herself, and the small
noise made Cullen and Cassandra jump, but Josephine only sighed.

“Is there some secret we cannot tell the Herald, now? Because if we are to make her Inquisitor, we
should not hide anything from her,” Josephine said, setting down her writing tablet on her desk.

“It’s about the Herald’s choices. And the child,” Leliana said.

“Luka,” Cullen murmured, and Leliana asked him to repeat what he said. “The child’s name is
Luka,” he said, and Leliana was surprised at his defense of the boy.

“The child is a security risk. No matter his age. We should find someone to take him.”

“Leliana, I hardly think-” Cassandra started, as Cullen shook his head adamantly.

“No,” he said with finality in his tone. “There’s nothing wrong with him being here.”

“Leliana is right. He could be a threat to the Inquisition’s reputation, as well, her being unmarred
and now with a child. The Chantry has enough reason to be angry with us without us adding any
impropriety on the Herald’s behalf, imagined or not.” Josephine added hesitantly.

“No! We’re not asking Lillian to give Luka to a stranger. If you want to ruin that child’s life, you’ll
have to do it without me and without the Herald. There’s no way she’ll let you take Marian’s child
away,” Cullen said, his eyes narrowing, brow furrowing, and voice rising in volume.

“Not away, Commander, just not with the Herald,” Josephine said.

“Away would not be the worst thing. He could go to a Chantry in some quiet town. He’ll be safe
there,” Leliana said.

“You haven’t been out there, Leliana. There are no quiet towns any more. The Hinterlands is full of
bandits, less since we were there, but still too many to call it quiet,” Cassandra said evenly.

“It’s a risk we can’t just ignore,” Leliana said, but Cullen shook his head again.
“More of a risk than her being a mage? More of a risk than her family trying to manipulate us into giving them power?” Cullen scoffs.

“We have to do something. I’m sorry, Commander. We have to,” Josephine said, and Cullen sighed angrily and clenched his fists.

“No. If you want to take that child from Lillian you’ll have to go through me personally. She’s lost her family, her friends, everything she’s ever known. Marian was the only one who treated her like a person, and Marian asked her to take care of Luka.” He paused for a moment, his hand going to the back of his neck.

“She is giving us everything, and this is the one thing she is asking of us. Of all the things for her to ask, allowing her to take care of a helpless child is the least we could do,” he said, and then his shoulders slumped and his hands fell to his side.

Leliana and Josephine shared a look, and a smile cracked Leliana’s normally stoic face.

“Commander, that’s an awfully impassioned statement,” Josephine said, and stifled a giggle.

“We’ll drop it, Commander. I’ll put a guard on the child, just in case.”

“Good,” he said in a strangled voice, and he made his retreat out of the room to the training yard.

Leliana sighed. “Well, that’s something we’ll have to deal with. He’s in love with the Herald.”

Cassandra shook her head. “We probably shouldn’t interfere,” she said.

“We’re definitely going to interfere. We’ll have to push him towards her in a subtle way,” Josephine said, picking up her tablet and writing furiously on it.

“Let’s close the Breach first,” Cassandra said, as she left the room.
Haven had been covered in snow, and Lillian had been lost. Cullen didn’t know how to explain that to Luka. He didn’t know how to tell him that he had lost his mother and the woman who was almost his adoptive mother within two weeks. So instead, he scrounged around for any blankets he could find and wrapped them around Luka’s small frame.

“Thank you!” the boy said in a happy voice, and Cullen’s heart cracked a little. “Where’s Lilan?”

Cullen pretended like he couldn’t hear his question. He knew that wasn’t the best choice, but for the life of him he couldn’t figure out another. Hopefully-

Hopefully Lillian would come back before he had to explain anything to Luka.

If she was still alive.

Oh, Maker. She had to still be alive.

When she’d pushed Luka into his arms, with a whispered goodbye and a charge to take care of him, he had thought foolishly that she was overreacting. Even in the presence of a dragon, which was possibly an archdemon, he had faith in her.

“Commander, the troops need direction,” Cassandra said, and Cullen turned towards her.

“We don’t have direction. We can’t do anything about it until the Herald comes back.”

Cassandra rested a gloved hand on Cullen’s arm gauntlet. “Cullen,” she said sadly, and Cullen brushed her hand away.

“There’s a search party leaving in twenty minutes,” he said. “I will be in that party.”

“Can I go?” Luka asked.

“Of course,” Cullen replied before he realized that happening upon the dead body of his adoptive mother might not be the best thing for a four year old. But he couldn’t take it back.

Cassandra groaned and turned away.

When the search party left, it contained Cullen, Cassandra, Luka, and three scouts, all of whom were completely charmed by Luka’s determination to find Lillian, despite the fact that Cullen didn’t tell him that’s who they were searching for.

If he told Luka that they were looking for Lillian, he’d have to tell him that there’s a chance she wouldn’t come back. And he’d seen how she’d had to tell him about Marian- he didn’t want to do that unless he had to.

And the longer he walked through the snow drifts, the more it seemed like he would have to.

“What’s that green light?” Luka asked from atop Cullen’s shoulders, pointing off into the distance. He turned, and saw the light Luka was talking about, bobbing and weaving, then stopping. Cullen lifted Luka off of his shoulders and set him down in the snow, leaning forward and squinting at the light.

“It’s the Herald!” he found himself saying, and he rushed forward the thirty paces it took for him to
get to her side, as Cassandra sighed in relief behind him.

Luka followed him to Lillian, and he shook Lillian’s arm to try to keep her awake. “Lilan! Lilan!”

Cullen lifted her up, as her eyes fluttered open and shut, and she whispered something under her
breath which Cullen leaned closer to hear.

“Cullen-” she said, and he smiled at her, relief coloring his face red.

“I’m here. You’re safe, Luka’s safe,” he said, and Lillian relaxed in his arms as much as she could
with frostbite and chattering teeth.

“Thank you, Cullen,” she breathed, and her eyes shut completely, so he ran faster.

“Lilan’s back, Lilan’s back!” Luka shouted gleefully running behind him, and the whole camp
seemed to perk up, even though Lillian was nonresponsive in the commander’s arms.

Cullen opened the healer’s tent and shouted “Help her!”, putting her down on an empty cot.

Luka toddled in behind him and stood by her bed as the healers bustled around, putting blanket upon
blanket on her as one checked her pulse and her temperature. Luka shrugged the blanket off of his
shoulders and reached up to his full height to place it on the pile of blankets that was formerly known
as Lillian.

He looked up at Cullen, who was standing with his hands at his sides, looking on helplessly, and he
tugged on Cullen’s mantle so he’d look down at him.

“Is Lilan going to be okay?” he asked. Cullen blinked a few times, and crouched beside him, and put
a hand on his shoulder, not sure what to say.

Dorian swept into the room, hands ablaze, and he followed the healers to where Lillian lay and
proceeded to heat up the tent as much as he could without boiling the people inside. Then he turned
to Luka, and offered him a hand up onto Lillian’s cot so he could sit beside her.

“And that’s when Dorian noticed the raw fear on Cullen’s face and in his shaking hands, and he
pulled him outside before Luka could see.

“You need to pull yourself together, Commander,” he hissed, and Cullen just stared at him.

“If you’re worried, the soldiers will be worried. If you’re worried, and the soldiers are worried, that
little boy in there will be worried, and then when Lillian wakes up she’ll yell at us. Has she yelled at
you before, Commander?” Dorian said.

Cullen shook his head. If she’d anywhere near raised her voice when he was there, it hadn’t been
actually at him.

“I have a feeling she’d be quite good at it. She yelled at Alexius in Redcliffe and I believe that man
piissed himself,” Dorian continued, and Cullen smiled wryly. “That’s it, Commander. She’ll be fine.
It’s our job to make sure she doesn’t wake up to madness.”

“I can’t-” Cullen started, but his voice failed him and he had to try again. “I can’t imagine this
without her.” He didn’t quite realize what he was saying, but Dorian did.

His face went softer and he clapped a hand on Cullen’s shoulder.

“You won’t have to,” he said, but Cullen knew when people were just saying things to make him feel better. In Dorian’s eyes he could see the same pity people had after Kinloch. So he nodded at Dorian and pushed his way through the slowly gathering crowd of people who were waiting for the Herald to wake up and went to find Cassandra. He was helpless to save Lillian. At the very least he could do something.

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Two days later, two agonizing days later, Lillian woke up for good, not the fluttering lashes and small murmured words of the in-between, but really really woke up. Cullen was across the camp, trying to put together a defense strategy for what amounted to a large collection of tents with no defensible position and half as many soldiers as he was used to working with. Even so, he could hear Luka’s delighted shouts of “Lilan, Lilan!”

Sera confirmed his suspicions when she passed his tent, and kicked the front flap in for a moment to tell him “not to mope about anymore, Herald is Heralding again.”

So he got up. Shoved his hair back into something resembling normal. Sighed. And then he walked to the healer’s tent, and pulled the flap back, revealing Lillian sitting up with Luka smiling beside her, and Dorian, Cassandra, and Leliana on her other side.

As Cullen walked in, Lillian turned towards him, and smiled a smile Cullen thought he didn’t quite deserve.

“I told you she’d wake up, Commander. If only to tell me that I have the wrong theory on fire magic and its use in healing.”

“He’s exaggerating,” Lillian said, and a knot of tension released from his shoulder when he heard her voice. “I would have haunted you to tell you that. When we get to-”

She stopped, suddenly remembering Haven’s fate.

“How many?” she asked in a small voice, and Cullen shook his head. Leliana answered for him. They didn’t know. Cullen’s head started hurting.

“We’ll ready the camp to move tomorrow,” Leliana said, and Lillian nodded. “Even if we don’t know where we’re going, we can’t hold the same position for too long. We’ll certainly get attacked,” Cassandra added as she followed Leliana out.

Dorian looked at Cullen and saw the pain of his headache and potentially more, and stood up.

“I’m going to get the book that proves me right and you wrong. If you’ll excuse me, Commander, Herald, Luka.” He left the tent with a smirk thrown at Lillian, who sighed.

The healers had all left, which Cullen was only just then noticing. And Luka had fallen silent, content to play with the amulet around his neck, one that looked slightly familiar, like the one Marian had worn. It probably was the same amulet, he reasoned, and then tried to think of something else to say, something to convey that he couldn’t imagine the Inquisition without her, couldn’t imagine his life without-

“Thank you,” she said, interrupting his train of thought. “For taking care of him.”
It took a moment for him to realize she meant Luka, all of his words seeming jumbled and unfit for how she was looking at him, with fondness, relief.

“Of course, Herald,” he replied, because it was the only thing he could think to say.

“Don’t ‘of course, Herald’ me. You could have delegated him to someone else, but he says you took care of him yourself. Thank you,” she said, ruffling Luka’s hair but keeping her eyes on Cullen.

He smiled softly at her, and nodded. “Of course, Lillian.”

She smiled a smile more beautiful than Cullen thought any nearly dead person should be able to smile and he left, mind still jumbled, but with the faintest thread of hope running through his thoughts.

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Sera was the most constant visitor to Lillian’s tent beside Dorian, as both women were bored much too easily by the monotony of staying in one place, stuck in one tent. When the path to Skyhold was decided upon, and the rest of the camp was finishing packing, Sera sat beside Lillian as she looked at map after map, trying to make sure that Solas wasn’t just pulling her leg. Not that he would, but she liked maps, and didn’t have much else to do until they left. All of her things fit into one bag, and among those things, two thirds of them were Luka’s. At this point she had her staff, a change of clothes Josephine had found for her, and what she was wearing when Corypheus attacked Haven.

“You’ve got to keep your things in an easy grab bag!” Sera said.

“I couldn’t have gone to get the bag even if I had had a bag,” Lillian retorted, and Sera sighed.

“Fine, fine. Where’s Little Shit gone?”

“You better not be calling him that to his face,” Lillian said, pointing to where Luka was running in circles around Bull, who was pretending to not be able to catch him.

“Nah, course I don’t. But after the snowball, I’m gonna call him whatever I want,” Sera said, and Lillian shrugged.

“I’ll tell him not to hit you in the face with snowballs anymore,” she said, but Sera shook her head.

“No, was brilliant, it was! Rather not be me, but any tricking I’ll support.”

Lillian smiled at Sera, and flung a handful of snow into her face, eliciting a shriek.

“If you weren’t frozen near to death, I’d bury you in snow til poor Cully Wully cries,” Sera hissed, and Lillian furrowed her eyebrows.

“Why would Cullen care?”

Sera flopped down onto her back with the biggest and most exaggerated sigh Lillian had ever heard, which attracted Dorian’s attention and got him to leave his discussion with Dalish that definitely wasn’t about magic.

