Filling Quiet Spaces

by WritingEmi

Summary

Dorian is trying to get back into dating, but his hopes and plans are derailed as he finds himself drawn in by a wonderful Qunari couple that he meets, Adaar and the Iron Bull.

Or, a modern Thedas fic where Dorian finds himself in the middle of a Qunari sandwich.

Notes

I've always wanted to do an Iron Bull/Dorian/Adaar fic. This is the result.
The quiet murmur of chatter and the clinking of glassware filled Dorian’s ears as he slowly meandered through the art gallery with a flute of champagne in his hand. His eyes briefly scanned the oil paintings resembling abstract vallaslin, but the bright and colorful artwork against the stark white backdrop of the walls did little to hold Dorian’s attention. His brain hardly registered the paintings as his nerves chewed away at him. Instead of appreciating the artwork, he was hyper aware of the squeak of his shoes upon the floor, the tug of his tight, black button up shirt, and the unfamiliar feel of the contacts against his eyes, making him long for his glasses.

Dorian knew that he looked impeccable, he always did. He never left the house in anything that could be considered shabby and that night was no exception. That evening before going out, Dorian took special care to dress well, his clothes, hair, and makeup were all done up and chosen to allure. Not that it did much good.

It was over half an hour into the gallery opening and Dorian was already approached by two women. Both were friendly, flashing pretty smiles and delightfully engaging in their conversations. Dorian was flattered as he always was and he did enjoy flirting with women in general, but he took caution to be upfront with his lack of romantic interest and the women were both gracious in that knowledge, soon leaving Dorian on his own.

There were plenty of men at the event, but every time Dorian saw someone of interest, he found that his feet were suddenly leaden and his throat became dry. Any desire to flirt shriveled up and he pretended to be interested in a painting whenever someone noticed his staring. It used to be such an easy dance and years ago Dorian wouldn’t have felt a second of hesitation in approaching a man, but he was long out of practice. That ease and grace that allowed him to talk to anyone was now replaced with awkwardness and knots of anxiety that twisted him up into something almost unrecognizable.

Dorian’s eyes took in the crowd again and caught Ellana Lavellan’s gaze from across the room where she was standing with her husband, Cullen Rutherford, who was chatting happily with the Hawke twins. His friend smiled encouragingly at Dorian and he had to resist the urge to go to her side, to sink into the comfortable cocoon of conversation with his friends and to ignore everyone else. There was a simple comfort in hanging out with Lavellan and Cullen, an old routine that Dorian could do without thinking and without putting himself out. The urge to give up and fall back upon his friends was strong.

Letting a small sigh puff from his lips, Dorian squeezed his left hand, feeling the plain silverite ring on his middle finger dig into his other digits. It gave him a small boost of confidence to not slink over to Lavellan’s side, to avert his gaze from the temptation of familiar company, and to continue trying to catch the eye of an interested man. Years ago, Dorian could draw a man in with just a smile, so he was sure that he could something as simple as introducing himself to someone.

Scanning the room, Dorian saw a man whose physical appearance ticked off several boxes for him. A tall, strong looking Orlesian man with fine blond hair and striking hazel eyes was lingering not
far from Dorian at the bar and Dorian found the Orlesian man’s smirk and laugh pleasing. From what Dorian could see, he had no rings on his left hand and he didn’t appear to be with anyone.

Several long minute passed where his nerves made him waver, but finally firm resolution overtook Dorian. He had to speak to at least one man that night and he decided it would be the handsome Orlesian. His spirits were rallied and he shifted his weight to start walking over to the bar when Dorian was suddenly interrupted by a firm wall of muscle colliding into him. Despite being a tall man with a solid build, the surprise and the force he was hit with made Dorian trip over his feet. An undignified squeak shook out of him as Dorian lost balance, his glass of champagne tumbling out of his hand and shattering upon the polish hardwood floor.

A pair of strong arms wrapped around Dorian’s waist to keep him from tumbling over like his glass and large hands splayed against his back as a hurried voice blurted out, “Oh Maker, I’m so sorry! I wasn’t watching where I was going! Are you ok?”

Dorian opened his mouth, though no noise came from him as he stared up at the face of the Qunari holding him. The Qunari was shockingly gentle looking, his horns were curled backwards into a loop and bracketed the sides of his face, there was the faintest smattering of freckles across the bridge of his nose, and his wide, clear green eyes were fixed on Dorian. A sudden tightness enveloped Dorian’s chest and his brain helpfully shut down, all previous thoughts of the handsome Orlesian man had quickly vanished. The only thoughts occupying Dorian’s head were circling around the searing warmth of the Qunari’s massive hands on his back.