“They’re being stupid,” Sera said when he approached, and he nodded.

“Aren’t they always?” he replied, giving Lillian a hand up from where she’d sat after throwing snow at Sera.
“Who are you talking about?” Lillian asked, hoping she knew and hoping they had more information on the subject than she did. Cullen was a hard man to read, unless he was embarrassed.

“Don’t play at being oblivious, Lillian, it doesn’t suit you. If I had gold for every time I saw Cullen look over here like Andraste herself was here, I’d have enough money to pay for Corypheus to stop attacking,” Dorian said, with a grin.

“I’m not playing at anything,” Lillian said, but Dorian groaned dramatically.

“Just sleep with him already, and then we won’t have to deal with this anymore. You’ll have gotten it out of your systems,” he said, and Lillian shook her head.

“They loooooove each other, Dorian, they’re not going to get anything out of their systems,” Sera chimed in, and then giggled. “Well, they’d get something out.”

Lillian shoved her.

“When you were unconscious, the man looked lost. Like someone had stolen his armor. You should have seen him when he carried you in—”

Lillian shoved Dorian too, cutting him off, and walking towards Bull and Luka.

“I hate them,” Sera said, and Dorian sighed.

“They’ll figure it out eventually. If it’s meant to happen, they’ll figure it out,” Dorian said, and Sera groaned and followed Lillian’s example by shoving him and leaving.
The walk to Skyhold was long, and rough. Made slightly rougher by the four year old Lillian carried on her shoulders, but even for those without a Luka on their back could feel how exhausting the walk was. And for Lillian, with the combination of recently recovering from hypothermia and carrying Luka, the walk was made almost torturous. But still, she walked in the front, leading the Inquisition to a home she really hoped was there.

So she kept walking. Her advisors walked beside her in shifts it seemed, as the moment one left to walk behind, another appeared. Cullen was the most attentive of them, as Cassandra mostly talked about how she thought Varric was hiding something, Leliana asked questions about potential weaknesses and blackmail opportunities in the Trevelyan line, and Josephine wrote while she walked and discussed potential alliances the Inquisition could create. But when Cullen walked with her, he would take Luka from her shoulders and move him to his, and walk a little closer to her than the others would. And he didn’t talk to her about the army, but about the rules of chess, and a book they’d both read a long time ago, and about Ostwick and how it compared to Kirkwall in terms of food.

Walking with him felt like a rest, in more ways than one.

She may not have been the most observant person, not compared to Sera or Varric, but she noticed when he smiled at her more than he’d smiled at anyone else since Haven, and how any time she stumbled he reached out to keep her from falling, while still making sure to keep Luka safe, and how whenever they stopped for water or to eat he lifted Luka down like he was his own kid, and Maker, now she was thinking about Cullen having kids.

A soldier brought Cullen a report, and he read it while Luka looked over his shoulder.

“What it say?” he asked, and Cullen sighed.

“The scouts say we are at least another day away from whatever this place is,” he replied, and Lillian all of a sudden couldn’t breathe, and she squatted where she stood and put her head in her hands.

“Lilan?” Luka said, and Cullen turned towards her, and seeing the panic on her face, he pulled Luka off of his shoulders in a single smooth motion, and crouched beside her.


She stood back up, as fast as she could. “I’m fine. I’m fine. Sorry,” she said, and he stood up more slowly and put a comforting hand on her arm. “Just, uh. Tired of walking.”

Luka took her hand and smiled up at her, and she resisted the urge to lean into Cullen’s breastplate and close her eyes, if only for a moment.

So instead she took the deepest breath she could, and shouldered her bag.

“Lillian,” Cullen said, his voice soft and low, and definitely more than friendly. “If there is anything we can do, that I can do…” his voice trailed off.

“I’m really okay.” she said, and even though she knew he didn’t believe her, he swung Luka back onto his shoulders and kept walking.
At the last stop before they reached Skyhold, Lillian set up her and Luka’s tent, got Luka to go to sleep, and then found some parchment, a pen, wrote a long list of things to do and went to find Leliana.

“I’m sorry to bother you, Leliana, do you have a moment?” Lillian asked.

Leliana nodded, and Lillian continued. “There aren’t many children with the Inquisition, and I’m concerned about Luka’s education and if something happens to me, who will take care of him. I was wondering…” but Leliana cut her off.

“The Chantry will take care of the boy, if something happens.”

“That’s not- when I’m on trips, I was wondering if you could teach him about the Chant? Dorian is going to teach him to read, the Iron Bull is determined to teach him some sort of self defense, and Josephine’s going to teach him Antivan, but I was hoping you could teach him about Andraste?”

Leliana hadn’t expected that, Lillian could tell, although the spymaster’s face remained still.

“Why me?” she asked, and Lillian took a second before responding.

“Luka thinks you’re cool. And as much as I trust the people here, I know things could go badly, and if Luka was with you-”

“People would be less inclined to try to come after him,” Leliana finished, and Lillian nodded.

“And you’re the only spymaster I know who is also very knowledgeable about the Chant,” she said, and Leliana smiled.

“Well, in that case, I’d be glad to,” she said, and Lillian sighed.

“Thank you so much!” she said, as a messenger started talking to Leliana, who smiled back and waved her off, so Lillian scratched off one of the items on her list and went to find Cullen.

It took a while, but she finally found Cullen sharpening his sword by a fire, and although it took a moment for her to stop thinking about the Templars she’d seen in the Circle doing the same thing, she walked up to Cullen quietly, but making enough noise to not startle him. He looked up when she approached, and smiled at her.

“Herald,” he said, and Lillian’s stomach flipped.

“Please stop calling me Herald. My uncle’s name was Harold, it’s weird,” she said, forcing fake lightness into her tone.

He nodded and kept smiling, despite a furrow in his brow that told her he knew she wasn’t as happy as she was trying to seem.

“Of course, Lady Trevelyan,” he said, and she groaned, but decided not to argue the point, he was probably joking. After a second glance at the smile on his face, he was definitely joking.

“I have a favor to ask you,” she said, and he looked at her and nodded again.

Maker, his gaze was steady and kind. She wanted him to look at her like that forever.

“I was wondering if you could teach Luka how to play chess.”

That surprised Cullen, and it took a moment for him to find a reply.
“Of course, Lady Trevelyan. Did he express an interest in chess, or-”

Lillian sat down beside him, and crossed her arms.

“I’ve arranged for Josie and Leliana and Dorian to teach him when I’m gone. I was hoping that you could teach him chess, and, uh, make sure he’s okay? He likes you, and you’re probably best equipped to know if something’s wrong-”

Cullen rested a hand on her arm, stemming the tide of nervous chatter.

“He will be the best chess player in Thedas,” he said, and she tried her best to ignore the heat of his hand.

“Thank you,” she said, and he smiled at her, with the same smile she only ever saw him give her. It took all her resolve to not reach forward and kiss him, so she looked away into the fire they were beside, and listened to the rhythmic whirl of the whetstone against steel and the crackle of the fire until she found herself drifting off and had to go to her tent to sleep.

And if she looked back to get one last glimpse of Cullen, before she went inside her tent, that was her business. And if she resolved to never forget how he looked in that moment, relaxed, touched by gentle fire-light, well. She was only human.
settling in at skyhold

The differences between Skyhold and Haven could fill multiple books, but the biggest difference Lillian could find was that Skyhold seemed to fit every member of the Inquisition like a glove, with different parts reflecting each of her advisor’s and inner circle’s personalities. The exception was her quarters, which were a blank slate of windows and a bed that looked original to the structure. Josephine was asking her how she wanted to decorate the room, but she couldn’t focus on the question with the light glinting off the windows, and Luka running up and down the stairs.

“Uh, I like blue?” she said, and Josephine turned and tilted her head questioningly.

“The color? This room is a just for you, you can decorate it however you want, surely you have more opinions than just blue,” she said, and Lillian blinked twice and turned to her.

“Yes, sorry. A desk?”

“Of course, a desk. The finest desk we can find!”

Lillian shook her head, then peeked in the two adjoining rooms.

“Just a normal desk, Josie. I don’t need anything fancy.”

Josephine groaned. “You sound like Cassandra. What about a better bed? Didn’t you have dreams as a child of how your room would look if you could design all of it?”

“I’ve always wanted one of those beds with curtains on the side?” Lillian said, smiling into the distance, as Luka yelled “Curtains!”

“I can acquire a bed with curtains,” Josephine said gleefully. “What color curtains?”

Lillian sighed and rested a hand on Josephine’s shoulder.

“Josie, I’m a Circle mage. My idea of style is an extra ribbon on a plain black robe. I trust your judgement on any and all things design.”

Josephine nodded, and smiled. “It will be lovely in here.”

“And childproof?”

Josephine raised her eyebrows, then scribbled something on her tablet. “Yes, of course.”

“Luka,” Lillian called, and Luka popped up from the top of the stairs.

“Lilan!”

“Where do you want to sleep, kiddo?” she asked, and Luka pondered for a moment, resting his chin on his hands. Then he pointed at the loft opposite the windows.

“I don’t know about that,” Lillian said, as she picked him up. “You’re not good at ladders, buddy.”

So Luka pondered again, and pointed beside Lillian’s bed.

“We’ll have a cot brought up for Ser Luka,” Josephine said, and he squealed.
“Say thank you, Luka,” Lillian whispered to him, and he echoed her with a resounding “Thank you Josie!”

Josephine smiled and nodded, and headed down the stairs. “This room will be magnificent,” she called up, and Lillian smiled again.

“Thanks, Josie!” she said.

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Lillian woke up when the moon was still high and bright, and the windows reminded her of her room at the Trevelyan estate, where the sun, moon, and stars had shone so brightly she never needed to light a candle. When the Anchor flared on her hand, she remembered who and where she was, and stood up from her bed quietly, careful not to wake Luka. When she woke up in the middle of the night, she could never go back to sleep, which had caused a number of midnight reading adventures in the Circle.

But as she very quietly pulled her boots on, and grabbed her coat because her nightshirt was thin and Skyhold was cold, she planned and resolved to learn the layout as quickly as possible so that she would never be seen getting lost.

So she snuck down the stairs and walked into the main hall, which was still covered in wood and debris, but much cleaner than it had been earlier that day.

She walked to Solas’ rotunda, then up the stairs to the library, and the rookery, and she nodded at the scouts who were still awake, and took and read the messages she was handed. She stole the quill Dorian had stuffed in a nook in the bookcase the floor below, and the paper he’d hidden under the seat of the chair, reminding herself to apologize and/or thank him later. She scribbled notes about the contents of the messages, reactions, plans, ideas, for almost an hour, before the third scout poked her head into the nook and asked if she was okay. She tucked the written on paper into the pocket of her coat, and re-hid the quill and extra paper, before she walked back down to the rotunda, and through the hallway going outside. And it took a moment, but she saw a light flickering in Cullen’s office, and no light in his bedroom.

So she pushed the door open.

And when she pushed the door open, she saw Cullen, asleep with his head on his desk, still holding his pen, in the middle of writing a letter or a report or something. She walked softly to the desk, and blew out the candle that was almost burned down completely, pulled the pen out of his hand, and didn’t flinch at all when he grabbed her wrist and shot up and awake faster than she thought possible.

He released her hand when it registered that it was her, not an intruder.

“I’m sorry, Herald, I don’t know what I was thinking,” he said, as he sat back.

“You should go to sleep for real, Commander,” she said, and he took a moment to blink the sleep from his eyes before responding.

“As should you, Lillian,” he said, and her stomach swooped at him using her name.

“I did already, now I’m awake again. But you fell asleep on your desk, and that means you’re exhausted. Go to sleep. The reports can wait.”

Cullen wordlessly handed the report to Lillian, and stood up with a groan as she read it.
“This is a report on the red lyrium in Emprise du Lion? From Scout Harding,” she said, as she read. “And rifts, and—” She took a breath. “Dragons. Great.”

He took off his gloves and rubbed the back of his neck. “I am trying to determine how many soldiers we can spare to aid with the rebuilding efforts, and if it is a waste of time to rebuild damaged buildings while the dragons are still at large.”

Lillian sighed as she sank into the chair opposite Cullen’s desk.

“Temporary housing? Fairly inexpensive but can be reinforced if it survives and if it doesn’t, it hasn’t been a big cost to the community or the Inquisition. And after the dragons are taken care of, we can fix the existing buildings,” she said.

“We have quite a few bridges to build as well, and the concern is that by sending so many soldiers to build, we will be weakening the defense of the rest of the region,” Cullen said as he removed his cloak and breastplate.

“Hm,” Lillian said, still studying the report. She pulled the paper she’d recently written on from her coat pocket, and unfolded it on Cullen’s desk. “I was wondering why we had so many soldiers in Val Royeaux, could we spare some from there?”

“Possibly,” Cullen replied, taking off the rest of his armor.

“And in the Storm Coast? I know there’s concern about darkspawn, but beyond that, maybe we could move some? Although…” she trailed off, folding the paper back.

“What?” Cullen said, stifling a yawn, which got Lillian to look up at him, seeing him for the first time without armor. He looked smaller, but no less strong. More human. He reached out and took the folded paper from her, unfolded it, and read what she’d written.

“They found the mayor of Crestwood?” he asked, looking up from the paper.

Lillian nodded. “Bringing him for judgement as soon as possible. I don’t know what I should do.”

Cullen turned back to the paper.

“Tell Dorian to eat his own hat?” Is that a euphemism?”

“No, just a joke I thought of. The hat’s the punchline.”

“This is a very specific list of places we have too many troops.”

“I try my best.”

Cullen smiled at her, and turned back to the paper.

“Tell Cullen to relax.’ You can cross that off your list,” he said still smiling, and Lillian felt her face turn red.

“You’re working too hard. You should delegate. You have a second in command, and a third in command, and I see both of them at the tavern entirely too often,” Lillian said quickly.

And Lillian couldn’t tell if he was smiling at her because he was tired or because he really meant it, but he walked closer, brushed a stray piece of hair out of her eyes, and put the paper back in her pocket.
“Thank you,” he murmured, closer to her than he’d ever been when she was fully awake.

“I worry about you,” she said, looking down at her shoes.

“Thank you,” he repeated, and reached past her to his armor rack where he hung up his sword belt.

He stepped away and moved to the door, which he opened, and kept smiling at her.

“You should sleep as well,” he said, and she walked out of the room.

“I’ll try if you try,” she said over her shoulder, and resolutely didn’t look back until she reached the rotunda door, when she saw the candlelight flickering in the second floor of Cullen’s room, and then the lights going out.
Lillian hated the Western Approach. It was hard to climb on the rocks, people had made ladders in inconvenient places, and every time she turned her back a new group of Venatori or raiders popped up, seemingly indifferent to the sun and the sand and the pure heat that Lillian couldn’t figure out a way to block. And of course, there was poison fog, which meant she’d have to ask her advisors to find a solution, which meant she would have to go back to the Approach at some point in the future.

She missed Skyhold, and the cool of the breeze coming through her open windows in her quarters. She missed Luka’s giggles at breakfast every morning as he played with his food before eating it. She missed talking with Josephine about the stupid things Orlesian nobles were demanding at Skyhold. She missed seeing Cullen’s ears go red when she said anything remotely flirty.

Maker, she missed Cullen.

As she picked herself up from her bedroll on the third to last morning before she returned to Skyhold, she shook her head as if to shake off thoughts of the handsome commander. But when she got out of her tent, a scout handed her all the reports that had come in overnight to Griffon Wing Keep, and she could no longer keep Cullen from her thoughts.

She sat down at a table to read the reports, one from Leliana on Scout Harding’s progress checking out the Dales, one from Josephine about Halamshiral plans, and one from Cullen about red templar movement in Emprise du Lion, following up on their conversation from a month and a half earlier.

When she reached the end of the letter, she couldn’t stop herself from breaking into a smile, because, like he had on the past twelve reports, he had included a report on Luka’s wellbeing.

Seeing her smile, Dorian snatched the letter out of her hands from behind her and started reading it aloud.

“‘Inquisitor, it pleases me to tell you that the red templars in Emprise du Lion have been effectively contained blah blah blah,’” Dorian said, and Lillian unsuccessfully attempted to snatch the letter out of his grasp. “‘Why were you smiling at this?’ he asked, before he saw the end of the report, written in a much more relaxed hand.

“‘Ah, I see. ‘Luka is doing well. He has finally learned how knights move on the chessboard, so our games are taking significantly less time, as I no longer have to explain every time he tries to move a knight. He told me yesterday that he misses you very much, and he asks every day when you are coming home.’ Oh, I bet the Commander asks that too,’” Dorian continued.

“Dorian, you’re the worst,” Lillian muttered, and Dorian just laughed.

“Luka asked if I was writing to you, and when I said yes, he asked me to tell you he wants a toy soldier like the one Matthew has. I do not know who Matthew is, but the soldier he described seemed fairly simple. If you come across one in your travels, Luka says he will give you a thousand cookies. I doubt that, but he will surely be grateful. Sincerely, the Commander of Your Heart, Cully.”

Lillian was unimpressed with Dorian’s addition. “He didn’t sign it like that.”

“I suppose not, but he didn’t put his title, he put his name! That’s something! Oh, your reunion will be just adorable,” Dorian said, and Lillian finally managed to grab the letter back.
“That’s normal, Dorian. On letters between me and the advisors everyone uses names, not titles,” she said as she carefully folded the letter and tuck it into her bag.

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Dorian was still muttering about how angry he was at the researcher who lured a dragon for fun, saying things like “stupid Frederic”, “result of Orlesian pretention”, etc. etc., even when they reached Skyhold almost two weeks later.

Lillian reached into the pack on the side of her horse, and pulled out the toy soldier she was going to give Luka as she saw him jumping up and down next to Cullen at the gates of Skyhold.

When she slid off her horse and walked the ten steps to where Luka was, she held her breath and kept herself from wincing as Luka flung his arms around her neck and managed to hit all the bruises on her body.

Cullen noticed. He was standing right there, and she could see him frown slightly behind Luka.

“Hey kiddo, a birdy told me that you wanted a toy soldier,” she said and Luka stood back, grinning.

“Did you find one?!” he asked, and Lillian held it out to him. He grabbed it excitedly but reverently, and squealed.

“He’s an Orlesian soldier, so he talks like this,” Lillian said, doing an impression of Orlesian accents that made Dorian snort behind her.

“His name is Frederic!” Luka exclaimed, and Dorian groaned and walked past them into Skyhold.

Lillian picked Luka up, and smiled at Cullen.

“Welcome back, Inquisitor,” Cullen said, and she could tell in the furrow in his brow that she wasn’t fooling him at all.

“Good to see you again, Commander,” and Lillian hoped she was getting across how much she really meant that. Her stomach was flipping again, the very pleasant flipping that she was certain to think about later, when she overanalyzed everything he had said.

After greeting the rest of the advisors, and taking the reports they gave her to read, Luka went to do his Orlesian lesson with Josephine, taking Frederic with him, and Lillian rested a hand on Cullen’s arm.

“Inquisitor? Are you alright?” he asked, and she smiled slightly at him asking even though he knew the answer.

“Dorian can’t heal for shit,” Lillian murmured, and Cullen bowed his head slightly in acknowledgement. “I can’t go to the surgeon or the healers, because I have to be the invincible Inquisitor, any chance you could walk with me to Vivienne’s balcony? I’m not confident in my ability to climb that many stairs and not trip.”

“Of course, Inquisitor,” Cullen said, and he readjusted her hand on his arm to support her more inconspicuously as they walked. “Luka beat me at chess yesterday,” he said after a moment.

Lillian laughed. “You let him win.”

“That is irrelevant,” he said, still resolutely staring forward with a smile creeping on his face.
“Thank you,” she said softly, and he nodded almost imperceptibly. “How are the soldiers?”

Cullen’s back straightened almost involuntarily. “Progressing. There was a meeting yesterday with the captains of each regiment that went well.”

“Good.”

And they walked through the main hall in companionable silence where each of them was secretly trying to think of what to say.

Dorian was already up on the balcony with Vivienne, and Lillian could hear them arguing about magical theory even a whole set of stairs down.

Vivienne shot a healing spell down at Lillian, seemingly without looking, that would have knocked her down the stairs if she hadn’t been holding on to Cullen’s arm. As it was, she slipped and grabbed Cullen’s hand as she fell backwards, and he pulled her into his arms to keep her from somersaulting down the stairs.

She let out a breath and let herself relax for a moment before she pulled away from the Commander’s embrace. His armor wasn’t as cold or hard as she thought it would be. There weren’t a lot of hugs in the Circle, and she’d almost forgotten what it felt like to be safe with someone, truly safe. Her head fell forward slightly to lean against his breastplate, eyes still shut from the fear of falling, and his arms tightened around her waist.

“Inquisitor,” he said quietly, and she felt his chest move and vibrate with the word. “Lillian,” he said, and she swore she could feel his heart beating faster, even through the armor.

“Sorry,” she said, as she found her footing again and leaned away. He didn’t let go of her.

“That was my fault, darling,” she heard Vivienne’s voice from above, but she didn’t turn. Instead she raised her eyes to meet his, and saw as best as she could tell, concern and care.

“Are you okay?” he asked, softly, urgently.

She nodded, and he seemed to realize that he had been holding on to her for a long time.

“Good,” he said, as he let go. “Good.”

He offered her his arm again, as if to reassure her that he did not regret holding her, that the warmth in her stomach and the fast and steady beating of her heart was mirrored in his, which made her smile as they walked up the final steps.
“He has a fever,” the healer said, sitting back from where Lillian and Luka sat, Luka’s arms around Lillian’s neck and his eyes barely open. “He should be fine in a few days, but if anything changes, bring him back.”

Lillian nodded and thanked her, then carried Luka up to his bed, tucked him in, and stationed a scout outside the door to get her if anything changed.

She took the steps down quickly and hurried over to Cullen’s office.

“I’m sorry I’m late, Luka wasn’t feeling well,” she said as she walked in, and Cullen didn’t look up.

“Fine,” Cullen said in a clipped tone.

That was not how he usually spoke to her, but she could move past it.

“I had a talk with the mages, and they mentioned decreasing the templar to mage ratio. They have a whole list of reasons, but-”

“No.”

Lillian paused. “I’m sorry?”

“We cannot decrease the number of templars guarding the mages.”

“Cullen, they have good reasons, and personally-”

Cullen looked up, and she took a step back at his furrowed brow combined with the dark circles under his eyes.

“I cannot discuss this right now, Inquisitor,” he said, and Lillian forcefully pushed her hair behind her ear.

“I believe you can, Commander. The mages are free, and they can request a change without being immediately shut down. They have good reasons, and on a trial basis-”

He interrupted her again, with slightly more anger in his voice. “I will not discuss this, Inquisitor,” he said, and Lillian forcefully pushed her hair behind her ear.

“I believe you can, Commander. The mages are free, and they can request a change without being immediately shut down. They have good reasons, and on a trial basis-”

He interrupted her again, with slightly more anger in his voice. “I will not discuss this, Inquisitor,” he said, and Lillian forcefully pushed her hair behind her ear.

“Cullen, are you being serious? Because I can and will pull rank.”

“Then as your Commander I will tell you that more templars are needed to control mages,” Cullen said, with something that Lillian thought was fury in his eyes, and that was the last straw, and without wanting to say something she’d regret, she threw the list of reasons the mages had given her on his desk and walked out, even though she did let herself slam the door on the way out.

If Cullen was going to be that way, she’d just avoid him. And maybe give Sera permission to pull some sort of prank on him.

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An apology appeared on her desk the next day, stating that he didn’t mean what he said how she thought he had, and he hoped she could forgive him, which was all well and good, but it didn’t quite
extinguish the little flame of anger leftover from the fire of fury.

The day after that, when she was still avoiding him, Cassandra mentioned offhand that Cullen hadn’t been sleeping the past few days because of his withdrawal symptoms, but that didn’t extinguish the anger.

The day after that, Luka was fully healed from his fever so she didn’t have an excuse to avoid Cullen in her quarters anymore.

Of course, because Luka was an adventurous four year old, she lost him at one point between a meeting with Dorian and a meeting with Josephine, and it was almost an hour before she could leave to find him.

She checked their quarters first, then the Rest, and then the garden, which is where she found him, and Cullen.

She thought about turning around and running, but Cullen had already seen her, and as much as she wanted to avoid him, he had already seen her. His face was turning red, which got Luka to turn around and see what caused his embarrassment, and when Luka saw Lillian, he giggled and waved her over.

“Lilan, sit down and play chess with me and -mander Cull-n!”

And who was she to ignore a grinning four year old’s invitation to ignore her Inquisitorial duties for a while?

So she sat down, ignoring the anger flaring back up at the sight of Cullen, remembering how she liked him and how this was the first time he’d done something that wasn’t kind and caring.

Luka sat on her lap, and excitedly picked up each one of the pieces and explained how they moved on the board. Lillian smiled at Luka, and resolutely didn’t look at Cullen, but as the game went on, it was harder and harder to ignore him. For one, when he spoke to Luka, it was as if Cullen was an equal, not a precocious and excitable four year old. He called Luka “Ser,” which he was under no obligation to do, and no matter what move Luka made on the board, Cullen found a way to encourage him. Even when it was obvious to her, and definitely to Cullen, that Luka had lost, Cullen took as long as possible to let Luka know that winning was out of his reach.