Taking a step back and letting those strong, distracting arms fall away from his body, Dorian tried vainly to compose himself and swallowed in an effort to bring some moisture back into his mouth and throat. With a flush creeping up his face, Dorian answered ungracefully, “Oh, um, yes, I am, I’m ok.”

“Let me get you another drink,” the Qunari insisted, earnestness coloring his voice and reaching out to make amends.

“It’s ok, I was almost done anyway,” Dorian declined politely, somehow managing to get his wits together to make a coherent reply. “You actually did me a favor, the champagne they are serving is absolutely dreadful.”

“It is, isn’t it?” The Qunari took Dorian’s complaint with amusement.

“Quite, that’s probably why they’re handing it out for free.”

“I wager it’s not even Orlesian,” the Qunari teased, “it’s probably just a sparkling Free Marcher wine the gallery got on wholesale.”

“More and more scandalous!”

A smile curled on the Qunari’s lips. “What would you prefer to be drinking?”

“That wine looks tolerable,” Dorian nodded to the glass of red wine in the Qunari’s hand, which thankfully did not slosh out during their collision. It would be a great pity to stain the jewel blue dress shirt the Qunari was wearing, striking against his light grey skin and fitted well enough to emphasize his muscular arms and chest. Dorian’s mouth instantly went dry again.

“Then let me get you one.”

“I—” Dorian was about to refuse again, but stopped himself short. “Yes, that would be lovely, thank you.”
The smile on the Qunari’s face widened and he made his way to the bar while Dorian stood rooted in place. While being nearly knocked over was embarrassing, their exchange thus far was encouraging, though Dorian realized belatedly that he didn’t get the Qunari’s name. Dread filled Dorian at the thought that the Qunari withheld his name on purpose and used the excuse of getting a drink as a pretext to escape Dorian and his sharply defined Tevinter features.

But a quick glance over at the bar confirmed that the Qunari was in line and he even looked over his shoulder as if checking to make sure that Dorian was still there. Dorian managed a weak grin and pretended to look at the artwork, but was really trying to catch Lavellan’s eyes. When his eyes met his friend’s, she absolutely beamed at him and she even gave him a thumb’s up, which just made Dorian flush even more.

The Qunari soon returned and handed Dorian a glass of red wine, their fingers briefly brushing, the pads of the Qunari’s fingertips were lightly calloused and dragged wonderfully over Dorian’s soft skin.

“I hope you’ll find this a little more palatable than the champagne.”

A sip confirmed the Qunari’s hopes as Dorian reported, “It’s a decent Orlesian merlot, far superior to the champagne. I’m glad that they’re not serving for what passes for wine in Ferelden.”

“They were, but you look to be a man of finer tastes.”

“I certainly am.”

“I’m Kaaras Adaar, by the way,” the Qunari held out his large hand to Dorian, finally introducing himself. “Most people call me Adaar.”

“Dorian Pavus, a pleasure.” Dorian took the offered hand and his heart very much sped up at its heat and sheer size as it enveloped his own. The handshake was firm, but not exceedingly so, and it lingered a second or two longer than necessary. “What brings you to this gathering?”

“The artist is a colleague of mine at Skyhold University, we’re professors in the same department, and I promised to come to her show.”

“Oh? What do you teach? Art?”

“Maker, no! I couldn’t draw a straight line to save my soul, my colleague does this as a hobby, though I see it has become quite a passion for her,” Adaar shook his head with obvious amusement. “We’re in the magical studies department. I’m a mage, I study and teach theoretical rift magic.”

Dorian tried to keep the grin spreading on his lips under control. A mage and a smart one at that, better and better. “Theoretical rift magic? That’s quite impressive, it’s a very difficult field of study.”

“Emphasis on the word theoretical. I don’t actually practice it, I enjoy keeping my sanity. Ice and spirit magic are more my pace,” Adaar’s smile became sheepish at the admission, but Dorian’s good opinion of him did not falter.

“It’s still an impressive area of study, very few actually delve into it, I only took introductory classes on it myself while doing my undergraduate studies. It must be fascinating work.”

“I think it is, though my students seem to think otherwise, most tend to sleep through my lectures,” Adaar replied, but his smile was pleased.
“If you had been my professor I certainly would have been more than inclined stay awake in class and I would have been more than tempted to pursue it.” Dorian dared a brief touch to Adaar’s arm and was relieved when his smile didn’t wane nor did he shrug off Dorian’s touch. “Alas, you were not at my university and I was not lured into rift magic.”

“A pity, though I imagine you were a distracting student, so it’s probably for the best that you were never in my classroom,” Adaar replied. “What did you end up studying?”

“Theoretical time magic and necromancy.”

“I’m not the only mage in a difficult field of study,” Adaar sounded impressed. “Did you happen to study under Magister Gereon Alexius?”