The thing that cooled the anger inside her completely was that Cullen let Luka win at least half of the games they played. And he did so without letting Luka know that he was letting him win. He would “forget” to move a key piece, or sacrifice his queen in what would normally be a trap.

Lillian let herself look at Cullen again.

With the knowledge of the lyrium withdrawal, and the kindness in his eyes as he taught Luka, and that swooping feeling in her stomach when she met his eyes, she decided to forgive him.

When Luka played his last game, and ran off to meet Josephine for his Antivan lesson, she was left sitting with Cullen, who was somewhat obviously hoping a messenger would summon him to go somewhere, but none came.

He had asked forgiveness, and she hadn’t done anything. It was her turn. She cleared her throat.

“I’m sorry,” she said, and Cullen’s face froze.

“For what?” he asked, and she took a breath.
“Cassandra told me you’d had a rough few days, I shouldn’t have pushed the issue, I’m just- I’m just sorry,” she said, hands limp on the table, heart stuttering in her chest.

He reached out across the table, to rest a hand on hers. “I should not have said what I did. I do not believe it, not anymore.”

Lillian smiled, and Cullen took his hand back and started rearranging the pieces to their starting positions, and Lillian resolved to show him, somehow, during this chess game, that she liked him.

And that she never wanted to be angry at him again.

And that he was totally welcome to hold her hand again.

So they talked about his family, her past, and she suggested talking more. And his smile gave her the swooping in her stomach again, and the feeling that she didn’t mind being a pawn in the Maker’s game as much as she had before.

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And then she saw Krem and Rocky tossing Luka back and forth, so she went to grab him before he broke his neck, making sure to throw one last smile Cullen’s way before she yelled for Krem and Rocky to put the kid down. Dorian sauntered up to the table as she left and grinned at Cullen.

“You let her win!” he said, and Cullen groaned. “You’re such a sap.”

“She won on her own,” Cullen replied, and Dorian shook his head and sat down.

“She’s terrible at chess. Truly awful. She was a researcher in the Circle, you know,” Dorian said.

“Yes, I know,” Cullen said, softly.

“She didn’t play a lot of chess. Do you need any more information about her? She talks in her sleep.”

“I knew that too.”

Dorian sat back. “How did you know that?”

“Luka told me.”

“Oh, right, you have the kid connection. That ought to work in your favor,” Dorian said.

“Please stop,” Cullen said.

“As enticing as stopping sounds, I think I will not.”

“Then I shall beat you at chess again,” Cullen said, and he did.

When Dorian was beaten, he leaned back and sighed.

“She was pretty mad about whatever you said,” Dorian said.

“Yes,” Cullen said, and Dorian couldn’t help but raise his eyebrows at his somber tone.

“But now you’re playing chess and smiling at each other,” Dorian continued.

“Yes.”
“So you apologized.”

“Yes.”

Dorian sighed. “Give me a little more detail, man, I’m starved for entertainment.”

Cullen chuckled. “I would not consider you starved for entertainment.”

So Dorian stood up, groaned, and flicked the king piece at Cullen and walked towards Lillian, hoping to get more details from her.
Lillian was trying very hard to flirt with Cullen. Really really hard. But here’s the thing, it was hard. For that matter, it was harder to flirt with him than it had been to flirt with anyone else. She flirted with Dorian all the time, and it was easy! The flirting there was entirely a joke, but still. She could flirt. It was possible.

Why it was so hard?

She knew why. She knew that it was because she liked him more than she’d liked anyone else, and there was this look in his eyes that made her feel like she’d fight through fire and ice and hell to see him happy. And that wasn’t the sort of thing she took lightly. So if she said anything wrong, made a wrong move or turn, she’d lose that. She’d lose whatever the potential future was with Cullen, she’d lose the flashes of future happiness that showed up whenever he brushed her hand with his or touched her arm to get her attention.

So there she was, leaning against his desk, waiting for him to stop training his soldiers and discuss potential troop movements with her. But he was late, so she poked her head out the door to see if he was walking up. Instead, she saw Josephine hurrying across the yard, calling Luka’s name.

“Josie!” Lillian said, voice fraying at the edges, and Josephine turned, going paler than she’d ever seen.

“Inquisitor! I’m afraid Luka did not attend his Antivan lesson today, and Dorian tells me he has not seen him this morning when he usually does,” Josephine said, and all thoughts of flirting left Lillian’s mind.

And that’s when Cullen finally arrived, all windswept hair and smiles, which faded when he saw the pure panic on Josie and Lillian’s faces.

“Commander, have you seen Luka?” Josephine asked, which was more than Lillian was able to do. She felt frozen in the worst way.

“I do not usually see him until the afternoon, no,” Cullen said, reaching a hand towards Lillian’s arm.


“We will find him. Did you check with Dorian?”

Josephine nodded, and Cullen turned towards one of the scouts passing by. “You! Come here! Have you seen the Inquisitor’s son?”

The scout shook his head, and Lillian groaned. “Check all of Skyhold. Ten scout team, highest priority. Whatever you were doing can wait,” Cullen said, and the scout nodded.

“Yes, ser,” the scout said as he jogged quickly to another scout and did what Cullen said.

“He could be with Leliana. Or she might know where he is,” Lillian said in a rush, and she ran
towards the tower, not conscious of Cullen following behind her. She sprinted up the stairs as fast as she could, not able to see anything other than the steps in front of her, and the list of enemies she had made as a result of being Inquisitor running through her mind.

“Leliana!” Lillian shouted when she was halfway up the last set of stairs. “Leliana, have you seen Luka?”

When she reached the top of the stairs, she saw Leliana looking questioningly at her from where she was meeting with some people who in the back of her mind she noticed seemed important.

“We can’t find him. Who would have taken him? Have you seen him?” she asked frantically.

Leliana shook her head, and Lillian pressed her hand to her own forehead, and tried to keep her knees from giving out. She turned around, ready to run down the stairs again, and saw Cullen blocking her path.

“Cullen, where would he-?” she started, and he rested a hand on her shoulder.

“We will find him,” he said, and that kept the panic from taking over her mind.

She gently pushed past him, ran down the stairs, and started to sprint down to the stables, when a scout shouted “Inquisitor!”

Lillian and Cullen turned in unison towards the scout, and Lillian saw out of the corner of her eye that Josephine was hurrying towards the scout as well, the scout who was holding Luka’s hand, leading him towards Lillian.

Lillian let out a relieved sigh, and sprinted towards him, with Cullen still following quickly behind.

She reached out towards Luka and pulled him close. “Maker, Luka, you can’t-” she took a breath. “Where were you? Where was he?” she turned to the scout.

“Stables, with Horsemaster Dennet,” the scout replied.

Lillian pulled away from Luka, still holding his arms in a vice grip. “Why were you in the stables, Luka? Why didn’t you tell someone where you were going?”

“I told Master Dennet,” he replied and Lillian sighed and laughed quietly at the same time.

“Kiddo, next time, tell me you’re going to go somewhere different. I thought-” and she stopped.

“What if you aren’t here?” he asked, and Lillian hugged him tight again, and looked up at Cullen from over Luka’s shoulder.

“Then tell Cullen,” she said. “And if both of us aren’t here, you tell whoever you’re supposed to be with so that you don’t scare them like you scared Josephine, okay?”

Luka nodded into her shoulder, and Lillian stood up, keeping a hand firmly on Luka’s shoulder.

“Thank you,” she said to the scout, who nodded and walked away, as Josephine and Cullen walked closer.

“If you did not want to do your Antivan lesson, you could have just told me,” Josephine said, and Luka shook his head.

“I didn’t know what time it was. I didn’t want to do my history lesson, but I like Antivan!” he said,
and Josephine laughed.

Cullen stood beside Lillian, and she resisted the sudden urge to lean her head against Cullen’s chest and sigh deeply. And then she resisted the second urge to pick Luka up and lean against Cullen and let Cullen wrap his arms around her and Luka, so that she could feel safer than she did at that moment. When she looked up at him, it looked like he was resisting a similar urge, his left hand twitching at his side, his right resting on her shoulder. He had the same look of relief in her eyes that she felt in hers.

“Can we do Antivan now? I was trying to talk to the Antivan horse but I didn’t know the word for hay, so I don’t think he understood me.”

Josephine nodded, and Lillian pressed a kiss to the top of Luka’s head and let him go with Josephine to her office.

Cullen kept his hand on her shoulder as her shoulders slumped with the aftershocks of relief. “I can’t,” she started, but couldn’t finish her sentence. She took a deep breath. “I can’t do that again. Someone has to watch him.”

Cullen nodded, and pulled his hand back with some hesitation.

“I can assign a soldier to escort him around Skyhold,” he said, but Lillian shook her head. “No, I—” She swiped at her eyes to keep the tears from streaking down her face. She pushed her hair behind her ear. “When I was a kid, I would run around with my brother, climbing trees, skipping lessons to ride horses, stuff of normal childhoods. I never felt like I was in danger. I was happy. He deserves the same thing,” she said, and she couldn’t stop the tears, so Cullen ushered her quickly into his office.

“I agree,” he said softly once she’d sat down, and she let out a sob and buried her face in her hands.

“He shouldn’t feel trapped, or like I’m worried about him. If I’m worried about him, he’ll notice, and then he’ll be worried about his safety, and he doesn’t deserve that,” she said, muffled through her hands.

He crouched in front of her, and pulled her hands from her face, and wrapped them in his.

“We will assign one of Leliana’s agents to shadow him. He will not know they are there,” he said, and another sob fought its way out of her.

Cullen’s heart felt heavy in his chest as he watched her try to pull herself together, and he wasn’t sure how to tell her that she didn’t need to be the Inquisitor in front of him. So instead he held on to her hands tighter, covering them completely in his.

“I’m sorry,” she said, and he wiped the tears off of her cheeks with the thumb on one of his hands, while she held tightly to his other hand, head still bowed, and she didn’t look him in the eyes.

“You have no need to apologize,” Cullen replied, in the softest and kindest voice he could manage, which Lillian was more grateful for than she knew how to express. “He is your son,” he continued, “You can be worried about him.”

Lillian let go of his hands, which Cullen didn’t know how to interpret, and flung her arms around his neck, burying her face in his shoulder. “You said he was my son,” she said into his neck. “No one else has said- I didn’t- I couldn’t-”
And it took a few more moments before he felt confident enough in his voice not shaking to respond, but he eventually did. “He is your son. Anyone who says otherwise is simply wrong.”

In response, Lillian clutched the fabric on the back of his cloak tight in her hands, and couldn’t bring herself to let go.

And until a scout knocked on the door, she didn’t. Even then she almost didn’t release his cloak, and it took her trying to blink away the tears twice before she could sit back in the chair and let him get up to get the door. She could see his eyes shining as he went, with what she thought were sympathetic tears.

The scout handed him a report and saluted before leaving, and she recognized her as one of Leliana’s agents.

Cullen set the report on his desk and turned back towards her, and gave her a hand to lift her up to standing.

He wasn’t wearing his armor, she noticed. He wasn’t encased in the hard metal that she’d come to associate with him working, being on duty.

“It’s being cleaned,” he said, answering her unasked question. He looked softer without it. No less strong, but more like the person she knew beneath the armor.

“Are you alright?” he asked softly. And she finally met his eyes, for the first time since she had felt that fear of losing Luka- had it only been fifteen minutes before?

“I care for you,” she said, and his eyes crinkled at the edges, and the small amount of terror that ran through her spine wouldn’t let her figure out what emotion he was showing. “And I’m a mage, and you were a Templar, and you’re good to Luka, and you’re so much kinder to me than I deserve.” She took a breath as his hand went instinctively to the back of his neck. “Could you, um. Could you care for me? Despite my magic?”

Cullen moved his hand to reach for hers, and murmured quietly, “I can. I do. And not despite your magic, I care for you. All of you.” And seeming to run out of the right words, he pulled her closer, mouth ghosting over hers, until another knock interrupted them.

The same scout from before walked into the room, and Cullen pulled back, startled.

“Commander, I apologize, I gave you the wrong report,” the scout said, before she looked up and saw the Commander standing just a little too close to the Inquisitor. Lillian turned her head to the side, not wanting to make eye contact with the scout, out of embarrassment-? Something. Something she couldn’t quite name.

The scout left as quickly as she had come in after a well placed glare from Cullen, and Lillian moved to leave, put the whole thing behind her, wait a week before speaking to Cullen and hope that they’d be able to be friends again.

But instead, he pressed his lips to hers quickly, firmly.

And when she got over her surprise, she kissed him back, eyes fluttering shut, arms wrapping around his neck. She hadn’t been kissed many times before, only once or twice by fellow mages in the Circle, but she knew that this wasn’t a common kiss. It wasn’t a kiss of convenience, or lust, or even just a kiss to prove a point.

The first press of lips was to show her he cared, yes. But then he kissed her with all of the care and
love he’d been holding back ever since they had met, trying to show her with every movement that he would never hurt her, that he valued her, that he loved her. His hands reached up to cradle her face, and the gentle press of the pads of his fingers on her jawbone made her smile against his lips, and he pulled away slightly, keeping their foreheads touching.

“That was-” Cullen said as Lillian opened her eyes to see his flushed cheeks.

“Perfect,” she replied, and a thrill went through her when he smiled. “I think we should do that more often,” she said, and he chuckled softly.

“As you wish,” he said, and she kissed him again.

Chapter End Notes

I redid the first kiss scene FIGHT ME.
Dorian was a talkative drunk, Lillian had learned. And as she was finding out, that didn’t stop when Luka was around. He’d been talking for an hour, ever since she and Luka had collected him from the tavern, and he had only just managed to avoid saying something inappropriate.

“He’s being purposefully obtuse,” Dorian said from Lillian’s couch as she pulled Luka’s nightshirt over his head.

“I doubt Bull is being obtuse, Dorian, he’s probably just teasing you,” Lillian replied, and Luka jumped up and down on the bed.

“I’m sure he knows what’s going on,” she continued, after a dramatic groan from Dorian.

“What’s going on?” Luka asked.

“Dorian wants to hold hands with Bull,” Lillian said, and Dorian groaned again.

“It’s more complicated than that, but yes, I suppose,” he said.

“Bull said he wants to hold hands with you! Well, he said something else but I don’t know what it meant and he wouldn’t tell me,” Luka said.

“That’s probably a good thing,” Lillian said, as Dorian took another swig from his wine bottle. “You probably should stop drinking. It’s way past Luka’s bedtime, which means it’s way past wine time.”

“Do I have to go to bed? I want to keep talking to Uncle Dorian!” Luka said, and Lillian lifted him up onto her shoulders and carried him to his bed.

“Don’t think so, kiddo. Dorian’s gonna go to sleep soon too,” Lillian said, to which Dorian scoffed and muttered “I think not.”

But any argument they might have gotten into ended abruptly when there was a knock at Lillian’s door.

“Who-?” Dorian said, and Lillian let go of Luka and walked to the door, peered through a tiny hole in it, and then grinned and opened the door.

“Uncle Bull!” Luka yelled, and Dorian fell off the couch.

“I heard you had a Vint that needed relocating up here,” Bull said, grinning at Lillian. She waved him inside, and Luka sat up and grinned at him as Dorian frantically tried to sit up in some semblance of style.

“Make sure he doesn’t puke on himself on the way to his room,” Lillian said, as Bull helped Dorian up.

“Of course, Boss. Won’t let him puke on me either. Do you have to bring the wine, Vint?”

Dorian nodded, and Lillian could see his eyes drifting shut.
“Night, Dorian!” Luka said, and Dorian managed to murmur a goodnight as Bull pulled one of the mage’s arms over his shoulder.

“Night, kid. Night, Boss.” Bull said, throwing an impossibly fond look at Dorian as he helped him out of the room.

The next day when Cullen brushed her hair back from her face in the mountain wind, and she smiled at him, she saw Luka, out of the corner of her eye, grinning at the both of them.

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“Commander Cullen.”

Cullen turned from his desk to the door that had opened slightly.

“Hello, Luka,” he said to the boy who had walked in.

“You like my mama,” Luka said, voice matter of fact.

“I do. Is that okay?” Cullen asked, as Luka pulled himself into the chair across the desk from Cullen.

“I think so,” Luka said. “You make Mama smile. And I like when Mama smiles.”

Cullen set his pen down and leaned closer to him. “I like it too,” he said.

“A lot of things make Mama sad. She doesn’t think I can tell, but I can.”

Cullen nodded, not quite sure where Luka was going with this speech.

“She got a letter that made her really sad. And since I make her happy and you make her happy, I thought we could work together to make her really happy,” Luka said, pushing a piece of paper across to Cullen.

“Luka, where did you get this?” Cullen asked, not opening the letter.

“Mama’s room. She threw it away, but I got it before she burned it. I know what it says.”

Cullen sighed, and flattened the letter out, still not reading it.

“I do not think Lillian would want you to read this, Luka,” Cullen said as he pushed the letter back to Luka.

“If you won’t read it, I’ll tell you. Mama’s mama wrote and said that her and Mama’s papa weren’t going to ‘knowledge that Mama was their family,’” Luka said solemnly, and Cullen’s hand clenched into a fist under his desk.

“Of course she did,” Cullen muttered. “Still, you should not read your Mama’s letters.”

“I know,” Luka said, and Cullen thought he looked a little guilty. “But it made Mama cry. And I don’t like when Mama cries. Especially when she won’t talk to me about it. Or Dorian. Or you.”

“Thank you for telling me Luka,” Cullen said. “But I am not sure that there is anything we can do about it.”

“Well, if her mama and papa won’t say she’s family, then we should tell her she’s family. She’s my
mama, and I want her to be happy. And you make her happy. So you should do something,” Luka said.

Cullen smiled, and nodded. “Are you here for chess, or to plan?”

“Chess. You can plan. I’m only four.”

“Almost five,” Cullen retorted, as Luka pulled the chess board off of the bookshelf where it rested. Luka laughed, and Cullen smiled as he tried to think of something to make up for losing so much family.

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“I refuse to go to the Hinterlands again. If I see another damn bear, I’m going back to Ostwick and leave Ferelden to rot,” Lillian said, finally back in Skyhold before leaving for Halamshiral.

“I’ll take that under advisement, Inquisitor,” Leliana said with a smile, stacking the reports on her desk neatly. “This is what you missed, at least, the most important reports. Everything else I shall tell you at the meeting tomorrow morning.”

“Thanks,” Lillian said as she took the reports and moved to leave, then turned back to Leliana.

“Luka was good, while I was gone?” she asked, and Leliana nodded. “And we can take him with us to the Palace? I don’t want to leave him on his birthday.” Leliana nodded again. “Thank you,” Lillian said, and walked towards the stairs again.

“The Commander wanted to speak with you!” Leliana called after her, and Lillian waved a hand at her.

“On my way there now!” she replied, not seeing the grin creeping onto Leliana’s face.

Lillian stopped by Dorian’s corner of the library to return a book she had borrowed, noticing the conspicuous absence of the man himself, which she assumed was due to Bull’s returning with her. She continued down the stairs, then headed through Solas’ rotunda to Cullen’s office.

It was getting dark outside, and the sun was just barely peeking over the higher walls of the fortress. The sky had turned a soft shade of pink that distracted Lillian for a moment as she walked, but knowing that the smile waiting for her in Cullen’s office would be just as beautiful, she kept going.

Before opening his door, she shoved Leliana’s reports into the bag at her side, just careful enough to not wrinkle them. Then she pushed the door open, and poked her head in, then walked fully into Cullen’s office, jaw dropping as she did so.

Cullen’s desk had been turned into a dinner table, with a delicious looking spread of food covering it instead of the usual maps and lists.

And the Commander himself was climbing down his ladder, without his armor, dressed in a soft shirt and pants, hair escaping from its normally tamed state.

“Cullen, what is this?” she asked, a little bit breathless.

He smiled, and pulled the bag off of her shoulder, and set it down gently beside the door. Then he wrapped his arms around her, pulled her close to his chest. “By order of your advising council, you are relieved of work for the next twelve hours. I thought you probably had not eaten, so I took the liberty of getting dinner. Is that okay?”
Lillian pulled her head back from his chest and smiled at him radiantly, and rested her hand on his cheek. “Oh, Cullen,” she said, and she buried her face in his chest again. “Thank you,” she said, and he smiled into her hair.

“Anything for you, my dear,” he murmured, and she wrapped her arms around his neck to press light kisses to his neck.

“I would show you how grateful I am, but all I’ve eaten in the past two weeks has been bad biscuits, so I’m very excited for whatever it is you’ve got here,” Lillian said, and Cullen smiled.

“I requested what Luka said was your favorite meal,” Cullen said as they went to sit down. “And, since I know you are wondering, Bull and the Chargers have decided to teach him wilderness skills, so they are taking him camping in the garden tonight.”

“So it’s just you and me,” Lillian said, and he reached out to take her hand over the table and nodded.

After they ate, Cullen led Lillian up the ladder to his room, where they sat on his bed and read reports.

“You know,” Lillian started, then paused.

“Hm?” Cullen asked.

“As much as I’ve enjoyed the dinner, I think I like this more,” she said, as he wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

“Do you?”

She snuggled closer to him. “Being here with you, even doing work, it’s better than anything else,” she said, and Cullen could feel warmth grow in his chest, and he pressed his lips to her forehead.

“Definitely better than closing rifts. And better than killing demons. And also better than walking through the damn Approach.”

“Better than training new recruits,” Cullen added, and Lillian smirked.

“Better than talking to Orlesians.”

That made Cullen laugh outright, and she kissed him softly, both smiling against each others mouths.

“I love you,” Lillian murmured when she pulled slightly away, forehead still touching his.

His breath stuttered slightly, but he didn’t pull away. “I love you too,” he whispered, and he kissed her again, less softly, more hungrily.

“I love you, I love you, I love you,” he said between kisses.

She pulled back after about ten kisses. “I have an idea,” she said, and he wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her onto his lap.

“Let’s never leave here again.”

Cullen smiled. “A fine idea, Lady Inquisitor. At the very least, we could stay here until we leave for Orlais.”
“Oh, see I meant forever. Rest of our lives,” Lillian said, and Cullen smiled again.

“Ah, of course,” Cullen said, kissing her again.

A moment passed, and almost exactly when his hands began to move lower than her waist, and her hands started making circles on his back, they heard the door swing open in the office below them.

“Mama? Mama, are you here? Mama, I hurt my knee!” Luka shouted, and Lillian moved off of Cullen’s lap and started to descend the ladder.

“I’m here, kiddo. What happened?” she said, as she found her son standing with a completely raw and bloody knee, with tear tracks running down his cheeks.

“I fell down on the garden path and the Chargers were out of bandages and so I came here,” he said in a rush, and Lillian lifted him to sit on Cullen’s chair.

“Cullen, do you have bandages?” Lillian called up to Cullen, as she wiped the tears off of Luka’s cheeks.

“Yes. Give me a moment.”

“I can heal your knee, and then we can put the bandages on to make sure it doesn’t get infected. Is that okay, Luka?” Lillian said, and Luka nodded while Cullen climbed down the ladder.

Lillian pulled gentle healing magic to her fingertips, and the flesh on Luka’s knee slowly knit back together. When she was done, Cullen handed her a jar of elfroot salve, and a small stack of bandages. Lillian carefully applied the salve and pulled the bandages around it, then smiled at Luka.

“Better?” she asked Luka.

“Yes, thanks Mama,” he said, and hugged Lillian.

“Do you want to go back with the Chargers?” she asked him.

“I dunno. Maybe?”

“Well,” Lillian said, as she lifted him up to her hip. “Have you had dinner?”

Luka shook his head.

“Then let’s go get dinner for you and decide after that, okay?”

He nodded, and Lillian glanced at Cullen. “Would you care for a kitchen adventure, Commander?”

Cullen smiled and held the door open for Luka and Lillian. “I heard they made pies today,” he said in response, and Luka giggled.

The kitchen was deserted when they arrived, but they managed to find enough food for Luka, and when Cullen held Lillian’s hand under the table, it was just enough comfort so that he could ignore the edge of a headache that was creeping up on him slowly. He’d deal with it later.

Chapter End Notes
I wrote this fic entirely so that I could write Cullen being a good adopted dad scenes, so there'll be more of those coming up!
They were halfway to Halamshiral, and Lillian was sick and tired of traveling. When she traveled with her party, it was her and three of her friends on horses, going however fast and in whatever direction they wanted. But traveling as the Inquisitor with a “retinue” (made mostly of the Chargers and twenty or so hand picked soldiers and scouts), meant sitting in a carriage for hours, while they took the slowest possible route to get to Orlais.

The only good thing about it was that she could spend more time with Luka than she had in a while, or at least she thought, as he was trapped in the carriage with her. However, after about twenty minutes, the novelty of the carriage ride ran out, and he ended up sleeping on his side of the carriage, leaving Lillian with no one to talk to. When they stopped for the first time after three or so hours, she grabbed the first person she could find to talk to and pulled them in the carriage, who ended up being Dorian.