A sharp stab of old pain spiked through Dorian, but his face remained pleasant and he also felt oddly pleased that Adaar knew about Alexius. “I did, it is hard to be in Tevinter and pursuing time magic without studying under Magister Alexius.”

“That must have been a great opportunity! Magister Alexius is a brilliant man.” Adaar mercifully switched topics and asked, “And what do you do now? Do you also put students to sleep in a classroom?”

“I’m afraid that once I tell you that you will hate me for working for a dreaded rival of Skyhold University,” Dorian answered playfully.

“What? Oh!” Adaar’s eyes lit up and he chuckled, a sound that rumbled through his chest and sent a small quiver through Dorian. “You work for Herald University, huh? Are you a professor there?”

“I’m the director of the university’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library.”

The expression on Adaar’s face became one of pure envy. “You get to handle those books and manuscripts all day? That’s completely unfair! While I will always curse the name of Herald University, your collection of rare texts on ancient magic is incredible, Skyhold cannot compare. Your early manuscripts on the first Inquisition are to die for! Those early writings and notes on the Fade are amazing! And you get to manage all of that, I can’t believe it!” A blush suddenly appeared on Adaar’s face, bright enough to become apparent through grey skin and to drown out the little freckles scattered across his nose. “I’m … I’m gushing like a schoolgirl.”

“No, please do go on,” Dorian insisted, excited that Adaar knew so much about his library. “I am not one to turn down flattery over my pride and joy. I’ve worked very hard to build that collection of books on ancient magic.”

“You should be proud,” Adaar said softly. “It’s amazing.”

Dorian’s heart thudded in his chest. “Thank you,” he replied sincerely.

They continued to talk as they became engrossed with one another, and Dorian was nearly dizzy and lightheaded from his present company. Wanting to press his hopeful advantage and to signal his continued interest, Dorian offered to get refills of their drinks as they ran low and Adaar happily accepted.

Dorian took Adaar’s empty glass and made his way to the bar, not even noticing that the Orlesian he admired earlier was still there. The line at the cash bar was insufferably long as Dorian was eager to get back to his conversation with Adaar, but finally he made it to the front of the line, obtained their drinks, and was soon ready to go back to his companion.
Adaar was standing where Dorian left him, next to a painting of twisting trees reaching up towards the sky. But before Dorian could take a step towards his new friend, another and somehow even larger male Qunari appeared at Adaar’s side and immediately wrapped his arm around Adaar’s waist. The other Qunari was ridiculously tall and broad with wide, pointed horns and wearing a pink button up shirt paired with a terrible purple tie, clashing with the rough looking scars and black eyepatch on his kind face.

The brightened expression of recognition and adoration that appear on Adaar’s features left Dorian’s heart sinking in his chest. The final blow came as Adaar turned his head towards the taller Qunari and offered a simple, welcoming kiss in acknowledgement of the other’s arrival. They leaned into each other to whisper greetings with a sort of familiarity that took years to build.

Humiliation seared Dorian’s entire being. He was flustered in a way that he was sure he would never recover from and he felt like an idiot, holding two glasses of wine like he might get a phone number that night and the promise of coffee or dinner for another day. His base reaction was to blend into the crowd, down both drinks, and make his escape. However, excellent breeding and manners won out, and Dorian straightened his back and held his head up high as he walked back to Adaar, knowing that he looked best with good posture.

Thankfully, Adaar looked pleased to see Dorian instead of being dismissive now that his lover was there. “Dorian, this is my boyfriend, the Iron Bull. Bull, this is Dorian Pavus, we just met after I nearly ran him over.”

Dorian managed to give Adaar his drink without showing his newfound nervousness and held his hand to the Iron Bull. His smile was firmly in place and it never faded despite his racing mind and thundering heartbeat, a performance that would have made his mother proud.

“A pleasure to meet you, the Iron Bull.”

“Good to meet you. You can call me Bull.”

The Qunari’s hand completely engulfed Dorian’s, furthering Dorian’s sense of belittlement. The Iron Bull’s other hand rested on Adaar’s waist, his long arm wrapped around the wide expanse of Adaar’s back, and his fingers dug possessively into the blue dress shirt. Dorian had no doubt that the Iron Bull knew what Dorian had been trying to do. Breathing deeply, Dorian tried to soothe his anxious desire to untangle himself from the situation.

“Do you also know Merrill and work at Skyhold University?” The Iron Bull demonstrated that he possessed manners of his own and the words came out friendly and he sounded almost genuine in his curiosity.

“No, I’m just a librarian at another university. I only know Merrill by reputation and artwork, though my friends are acquainted with her,” Dorian answered vaguely and took a large drink of wine. Once he finished his drink, Dorian could politely excuse himself and fade into the crowd.

“He’s the director of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Herald University,” Adaar corrected swiftly, his earlier liveliness slowly shifting over into hesitant caution.