“I’ve missed our chats, Lady Trevelyan,” he said with a smirk, as Luka settled against her and dozed off again.

“We’re doing official names now Lord Pavus? If so, I request that you call me by my full title,” she joked.

“I don’t know your full title, I think it’s changed several times since I last heard it,” Dorian said with a grin. “Lady Lillian Trevelyan Rutherford…?”

Lillian gave him a dead stare.

“Or is it Lady Lillian Rutherford Trevelyan? I could understand why Cullen would want to take your name-”

She set his sleeve on fire.

After a nearly imperceptible shriek, Dorian put the fire out and glared at Lillian.

“Being happy has made you mean,” he said, and she grinned.

“Sleeping with Bull has made your jokes worse,” she retorted, and he scoffed in fake affrontedness.

“Well, I never-!”

Dorian pulled a book out of his bag and settled down to read it, but after about a minute of fake reading, he looked back up at Lillian.

“You’re happy?” he asked, and the sincerity was more plain in his voice than Lillian thought it had ever been. “You’re both happy?”

She nodded, edges of her mouth lifting up almost without her consent. “Very,” she said softly.

“He has very conspicuously not said anything about you to anyone else for about two months, so people outside of the inner circle are starting to notice, I think.”

Lillian smiled. “I heard someone placing a bet with Varric about whether or not we hated each other.
I think we’re doing too good a job at keeping it quiet.”

Dorian chuckled. “Of course Varric took that bet. He saw you two holding hands at the Rest last week.”

“He’s going to make a lot of money with insider information. I should issue a ban on betting on my personal life just to save everyone time and money,” she said, as she smoothed Luka’s hair. “When you and Vivienne were arguing and she shot a healing spell at me and nearly knocked me down the stairs, but Cullen caught me, what was going on? I’ve never seen healing spells used like that,” Lillian asked, reaching for her own book she’d brought.

Dorian smirked, and twirled the end of his mustache conspiratorially.

“I thought you and Cullen could use a bit of a push, so I may have created an argument with Vivienne about spirit magic theory when I knew you would be coming up the stairs,” he said.

Lillian snorted and shook her head.

“Well, thanks, I suppose.”

“Any time, Lady Rutherford.”

She set his sleeve on fire again.

---

Lillian had asked Krem to take Luka with him on the second day of travel, because he had refused to sleep that night after sleeping all day in the carriage. Josephine took the opening in the carriage as an opportunity to go over etiquette with Lillian until she wanted to turn back around and tell the Orlesians to hang.

Of course, that wasn’t really an option. But Maker, would it have felt good.

“And Master Luka, he won’t be joining us at the dance, correct?” Josie asked, for the fourth time, and Lillian shook her head.

“He wouldn’t enjoy the ball, and assassins make me nervous. So no.”

Josephine nodded, and there was a knock on the door to the carriage and it stopped, and the door opened cautiously.

“Commander, is everything alright?” Josephine asked.

Cullen nodded, and extended a hand to Josephine to help her out of the carriage.

“We have reached our camp for the night, and I believe the Inquisitor is tired of talking of Orlesian pomp and manners,” he said, smirking slightly.

“Oh, no, I could talk about Orlais and the Game for years!” Lillian said sarcastically, but without any mean spirit.

“I can take a hint, Inquisitor,” Josephine said with a smile, as Cullen gave Lillian a hand out of the carriage.

“Your tent is over here, my lady,” Cullen said in a quieter voice, and Lillian didn’t let go of his hand.
“Where is yours? Just in case of an emergency?” she asked, and grinned at him.

Cullen raised his eyebrows. “Right beside yours,” he said, and held her hand a little tighter. “Did you bring a warmer cloak? It’s rather cold here, and we cannot have a ball with a frozen Inquisitor.”

“Trevelyans don’t freeze. We are slowly covered with frost until we very politely stop breathing.”

“Ah, of course.”

“It’s a time honored Marcher custom,” Lillian said, unable to keep herself from smiling as wide as possible at him.

“Whatever you say, my dear,” he replied, with a look of such fondness that Lillian couldn’t keep herself from kissing him, even in front of whoever happened to be around.

When she pulled away, his look of love had only intensified, and she felt like she was going to combust from the warmth in his eyes.

“Keep looking at me like that and Varric is going to win quite a few bets,” she said, and Cullen simply smiled, and led her to where he had set up a command table, just far enough away from the Chargers and soldiers without being weirdly far away. He took his cloak off and wrapped it around her, and pointed towards the map.

“We are here. It should take approximately three hours to get to Gaspard’s mansion, and then we leave for the ball the next afternoon.”

“Sounds good. You remember tomorrow is Luka’s birthday?”

He nodded. “Of course. Bull mentioned that he was going to give him a knife for his birthday, and I convinced him that that might not be the best idea.”

“Thank you,” she said, and then took his hand from where it was resting on the table and wrapped it in both of hers. “Cullen. Your hands are shaking.”

He shook her hands off, and moved some papers around on the table. “I’m fine.”

“Cullen,” she said softly. “How bad is it?”

“I shall endure,” he said, as he’d said many times before.

“Can I help?” she asked, and he shook his head. “Would you tell me if I could?”

He didn’t move for a moment, and then nodded quietly. “It could be much worse.”

“Ride in the carriage with me, tomorrow? If Josie’s going to make me sit in there, at least I can give you a moment to rest.”

And under the table, he took her hand again, and smiled at her. “As you wish, Inquisitor,” he said, and she knew what he meant was “I love you.”

When he stepped into the carriage the next day with her and Leliana, under cover of planning scout rotations at the palace, and he fell asleep against her shoulder and holding her hand, she couldn’t keep from grinning at his sleeping form even when Leliana lightheartedly mocked them both.

“I see why you pick Cullen’s ideas most at the war table, Inquisitor. Would you pick mine more often if I were falling asleep on your shoulder?” the spymaster asked, with a smirk.
“You know perfectly well you take more missions than anyone,” Lillian retorted, and both women grinned, as Cullen slept on obliviously.

“Has it been getting worse?” Leliana asked.

“He hasn’t been telling me.”

Leliana nodded. “I’m sorry.”

“It’s hard to leave, knowing that anything could happen. I mean, it’s hard to leave anyway, but-” she sighed. “I know he won’t tell me if something is wrong. He’ll want me to not be worried or distracted.”

“If something happens, you’ll know,” Leliana said, and Lillian nodded.

“I know. And thank you.”

“Of course, Inquisitor. Lillian.”

---

Luka was playing with the miniature chess set Cullen had given him, managing to play both sides, while pretending that the Marcher wooden soldier Lillian had given him was his opponent.

Lillian was unpacking Luka’s things and setting out his pajamas for that night, as well as trying to figure out if the cake stains would come out without needing to wash them until they got back to Skyhold.

And Cullen was having a withdrawal attack.

There was a knock at Lillian and Luka’s door, and Lillian took a moment before answering to cast a barrier over her and Luka.

Then she pulled the door open, and Cullen fell forward into the room.

“Lillian, I-” he said, and that was all he managed to say before she caught him, and the barrier shattered.

She managed to get Cullen onto the bed, and Luka stood up, scattering the chess pieces all over the floor.

“Luka, pick the pieces up and put them in your bag, okay?” Lillian said, and he nodded and did so. “Go to my bag, and get the blue pouch and bring it to me.” He grabbed the pouch and handed it to Lillian, who took it from him and turned back to Cullen, and then turned back to Luka.

“Is Papa going to be okay?” Luka asked softly.

“I’m fine-” Cullen said, before he groaned in pain involuntarily, and Lillian could tell that Luka didn’t believe him.

So Lillian took a moment to grab both of Luka’s hands, and look him dead in the eyes. “Cullen is going to be fine. He’s just not feeling good right now. But he’ll feel better soon. I promise.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Do you mind if he stays with us tonight?”
Luka shook his head.

“Thank you, kiddo. Now why don’t you go get your pajamas on?”

Luka nodded, grabbed his pajamas, and left to find the washroom and Lillian turned back to Cullen.

His eyes were glassy, and fluttering open and shut, and it took a moment for her to figure out what to do.

“Cullen, I’m going to use healing magic to alleviate the worst symptoms, is that okay?”

He muttered a yes, and she focused on casting the best healing spell she could think of, cursing herself for not learning more.

His brow unfurrowed slightly, and she pressed her lips to his forehead. “Better?” she asked, and he nodded.

“I need you to sit up, okay?” she said, and he did so with a groan of pain. She pulled him forward so that he was leaning against her, and handed him some elfroot from the pouch.

“Chew and swallow this,” she said, and he shoved the elfroot in his mouth and started chewing. His head kept leaning against her shoulder, and she cooled off her hands as much as she could without hurting him, and she massaged the back of his neck.

“Any better?” she asked softly, and she listened for the soft “yes” that he breathed, followed by an even softer “thank you.”

They stayed like that until Luka came back in and looked questioningly at Lillian, who nodded.

“It’s okay, Luka. You can come here.”

Luka climbed up onto the bed, and put a hand on Cullen’s arm.

“Are you better, Papa?” he said, and Cullen pulled back from Lillian’s shoulder to smile at Luka. “I’m fine,” Cullen said, and he almost looked like he believed it.

Luka flung his arms around Cullen’s neck, and Cullen patted his back gingerly.

“Luka, buddy, you need to go to bed, okay?” Lillian said, as she noticed it getting harder for Cullen to keep the pain off of his face.

Luka jumped off of the bed and onto his own small cot. “And happy birthday, kiddo,” Lillian said as she tucked him in.

“Night, Mama. Night, Cullen,” Luka said and he turned over and started to try to go to sleep.

Lillian walked back to Cullen and let him rest on her shoulder again, and he wrapped his arms around her waist loosely.

“I’m sorry,” he said into her shoulder, and she rubbed his back soothingly, and kissed the crown of his head.

“I love you,” she said softly, and his arms tightened around her waist. “Thank you for coming to me.”

He picked up her pajamas from where they sat on the bed and pressed them into her hands.
“You should-” he said roughly, and it registered in her brain that he was already wearing his pajamas, or at least, more comfortable clothes than his normal armor.

She handed him a cup of water, and told him to drink it while she went to the washroom and changed quickly.

When she came back, he was looking at least a little bit better than he had been.

“Are you going to try to sleep?” she asked, and he nodded as she sat down on the other side of the bed, ran her hands through her hair one last time, and lay down, to which he responded by laying down beside her and curling protectively around her.

It was the first time anyone had slept that close to Lillian who wasn’t family, and she knew at that moment that no matter what happened, he was the only person who she ever wanted to sleep that close too again. She laced her fingers through his, and shut her eyes, after thinking a quick prayer for pain relief for him to the Maker, but she didn’t actually fall asleep until she heard his breathing even out in sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took so long! I just started a new job, so my free time has been basically nonexistent, but that shouldn’t affect posting too much.
“I should be taking it.”

Lillian pressed her lips together, not daring to move.

“Cullen,” she said, quietly. His shoulders slumped more. She waited a minute. “Cullen.”

He didn’t move, it looked like he was frozen, waiting for Lillian to do something. So she did. She walked towards him, slowly and gently, and pushed on his shoulder to turn him towards her. He didn’t meet her eyes and his head hung low.

She says his name again, softly, with a hand under his chin lifting his face to where his eyes met hers. “Cullen.”

“I should-”

“You should do what you believe to be right. I trust you. I want you to be happy, whatever that means.”

“And if it means lyrium?”

His eyes searched hers.

“I trust your decision,” she said. “But Cullen,” she rested a hand against his cheek, “I can find another commander, if you think not having lyrium impairs your decisionmaking. I cannot find another Cullen Rutherford, who I care for. I cannot find another person to love like I love you. And-”

She stopped for a moment, took a breath.

“I don’t want you to regret anything. And I worry that if you take lyrium again, you will regret it, and I will lose you,” and she pressed her head into his shoulder.

Cullen looked at her and his mouth raised slightly in a smile.

“My darling. My dear, darling, Lillian.” She looked up at him. “Has anyone ever told you that you have a knack for saying exactly the right thing?”

He pulled her close for a moment, kissing the top of her head, until she pulled away slightly to look at him.

“It hurts?”

“Yes.”

“Badly?”

He paused for a second, as if to consider what he was going to say, but his face cleared and Lillian could see the pain.
“Yes.”

“Like before the ball?” she asked, mentally comparing the man standing in front of her with the one who had collapsed against her door.

“Not yet. But rapidly heading that way,” Cullen said, and Lillian’s brow furrowed with concern, and she sighed, and looked behind him to the bookstore for a moment.