“A fancy librarian for the fancy private school,” the Iron Bull nodded cheekily.

“Yes, indeed,” Dorian agreed shortly, taking the comment as a slight as there could be no other meaning, but at least the wine helping him along. “And what do you do, Iron Bull? Another esteemed scholar like your Adaar?”
“Nah, I leave all the complicated thinking to my kadan. I just herd around second graders at Divine Justinia Elementary,” Iron Bull shrugged with a lopsided grin.

“He means he’s the best teacher the district has and has two awards to prove it,” Adaar added, his eyes focused solely on his boyfriend now.

Dorian’s stomach turned and he took another drink in an ill thought out effort to settle it. “A noble occupation.”

His cheeks were beginning to ache from the unnatural cheer he was displaying and his jaw was stiff from resisting the urge to clench it. Relief flooded him as he spotted Lavellan staring at him worryingly from across the room and she was urgently giving him signals to come to her. Of course she had seen everything, little escaped Lavellan’s keen attention. Even Cullen looked more serious than usual and he dipped his head to whisper into his wife’s sharply pointed ear, no doubt asking permission to go rescue Dorian from his increasingly awkward situation.

Draining the last of his wine, Dorian decided to leave before Cullen made a fumbling attempt at a rescue.

“I have just noticed that I have been simply terrible and have neglected my dear friend over there for most of the evening. I must speak with her before she gives up on me entirely and leaves me at this gallery. Adaar, Iron Bull, it’s been a great pleasure, thank you for indulging me. Do enjoy the rest of your evening.”

Dorian gave one last fleeting smile and turned on his heel to metaphorically crawl over to safety at Lavellan’s side. Behind him, Adaar said something, but it was lost to the rush of blood pounding in Dorian’s ears and Dorian would not have replied even if he did hear what Adaar had to say. His embarrassment was to complete for him to carry on and he was desperate to leave.

“Dorian,” Lavellan started once he was finally in the safety of her orbit.

“Well, let’s never speak of this again, shall we?” Dorian cut her off with a forceful brightness. “I am in complete favor of leaving this gallery, perhaps never to return again, and going somewhere else. Anywhere else. Shall we go to the alleyway behind the building? I believe I have not humiliated myself in front of anyone there.”

“Oh, Dorian …”

“Don’t,” Dorian said swiftly and quietly.

“Maybe we can make it Sera and Dagna’s house before they start their second movie? It’s not that late,” Cullen suggested helpfully, referring to Sera and Dagna’s weekly movie night on Fridays that Dorian would normally be at.

“Yes, that is an excellent idea. I have never wanted to hear Sera talk over a movie more in my life,” Dorian answered gratefully.

They made their exit and Dorian made sure not to look back, not wanting to catch a glimpse of the lovely Qunari couple that he humiliated himself in front of. His whole body relaxed as he slid onto the leather covered backseat of Lavellan’s car and he leaned on the door, staring out the open window as the car started moving. Air from the warm summer night flowed into the vehicle and the scent of the city at the start of the season stirred old memories in Dorian that were an effort to fight back.

As the car approached his street in a posh neighborhood on the north side of the city, all lit up with
the yellow light of street lamps, the desire to go to bed weighed heavily upon him. It wasn’t the
same crushing weight that urged him to lie down and to never get back up again, but just a passing
moment of self-pity that he could safely indulge in. A nagging little voice told Dorian that he
should go to Sera’s house and be social, to alleviate Lavellan and Cullen of their worries, but he
knew that he wouldn’t be good company.

“Could you drop me off at home? I’m rather exhausted.”

Lavellan’s large brown eyes flickered up towards the rear view mirror. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, it’s been a long week and I’m ready to go home.”

There was a short pause before Lavellan nodded and turned the steering wheel, taking the car
down Dorian’s street. “Ok, but we’re still on for brunch tomorrow morning, right?”

“As if I would dare to miss it.”

“Good,” Lavellan nodded again, an almost inaudible sigh of relief escaped from her. Then she
added, “Don’t let this get you down, Dorian, it really wasn’t that bad and it’s only your first try.
These things take time.”

“And I have plenty of friends from the Order who would be interested in dating you,” Cullen
pitched in.

“Always trying to push Templars on me to make me an honest man.” Dorian gave his friend a
halfhearted smirk, though he quietly conceded, “I’ll think about it.”

He bid his friends goodbye once the car stopped in front of his cozy, red brick townhouse with its
tiny patch of grass of a yard surrounded by an iron fence and long neglected potted plants on the
steps leading up to the door. Just stepping inside of his home made Dorian feel instantly better, not
totally better, but more so than he felt only a few minutes before.