“I can send a messenger down here in ten minutes, telling you there’s a very important emergency in my office. And then you bring lots of reports and maps to my quarters and you can take a break and I’ll mix together every pain reliever I can think of and you can take off that armor which looks ridiculously heavy.”

She can see Cullen start to shake his head, start to tell her that she doesn’t have to do that, that she has more important things to do, and she doesn’t let him finish his thought. She wraps her arms around his neck and tries to ignore how warm his forehead is as he rests it on her shoulder.

“You don’t deserve to just endure. You deserve to live and be happy, and not have to deal with this pain alone. You never have to deal with this alone, Cullen. Never. You’ve got a whole team of people who love you and want you to be okay. I happen to be the team captain, but we’re a pretty big group.”

He smiles into her shoulder.

“Alright,” he said, and after a moment she pulled back and went to do as she had said, with a parting kiss to the forehead for Cullen.

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“Mama, what’s wrong with Cullen?”

Lillian sighed, put down her pen, and looked across her desk to her son.

“He’ll be okay,” she said, as Luka climbed up onto the chair across from her and started setting up his chess set.

“He’s sleeping in your bed,” Luka said, and Lillian nodded, glancing over at the sleeping Fereldan.

“He was tired, and if he’d tried to sleep in his office, someone would have woken him up.”

“So, he’s hiding,” Luka said questioningly.

And Lillian didn’t know how to respond to that. Because, yes, he was, but-

How was she supposed to explain lyrium withdrawal to a five year old?

“He’ll feel better soon. He just needed to sleep,” she said, hoping that was enough to satisfy Luka.

“I know there’s something else, Mama. I’m smart.”

Lillian sighed. “It’s hard to explain, buddy. And Cullen should probably be the one to tell you. But kiddo, he’s going to be okay. He’s just not feeling great right now, but he’ll be fine.”

And when Luka nodded and dropped the subject, she tried really hard to believe it herself.

---
She woke up around two in the morning, and for a moment she couldn’t place the weight on her waist, and she couldn’t figure out where she was. Then she heard Luka’s soft snoring in the corner, and felt the familiar calluses on Cullen’s hand around her waist, and she blinked twice and reached for the curtain on the side of the bed. Luka was still there on the other side, still sleeping, and she let the curtain go as she felt Cullen moving beside her.

“Is everything alright?” he asked, in a tired soft voice, and she nodded at him as he touched her cheek, and she could see his eyes were clearer and less red than they had been earlier that day.

“Feeling better?” she said softly, and he laid back down and pulled her against his chest.

“Much,” he said, and she breathed in his scent and enjoyed the feeling of the soft bed below her and the blankets covering her and Cullen. She wasn’t in the Approach, with sand blowing against her tent, she wasn’t freezing in her tent in the Emprise, and she definitely wasn’t in the Circle, where she had been lonelier than she’d ever been.

She was safe. She wasn’t alone. She wasn’t freezing half to death. And she was with her two favorite people, in a blue bed with curtains.

“I feel like this could be a dream. Like being here with you is too good to be true,” she softly, and he kissed top of her head.

“I know what you mean,” he murmured, and she listened to his heartbeat, steady and strong. “I am afraid that I will wake up and be back in Kinloch. That all of this will have been that damn demon showing me what I want most in order to break my mind.”

Lillian’s voice was soft and happy when she replied, despite the darkness of both of their statements. “This is what you want most?” she asked, tilting her head to look up at him.

“A life with someone like you? Friends? A family? I did not think I deserved anything as good as this.”

She kissed him, and he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her back, with a focus and passion that he hadn’t had for the past week or so.

When he pulled back, she smiled at him, an incandescent smile that he returned.

“If this is what happens when you’re well rested, I’m going to write an Inquisitorial order that says you have to sleep for twelve hours a day,” she said, and he just kept smiling and caressed her cheekbone, and she relaxed beside him.

“Some of the new recruits started predicting my mood based on how long you have been gone. Apparently I conduct the most difficult training routines when you have been gone for over a week but less than two weeks,” Cullen said.

She laughed, and then covered her mouth with her hand and listened for Luka’s continued snoring. She let out a sigh of relief when she could tell he was still sleeping.

“I think Dorian has a similar schedule based on how much I make everyone walk,” she replied, more quietly. “We walk more and faster the closer we get to being done wherever we are. Really, the closer we get to coming home.”

“To me?” Cullen asked, smirking slightly.

“You’re part of it, I suppose,” she replied, pressing her face into his chest.
“Whatever you say, my dear,” he said. And as her eyes drifted shut, and his breathing evened out, she heard the wind whistling in the windows, and she felt completely safe. Maybe everything won’t go to the Void. Maybe.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so I hate that after the lyrium conversation you just leave? so uh, I changed it.
¯\_(ツ)_/¯
She couldn’t stop thinking about the red templar. They had left Emprise du Lion and were almost back in Skyhold, and she couldn’t stop thinking about the damn red templar, and what he had said before he died.

He had chosen red lyrium instead of following Imshael’s orders. He had sacrificed himself in order to slow down a demon.

It wasn’t that that was an uncommon decision; she’d seen small acts of heroism everywhere. But that templar stuck with her.

Cassandra had noticed, she’d been the only other member of the party to hear the templar’s words. She’d seen the look on Lillian’s face when what he was saying registered, the small hope she had had of saving him crushed when he collapsed.

Lillian had hoisted the Inquisition flag to a crowd of cheers only a moment later, but her face had stayed solemn, and she knew Cassandra knew why.

It wasn’t until they were a day away from Skyhold that Cassandra approached her near her tent, as she went through dozens of missives from her advisors.

“Inquisitor. May I speak with you for a moment?” Cassandra asked, and Lillian nodded, unsure what the cause of the extra formality was. Over their many trips, she and Cassandra had bonded over their bad taste in books, and Cassandra had started calling her Trevelyan, if not Lillian.

“I wanted to ask- You had been- Maker. Since we captured the keep, you’ve been in a strange mood. I thought I’d ask if everything was alright.”

“I’m fine, thanks, Cassandra,” Lillian said, and Cassandra sat down beside her.

“Trevelyan. Since that red templar died you haven’t made eye contact with anyone. It has been a week since you have laughed at one of Dorian’s awful comments about Bull’s ass. Something is wrong. What is it?”

Lillian set down her notebook and the missives.

“He chose something he knew would kill him rather than do something he knew was wrong,” she said, staring at the fire in front of her. “He could have lived but he knew it wouldn’t have been right.”

“And that reminds you of Cullen,” Cassandra said. It wasn’t a question.

Lillian nodded, and met her eyes.

“He’d take lyrium in a second if it meant it would be certain we could defeat Corypheus. You know he would.”

“Yes.”

“I don’t know how to say that I don’t want him to sacrifice himself for the world. I don’t know how to articulate that losing him is more of a nightmare to me than losing everything else,” she said, and her head fell into her hands. “It’s selfish, but I just-”
“You love him,” Cassandra said.

“Yes. Very much.”

Lillian shook slightly, and Cassandra rested a hand on her shoulder.

“It’s incredibly romantic, I think. You not wanting to sacrifice him for the world,” Cassandra said.

“Not very good Inquisition strategy, though,” Lillian responded, and she picked up a letter from Leliana. “I wouldn’t be a better Inquisitor without him. I wouldn’t make clearer or better decisions. But if someone asked me to sacrifice him or the Inquisition—” she took a breath. “I would do the right thing. I would save the Inquisition. But I wouldn’t be able to live with myself after that.”

She rubbed at her eyes. “I just need to see him. I miss him. It’s been almost a month,” she said, and Cassandra nodded.

“I’m sure he will be excited to see you. As will Luka.”

Lillian smiled. “Yeah. Ugh, I miss Luka too. Part of me just wants to ride to Skyhold right now.”

“I do not think your horse would appreciate that,” Cassandra said, and Lillian laughed.

“Probably not.”

They sat for a moment in silence.

“Thanks, Cassandra.”

“You’re welcome, Lillian.”

When they could finally see Skyhold, Cassandra didn’t say anything when Lillian made the trip faster than they ever had. She didn’t say anything when Luka ran towards the horses and Lillian just swung him up onto the horse in front of her and kept going towards Skyhold. And when they reached the gates of Skyhold, and Lillian’s face broke out into a giant smile when she saw Cullen leading drills in the yard, Cassandra took it upon herself to glare at anyone who looked like they were thinking of making a comment.

Lillian carried Luka on her back as she made her way to Cullen’s office, trying to look at least a little casual, as Cullen tried equally hard to look casual going the same direction. When she got into the office, she set Luka down and tossed her bag onto the desk and her staff into the corner of the room. Cullen opened the door and smiled at her, and she didn’t wait until the door was closed to fling herself at him, arms around his neck and face pressed into his fur mantle.

“It’s good to see you too, Inquisitor. How was Emprise du Lion?” Cullen said, and she would have laughed at his casual tone but his armor looked so much like the armor the red templar had worn and she couldn’t keep tears from springing to her eyes. Cullen seemed to notice, and he hugged her closer and waited.

“Cold. It was cold and we fought so many damn demons and I missed you so much,” she said quietly.

“I have a new room now! It’s right below yours and Cullen helped me put Ferelden banners in it!” Luka said, and Lillian let go of Cullen’s neck and held onto his hand instead, all the while pretending she didn’t have tears in her eyes in order not to worry Luka.
“That's great, kiddo! Did you move your bed and everything?” she asked, and Luka nodded.

“It's really cool!” he said, and Cullen squeezed Lillian’s hand questioningly, and she shook her head.

“You want to show me? Then we can meet Cullen for dinner?” and Luka grinned toothily and grabbed Lillian’s other hand and pulled her out of the office.

When Cullen went to the mess hall, he saw Lillian and Luka sitting with Dorian and Luka waved him over the second he saw him. Cullen sat next to Lillian, and she leaned against him slightly, not enough that anyone could notice, but enough that he could feel.

They finished dinner, and Cullen walked with Lillian to the council meeting as Luka went off to shoot at dummies with Sera, but Cullen and Lillian didn’t actually make it to the war room. They were close, they’d gone through the main hall and Josephine’s office, but something in the way the light of the setting sun hit Cullen’s armor made Lillian start to cry, so he poked his head into the council room and asked to postpone the meeting.

“What is it?” he asked, when he crouched in front of her.

“The red- the red light. You looked like- there was a demon, a ‘choice spirit’, who had gotten this huge following of red templars. He gave them the choice of doing what he wanted them to do or taking red lyrium. We killed the demon and fought the red templars who were too far gone, but there was one-”

She sniffed and swiped the tears from her cheeks.

“There was one who still had his mind, but the red was killing him. He said he’d chosen lyrium rather than do the bad things the demon had wanted.”

The pieces started to click into place for Cullen.

“He looked like you. He looked like who you could have been if you weren’t here,” she said, and the dam broke and she started truly crying, face in her hands.

He pulled her close as her sobs shook her harder and harder.

“I'm here, Lillian. I'm here, and you're here, and we are both alive,” he murmured into her ear, and it took a moment but she nodded through her tears.

“Cullen, if anything ever happens-”

He shook his head.

“Dear-” he started, but she squeezed his hand.

“You know how much I love you, right?” she said shakily, and he took both of her hands and nodded.

When she leaned into him a moment later, she sighed.

“I think I’m sleep deprived,” she joked, swiping tears away from her eyes, and he rubbed her back slowly.

“The council can wait, Lillian. It’s late. You can sleep,” he said, and she lifted a hand to his face and touched his cheek softly, running her fingers over the circles under his eyes.
“You need sleep too,” she said, and he stood up, pulling her up with him.

“Of course, Inquisitor,” Cullen said, and Lillian grinned at him, tears still coating her face. “And you know how much I love you, right?”

She kissed him, and the image of the red glint of the light on his eyes faded enough so that she could wrap her arms around him, and make a joke as they walked up to her quarters.

The worry would keep for later.
Lillian had always wanted to meet Divine Justinia. She didn’t think she’d meet her in the Fade. She definitely didn’t think she’d meet a spirit masquerading as her.

Not a bad way to die, getting your expectations turned upside down. The longer she was in the Fade the less she thought she would get back, and without fail her thoughts strayed to Cullen. She’d never see that horrible fur collar again, never make Cullen smile with a joke and then kiss him when he was still smiling, never feel the way he changed from the Commander to Cullen under her lips and her hands, or the rough calluses on the pads of his fingers and how delicately he held her hands in his.

“We’ll get out of here, it’ll be fine,” she said, as Sera threw a punch her way.

“Bullshit.”

“We have to keep moving, Sera,” Dorian added, and Sera flipped him off.