The townhouse was a source of pleasure and pride for Dorian, it was the first and only place
Dorian ever bought with his own money, the only place where he felt he had any real control. He
was pleased with his own taste in decor, the sleek, clean lines of his furniture and appliances,
balanced out with warm touches of personal photographs and keepsakes from travels, a hand
knitted blanket over the couch from a friend, and books lining every shelf. Fresh paint and update
fixtures made the place look fresh and modern, but the personal touches made it a home.

The townhouse was also laden with memories of better times.

Dorian’s feet automatically led him upstairs to the master bedroom and he only took a few minutes
to take out his contacts in the connected bathroom rather than going through the ritual of his
nightly routine. He then stripped himself of his clothing as he walked back into the bedroom, not
bothering to turn on the light or hang up his clothes or place them in the hamper. Down to his
briefs, Dorian crawled into bed, settling on the right side, and curled up on his side to face the
empty bed space next to him.

“You would not believe my night, amatus,” Dorian said aloud. “It was straight out of a TV show or
movie. I went out with Lavellan and Cullen to a gallery opening in hopes of meeting a ‘nice man,’
as Lavellan would say and it’s the first time I’ve tried since … Well, anyway, I did meet a nice
man. He’s a professor, a mage, and he studies theoretical rift magic. Of course I know that a career
in magical studies doesn’t make a good man, but still, it made for good conversation.”

A small smile tugged on his lips, but it quickly disappeared.
“He’s also a Qunari, I know, not quite my type, but he was very muscular and very cute. He’s also smart, funny, and he knows all about my library, so basically he was going straight for my heart.”

Dorian snorted, thinking back on his night and sighed into his pillow.

“But get this, amatus, he has a boyfriend! I should have known it was too good to be true, right? And of course I met his boyfriend, the Iron Bull. Such a terrible name! But it is fitting as he might be the largest Qunari in all of Thedas, I felt like a child standing next to him. I must have looked pathetic in comparison, but at least he was wearing the most horrid outfit. Maker, I made such a fool of myself,” Dorian’s voice wobbled. “You would have cried laughing at my mortification.”

His eyes burned and his vision blurred.

“This is far harder than I thought, amatus. Andraste help me, is it even worth it? I thought I could do this, but the thought of anyone else is just ...”

Clamping his left hand, Dorian brought the silverite ring on his middle finger to his trembling lips.

“I miss you so much, Felix.”

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“This is Delrin Barris,” Cullen practically shouted to Dorian over the thrum of music and constant din of people laughing and talking in Varric’s sports bar as Marian Hawke’s birthday went into full swing. “He was my last apprentice before I left the Order a few years ago. Delrin, this is Dorian Pavus, he and Ellana work together at Herald University.”

The man in question certainly looked the part of a Templar, handsome, clean cut, and fit. His manner of dress was disappointing, Delrin’s collared shirt was on the baggy side and Dorian disapproved of his tan khakis, but he was unbearably cute and was forgiven for his crimes of fashion. He also appeared rather young. Dorian didn’t try to figure out the young Templar’s age, especially if he was an apprentice only a few years back. The dark lighting and flickering lights of mounted televisions did nothing to emphasize Delrin’s more mature qualities and it left Dorian feeling old.

“A pleasure,” Dorian raised his voice over the noise, holding out his hand which Delrin took immediately and leaned in closer.

“Nice to meet you, Dorian, Cullen has told me a lot about you.” Delrin’s white toothed smile was blinding in the bar. The grin made him look even more boyish, almost innocent, and it made Dorian’s chest squeezed painfully.

Their age difference could not be that great, Dorian tried to reason with himself, it had to be less than ten years, maybe even only five years. But Dorian felt older than his own age, like he lived several dozen more years than he actually had. Experience wore him down, life’s challenges left an exhaustion that sank into to his soul, and at thirty-five years old Dorian felt nearly ancient.

Cullen was enthusiastic as they talked, though that initial enthusiasm waned at Dorian and Delrin’s fumbled attempts at a connection as they seemed to lack a common ground on almost every topic. They both had a fundamental knowledge of magic, but they approached it from opposite ends and could not connect on the topic. Dorian spent most of his time reading and doing research, while Delrin loved the outdoors and camping. Dorian was unapologetically Tevinter and Delrin was a Fereldan through and through. Though it was Delrin’s strong faith and involvement in the southern Chantry that made Dorian truly wary, and from there it became obvious that they did not share like
There was an awkwardness of trying too much, of reaching for something that wasn’t there, and Dorian found the process tedious and tiring. Thankfully, it didn’t last for too long and both Dorian and Delrin disengaged themselves from the conversation. Dorian couldn’t help but think about the natural and easy talk he had with Adaar just a couple of weeks ago and the pleasure of an instant connection with someone. Dorian banished those wistful thoughts as Delrin disappeared into the throng of party attendees and he accepted Cullen’s hurried apologies.

“I’m going to step outside,” Dorian told Cullen after he ordered another drink, needing to wash down the bitterness of disappointment with something sweet and alcoholic.

“I’ll come out with you,” Cullen offered, signaling the bartender for another beer.

“You will certainly melt the moment you’re outside. I won’t be long,” Dorian reassured his friend, patting Cullen’s arm, “and then I will be back for you to introduce me to the next Templar you want me to sleep with.”

Cullen snorted with a shake of his head, but he let Dorian go without further protest.

Stepping outside instantly fogged up Dorian’s glasses. The air conditioning in the bar was working hard to overcompensate for the unusually sticky, humid night, but Dorian preferred the natural heat over the chilled air. He was practically alone out on the bar’s second floor deck overlooking downtown Skyhold, almost everyone was inside to celebrate Hawke’s birthday and were driven away by the heat. While Dorian openly scoffed at Varric’s sports bar, he did have to give it to the dwarf that he understood a good location.

Dorian sank down in the wrought iron chair, holding a slushy monstrosity of a blended drink that tasted strongly of rum and watermelon. His cheeks were satisfyingly flushed from his second such monstrosity of the night and his palms were slick from the condensation weeping from the glass, which dripped down and left a small pattern of wet spots on his tight jeans. It spoke to his mood that he didn’t care.

Still, despite his retreat outdoors, Dorian wasn’t in such a terrible mood. He only wanted some fresh air, a moment to himself, and little heat to soothe his wounded pride before heading back inside. He needed to gather his wits together before Cullen insisted on introducing Dorian to more Templars as a potential boyfriend.

The movement of someone approaching his table caught Dorian’s attention and he suddenly knew he needed another drink to deal with the person sitting in the empty chair next to him. Dorian took a long, deep drink of his watermelon slushy, hoping to wash away his growing concern.

“Hey! Good to see you! Dorian, right?”

The Iron Bull sat next to Dorian, close enough that he could feel the Qunari’s body heat rolling off of him, which Dorian promptly ignored. He also did his best to ignore the fact that the Iron Bull was not wearing a shirt, as was the fashion with most Qunaris in the summer. While Dorian had admired the hint of Adaar’s muscular form under a well-chosen dress shirt and slacks, he had to consciously force himself not to stare at Bull’s chest and arms. Dorian managed to occupy himself with focusing his attention on the Iron Bull’s choice of drink, which was a tall pint of a golden color beer, probably a Fereldan beer that Dorian had a secret fancy for.

A bland smile plastered itself onto Dorian’s lips in greeting, reminding himself that it was not Adaar or the Iron Bull’s fault that Dorian misread the situation when he met Adaar a couple weeks
before and it would not do to be impolite. “Ah, yes, I am indeed Dorian. And you are the Iron Bull, correct? No, wait, there is no question to it, I could hardly forget such a descriptive name.”

Iron Bull laughed, coming out like a deep, short boom of thunder. “That’s why I picked it, keeps it simple. Better than listening to southerners completely butcher a complicated Qunlat name.”

The corner Dorian’s mouth twitched up in a brief, real grin. “Yes, we northerners must protect the southerners from their own ignorance. I am truly blessed that my name is not overly complicated.”

Iron Bull nodded in agreement. “Your parents were thinking ahead.”

“In more ways than one.” The statement came out as a bite and nearly caught Dorian off guard as an old bitterness and pain bubbled up in him and was only fueled by the alcohol in his blood, like dumping gasoline onto smoldering embers. In a much more easy tone, Dorian quickly added, “Now, I would say it is a surprise to see you here as this is a private event, but I believe Marian Hawke knows everyone in Thedas.”

His earlier retort did not go unnoticed, Iron Bull’s eye narrowed just a bit, and Dorian caught the gesture with a small amount of shame for being so transparent. But Iron Bull let it slide and instead rolled his massive shoulders, “Adaar is the one who really knows Hawke, I just know her in passing. But one never says no to a party thrown by Varric.”

“That is true, it even gets me into this bar of his.”

“What? You don’t come here regularly?” Iron Bull sounded incredulous, shock washing over his features. “This is the best place in the city to watch football!”

“I sincerely hope you mean real football, or soccer as they call it here, and not Fereldan football,” Dorian sniffed.

“Well, at least now I know you aren’t a savage.” Despite himself, Dorian could feel a genuine smile spread on his lips. “Which is your favorite team?”

A tension that Dorian didn’t notice before began to unwind from Iron Bull, as if he knew of Dorian’s reluctance to speak with him. An inkling of surprise filled Dorian’s mind, wondering why Iron Bull might be nervous to talk to him. If anything, Dorian expected a firm warning to stay away from Adaar, an acknowledgement of Dorian’s attempt to flirt with his boyfriend, but the casual conversation was a surprise.