“Give me half a second, asshole Vint.”

Dorian scoffed, but his heart wasn’t in it, and he chugged a restorative potion. She could see Bull looking at him, looking like he had been since he’d become Tal-Vashoth, with more softness and care than was appropriate for Hisrad.

She stood up from crouching in front of Sera. “We’ve got maybe half a mile to go. And then we’ll be out, and it’ll be fine.”

“Yeah, keep telling yourself that. We’re gonna die in here,” Sera said from the ground, but then she stood up, and Lillian clapped a hand on her shoulder.

“You get me out first, alright?” Sera said, and Lillian nodded. “Then let’s go kick some ass.”

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He had yelled at the soldier who’d told him.

“Inquisitor Trevelyan is inside a fade rift.”

He’d felt bad about it afterwards. But he didn’t apologize. Couldn’t form the words or complete the thought.

As soon as he could, he’d run to where the rift was, still flashing, but only a horrible crack in the air, not a demon portal, at least, for the moment. Leliana and Cassandra met him there, and talked about how to possibly close the rift if the Inquisitor didn’t make it out. If Lillian didn’t make it back.

He didn’t add anything to their conversation. Didn’t think he could add anything. All he did was stand and wait.

The rift popped open hours later, Cullen still unmoved. Rylen was trying to give him water and food, but he stood still, hands gripping the hilt of his sword so tight he was glad for his gloves covering his bone white knuckles.

Sera came out first, with Dorian and Iron Bull following quickly behind her, and Hawke after them. But still Lillian didn’t appear.
“She was right behind us, I don’t know-” Dorian started, still breathless from running, clapping a hand on Cullen’s shoulder, but as he said that Lillian fell through the rift.

He ran towards her, as she closed the rift from the ground, and then passed out.

“Lillian!” Cullen said in a strangled voice, rusty from being silent for hours, and he ran towards her, then scooped her up as gently as he could. He could see dozens of injuries, even with her armor still on, and with every drop of blood he saw he could feel hope draining from him, only exacerbated by her closed eyes and limp frame.

Her eyes fluttered open slightly as he brought her towards the healers. “Cullen,” she murmured, and his heart clenched.

“I’m here, Lillian. I’m here,” he said, as a healer ran up to them with bandages and glowing hands and he set her down on the cot. After a moment where the lyrium left in his blood ached in time with the worry in his heart, the more superficial of her wounds sealed and the healer sat back.

“She just needs rest, and a restorative. She’ll be fine, Commander,” the healer said, as a few feet away Cassandra started asking Hawke where Stroud was.

But against the healer’s protests, Lillian tried to sit up. “I told Stroud to stay,” she murmured, as Cullen eased her back onto lying down the bed. “He’s dead because of me,” she said, volume growing as tears streamed down her face.

The healer pushed a potion to her lips and she drank it quickly.

“It’s my fault,” she said, sobbing, and Cullen gathered her up and hugged her to his chest, ignoring the hundreds of Inquisition soldiers watching them, ignoring any thought of keeping their relationship quiet. He wiped the tears from her face, and pressed his forehead to hers.

“You’re safe,” he murmured, and held her gently as she cried and clutched his fur collar closer and closer to her, not letting go.

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It wasn’t until they got back to Skyhold that Cullen could see Lillian relax, they’d taken the fastest horses and traveled nearly non-stop, despite Lillian and her party’s lack of health.

The official reason was that they were needed at Skyhold, but the real reason, for Lillian, at least, was Luka. They had heard of rumors that Lillian had died at Adamant, and despite that not being the case, she was worried that Luka would hear and worry. So when they finally arrived in Skyhold, four days after they left Adamant, Cullen didn’t mention the bruises still showing on Lillian’s arms, or the tears in her mage’s armor, or the scars left from hasty healing.

He just helped her down from her horse, smoothed her hair back, and went to his office, preparing for her to find him later that night.

When she didn’t, he didn’t worry (much), just went to sleep, and felt a spark of worry ignite when he woke up the next morning and she still had not come by.

He walked to the War Room, intending to see if anything major had changed while they had been gone, but instead he found Lillian there, eyes still fatigued, looking like she’d stood at the table the whole night.

She didn’t look up when he walked in, just sighed, and let her shoulders fall.
“He didn’t hear the rumor,” she said, and he nodded. Luka had not had to fear the death of another mother. So why was she not asleep? Why was she not looking better, happier, anything?

“Couldn’t sleep,” she said, in answer to his unspoken question, leaning heavily on the table. “Did you?”

He nodded, and she finally looked up, and a ghost of a smile appeared on her face as she saw how rested he looked.

“I’m glad,” she said softly, turning back to the map, and pushing a small marker across it.

He was still frozen, not sure of what to do, how to help, but he pushed himself forward to stand beside her.

“Whenever I close my eyes, I see the spiders. And I can’t-” her voice broke, and she clamped her jaw shut, refusing to let out a sob.

Cullen was glad at that moment that he hadn’t put on his full set of armor, because it meant he could pull Lillian to rest against him, and she could hear his heart beating and feel the warmth of his chest.

“I’ve tried reciting the Chant, going over good memories, everything, but I still can’t sleep,” she said, with a sob stuck in her throat, and Cullen ran a hand up and down her back to try to keep her from getting hysterical.

He forgot sometimes, how young she was. How little of the world she’d experienced before the Inquisition. She’d gone from being a Circle researcher to being a mother and a world leader all at once.

And so many days, she would stand so tall and strong, letting everyone hold onto the image of the Inquisitor.

“It will pass, I promise,” he said softly, and she tightened her grip on his shirt momentarily, then let go and stood back. She swiped at her eyes and smiled at him, and even though the smile didn’t reach her eyes, it gave him some hope.

“Luka wants to show me everything he’s learned while I was gone today,” she said, and Cullen nodded. “He said you had had your time with me, and it was his turn.” She smiled again, and he held a hand out to her, which she took. “Didn’t know how to tell him that I haven’t been much of a companion the past week.”

Cullen shook his head, ready to contradict her, but she continued. “I haven’t said more than a few sentences each day, I know that’s not pleasant to be around. And I’m sorry. Once I can sleep, it will be-”

She trailed off, and then tried again. “I love you,” was what she finally settled on, and after she said it, she pressed a kiss to Cullen’s cheek. “I’ll be better soon.”

“Can I stay with you tonight?” he asked, and she nodded.

He would try to keep her there, convince her to sleep, but he knew she couldn’t, or wouldn’t, one of the two. So instead he watched as she squeezed his hand again and walked out, shoulders still slumped, still walking with a little bit of a limp from riding so hard on a twisted knee.

He’d stay with her that night, and hold her until she fell asleep.
Lillian stopped talking after the Arbor Wilds. Sure, she’d say what was necessary, ask questions, run
the Inquisition as normal, but the regular chatter she kept up, the jokes and smiles, were gone.

Luka, as he always had, would tell Lillian stories about what had happened to him while they ate
dinner with Cullen.

“And then Master Dennet let me ride the hart for a while to prove that I could do it so Andy would
believe me!” he said, jumping up and down in his chair.

“Master Dennet let you ride a hart?” Cullen asked, and Luka nodded excitedly. “That is- that is
probably not safe.” He looked at Lillian for backup, but instead of smiling and assuring Cullen
someone had been watching over Luka, she just reached out and smoothed Luka’s hair.

“Was Jimmy riding with you?” she asked after a moment, still not smiling, eyes still barely focused
on Luka.

Luka nodded, and then after a moment, when Lillian smiled halfheartedly and told Luka to be safe,
he tugged on the sleeve of Cullen’s shirt. Cullen nodded at him, but how could he tell Luka that his
mother was feeling a horrible hopelessness he couldn’t change.

After dinner, after she’d read Luka a story and gotten him to sleep, after Cullen had sparred with
Cassandra until they had both been sweating and had a few new cuts on their arms, after he’d bathed
and put on soft clothes to sleep in, he’d climbed the stairs to Lillian’s room and found her poring over
letters and plans and defenses.

“I’m sorry about dinner,” she said, standing up when he reached the top of the stairs, and he shook
his head.

“There is no need to apologize. You are under horrible pressure-”

“That can’t be an excuse, I can’t be a shitty mother to Luka, and a shitty partner to you-”

“You are not a shitty mother or partner-”

“Luka rode a hart and the best I could say was ‘was Jimmy helping?’ I can’t even ride a hart, he’s
five he shouldn’t-”

“Lillian, stop-” Cullen tried, but Lillian cut him off.

“Don’t make excuses for me, Cullen, I’m not being a good person. All I can do, maybe, is be an
okay Inquisitor. I can’t-”

And he saw tears starting to fall, and she crumpled into her chair, elbows on her knees, face in her
hands, shaking with sobs. “I can’t do this, Cullen,” she said softly between sobs. “I can’t-”

He walked over to her slowly, and knelt beside her chair. “And I said I could not stop taking
lyrium.”

She met his eyes, and nodded. “You were wrong,” she said after a moment.
“And you are wrong now,” he said, and brushed the tears from her cheeks.

When waking up he’d press kisses to her face to wake her, or smooth her hair behind her ear to soothe her after nightmares, or lift Luka onto the bed to sleep between them whenever he’d have a nightmare. His own nightmares were nearly forgotten with the power of Lillian’s, as he’d almost grown used to the screams of the Kinloch Circle appearing every night. But Lillian hadn’t had nightmares before this, not to the extreme she now experienced.

Cullen couldn’t get out of her what the dreams were. When she would wake up in a cold sweat, shaking with horrible fear in her eyes, he’d hold her like she’d held him when his nightmares were worse. He’d carry her to bed when she’d spend too much time pacing, unwilling to go to sleep, and ignore her tossing and turning all night until the Fade finally claimed her, keeping his arms wrapped around her securely, so she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was there. On her better days, she’d wake up in his arms and smile at him— a ghost of her former smile, but a smile all the same.

But then the Breach opened again. And Cullen watched as the mark on Lillian’s hand roared back to life, and Lillian fell to her knees in a horrific combination of pain and fear—

Maker, if he could do anything to take the pain from her, to take it upon himself, all the consequences and death and doubt, he’d take it, just so she’d never make that face again, so she’d never feel the feelings that went along with that face ever again.

But he couldn’t. He couldn’t take the pain from her. So he did the next best thing he could think of, he kissed her quickly and handed her her armor, whispered his love into her ear, and promised with shaking hands he would take care of Luka. He could feel in the tightness of her grip how close her heart was to breaking, the stuttering thump of her pulse fast and scattered against his.

But he had to let her go. He had to hold Luka back from running to her, had to comfort his cries as he watched another mother leave him, possibly for the last time.

He had to wait, and watch the ground rise up and the sky explode, and the Breach finally shut, with no way of knowing if it had shut with Lillian outside of it or lost inside the Fade. Everyone else was cheering in relief, but he and Luka and the rest of Lillian’s friends—no, family—were standing and waiting and hoping that maybe this victory could have been won without them losing someone they love.

“Cullen,” she had said a few nights before, after they’d had yet another war room meeting about possibilities. “I got you a birthday present the last time I was in Val Royeaux. It’s in my desk, in the bottom drawer. There’s one for Luka in there too, another wooden soldier. If I don’t make it—”

She had trailed off, and he’d turned to look her dead in the eyes and wait. She tried again, swallowing hard then speaking, even more softly, “I want you to be happy, Cullen. More than anything.”

And he couldn’t think of a way to tell her that she made him happy, that without her he could never be as happy, that he’d love her until he could do nothing,

And then he could see her. He could see her walking towards him, limping slightly, arm at the wrong angle, covered in blood (hopefully not her own), but walking. Alive.
His whole body relaxed in relief, with his armor the only thing keeping him upright. Luka grabbed his hand and pulled him towards Lillian, and all Cullen could do was follow, as hope gave the world color again, with the only one missing being the awful green of the Breach and the Anchor.

Luka ran into Lillian’s arms, and pulled Cullen with him, but Cullen didn’t immediately grab Lillian, he first checked her over for gaping wounds or obviously broken limbs, but she shook her head at him and smiled a radiant smile.

“We’re free,” she said, and kissed him fiercely, teeth bumping against his because she just couldn’t stop smiling. “We’re free.”

And that was when he could unclench his hands and pull her and Luka close to his chest and kiss her again.

They were free.

Chapter End Notes

And that's the main game! I might post some Trespasser and post-Trespasser related stuff, but this part of the story is done. It's been a pleasure writing for you. Hope you liked it!

End Notes

I've got most of this written, and I'm going to try as hard as I can to update regularly. Enjoy!

Title from Joanna Newsom's song "Anecdotes" because I'm a sucker for poetic lyrics.

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