“Absolutely not!” Dorian replied in real horror and offense, causing Iron Bull to rumble out a laugh at his reaction. “Minrathous Dragons, of course, like any proper civilized Tevinter.”

“I figured, never met a vint interested in sports who didn’t love the Dragons,” Iron Bull grinned.

“And any Tevinter who isn’t. The Dragons are a matter of national pride.”

“True. You must be pissed that they didn’t make it into the playoffs this year.”

Dorian’s mouth twitched, he was pissed that his team was not in the playoffs, but he took the
standoffish road and said, “I suppose Minrathous can’t always be in the playoffs. How else would your beloved Fog Warriors make it beyond the regular season?”

“Ouch! Right in the heart.” He pressed his massive hand to his chest, pretending to be faint.

“Though I do admit I would rather see Seheron win over Redcliffe, we northerners must ban together against the uncouth Orlesians and Fereldans.”

“You’re willing to consider a Qunari as a part of the more civilized world?”

“Not quite, but Maker, the Qunari certainly know how to use spice on their food. Unlike Fereldans and their obsession with frying or boiling everything or Orlesians and soaking everything in butter.”

“Don’t forget that the Qunari also make the best cocoa.”

Dorian wrinkled his nose. “Qunari ruin it putting in far too much sugar into it.”

“What would you know? Vints ruin it by dumping spices into it.”

The natural banter he and the Iron Bull fell into was startling. The teasing was lighthearted as they ribbed each other over their sports teams, culture, and background. It was never cruel or demeaning and was gentler than what Dorian would ever expect from a Qunari, even from those born and living outside of the Qun. It was felt good to laugh at himself, to be teased and treated like he wasn’t frail and ready to break. Dorian couldn’t remember the last time he actually laughed so much.

Perhaps it might do him some good to make new friends, Dorian briefly considered, to get to know people who knew little about him.

Dorian finally relaxed and his previous tensions about being around the Iron Bull were gone. The lingering embarrassment faded into the back of his mind as he verbally sparred with the Qunari. However, that merriment and confidence he gained suddenly lost ground as Adaar approached the pair, obviously looking for his missing boyfriend. Dorian’s chuckle died off at the jarring reminder of just a couple of weeks ago when he was considering what it might be like to take a Qunari to bed. Not that the consideration ever really left since then, but it was now firmly in the realm of fantasy rather than an actual possibility.

His own blunder and misunderstanding shouldn’t have disqualified such a lovely couple from making his acquaintance, but for a reason Dorian couldn’t pin down seeing them together made Dorian long for things that no longer belonged to him.

“Dorian!” Adaar sounded happy to see him. “I see you found my boyfriend.”

“I was borrowing him for only a moment,” Dorian rose from his seat, his glass of now mostly melted beverage in hand. “I found out that he is a proper football fan.”

“That’s great! The more people Bull can talk to about football who aren’t me, the better. I can hardly follow the damn game to know what’s going on.”

“Then you cannot possibly find fault in him for his terribly misplaced team loyalties and for that I will gladly hand him back over to you.” Dorian stepped away from the table and offered his abandoned seat to Adaar. “I’m afraid I’ve been out here too long.”

“Oh, ok,” Adaar blinked, his voice falling on the flat side at Dorian’s obvious exit.
“There’s plenty of me to share,” Iron Bull insisted, reaching over to the empty table next to them with his long arm and dragged an extra chair for his boyfriend.

With reluctance, Dorian sank back down into his chair and Adaar beamed.

“I had hoped to talk to you more when we were at the gallery, but I feel bad that I distracted you from your girlfriend,” Adaar started. “I hope I did not get you in too much trouble.”

Dorian had the misfortune of taking a drink right as Adaar suggested that Lavellan was his girlfriend and very nearly drowned in watermelon and rum. High pitched coughs rattled his body and the Iron Bull thumped gently on his back in a vain attempt to help him clear out his lungs.

“I have a feeling she’s not his girlfriend, kadan,” Iron Bull teased.

“Certainly not,” Dorian asserted once he was able to speak. “Lavellan is a treasured friend and nothing more. If anything, I would be far more interested in her former Templar husband, he is more my type than she is.”

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to assume,” Adaar apologized. “Then I hope there was no seething boyfriend waiting for you at the gallery, angry that you were ignoring him for the Qunari that nearly knocked you over.”

“Ah, no, there wasn’t. That is a vacancy that is waiting to be filled,” Dorian’s smile became forced and his chest contracting at having to make the admission.

At least Adaar did not seem to notice as his grin became wider and it left Dorian wondering if Adaar was the type of person who liked to flirt with other people to make his boyfriend jealous. But there was nothing untoward in Adaar’s manners as they started to chat, Adaar was interested in his work at Herald University and started gushing again about Dorian’s library. Dorian was equally interested in Adaar’s work in rift magic and now that he knew that he could not have Adaar, he could be safe in his interactions with the other mage.

The Iron Bull was mostly quiet, but a small smirk on his face showed his enjoyment, like listening to complicated magical theory was something of a regular occurrence. He only interrupted long enough to fetch them drinks once their glasses became alarming low. “Can’t let you two magic nerds get too sober or else you might get boring,” Iron Bull winked with his one eye as he got up to head back inside to the bar.

“So, how do you know Hawke?” Adaar asked.

“Through Varric, I’ve lost more coin to Hawke playing Wicked Grace than I can to admit. At least her brother, Carver, is a terrible player.”

“He is! I love Wicked Grace nights at Varric’s house, he always invites the most interesting people. He has this friend, Sera, she always comes to play, but can never stay sober enough to make through an entire game.”

Dorian chuckled as he knew exactly what Adaar meant as he spent an obscene amount of time with Sera. “That’s because Sera is an awful lightweight and can barely make through a pint without getting drunk. Her wife, Dagna, can hold her own, though hopefully she isn’t damaging her valuable brain cells with her hearty dwarven thirst.”

“You know Dagna? Isn’t she brilliant? She used to work at my university until last year, I’m still fuming that she took that job at Herald University, she was one of our best researchers.”
“I know, that’s why my university offered her so much more money,” Dorian was rather smug about that and Adaar shook his fist at Dorian in jest.

“It’s a wonder that we know so many of the same people, but the gallery opening was the first time we’ve met,” Adaar commented, his cheeks delightfully flushed from the alcohol and heat.

It was odd that they never crossed paths before, but then Dorian asked, “How long have you and Iron Bull been in Skyhold?”

“About two and half years,” Iron Bull answered as he came back to the table with their drinks.

Their lack of acquaintance made more sense, in the years that Adaar and Iron Bull were in residence at Skyhold, Dorian was detached from the rest of the world. Dorian closed his eyes briefly, his mind skimming over the deep well of emotions about the past few years of his life. The way his world unraveled and narrowed and became insulated in despair and grief.

“I’ve been on sabbatical,” Dorian fibbed, “and my life was so disorganized afterwards that I haven’t been out much, though I do confess that I have become more of a homebody in my advancing age. Dreadful, isn’t it? You get to a certain age and suddenly you look forward to watching movies at your friend’s house and farmers’ markets on the weekend instead of going out to bars and meeting new people.”

“Where did you go for your sabbatical?” Adaar asked.

“Around the north and Tevinter,” Dorian answered, that was less of a lie. He did spend time back in Tevinter, though he couldn’t remember much of it. He just remembered how disconnected he was at the time, of others shuffling him from place to place, and no small amount of anger directed at him.

“Back home to see family?”

That last word was like barb to Dorian, it caught in his heart and dug in deep. “Something like that.”

“Hey Dorian, want to join me next weekend to watch the playoff game? I told you that this is the best place to watch football,” Iron Bull cut in, effectively putting an end to the increasingly uncomfortable train of conversation.

Iron Bull’s interruption was a small comfort to Dorian, though he felt embarrassed at the intolerably kind expression on Iron Bull’s face. To further Dorian’s awkwardness, Adaar blinked a few times and shared a look with his boyfriend. They were speaking the silent language of a close couple, communicating with each other in a way that no one else could understand. It made Dorian ache.

“I’m not sure if I would be the best of companions for watching the game with, I am still bitter about my team not being in the playoffs,” Dorian tried to politely decline.

“Come on, everyone else here will be cheering for the Mabaris, I need a northerner to stand in solidarity with me against the Fereldans and Adaar won’t come with me.”

“I certainly won’t,” Adaar confirmed. “And Krem won’t go with you because he’s still sobbing over the Dragons.”

Dorian hesitated, but he could think of no reason to refuse the offer. In truth, he found that he liked the Iron Bull almost as much as he liked Adaar. Apart from his previous humiliation in flirting with
Adaar, Dorian could see no reason why he shouldn’t associate with the couple. If anything, he could keep them as casual acquaintances.

“Alright, I suppose I must protect you from the Fereldan masses if Adaar will not.”

Dorian figured that one outing couldn’t hurt and then he could put some distance between him and the Qunari couple.
Chapter Summary

They meet in the company of friends and Dorian hopes that he is beginning to make new ones.

When Dorian first met Cullen Rutherford many years ago, he was a worn veteran of the Templar Order, had just started dating Lavellan, and was a terribly serious man. His experiences as a Knight-Commander, investigating horrendous crimes perpetrated by or against mages, dashed most of the vestiges of joy and pleasure in his life, though a hint of that former happiness in Cullen blossomed under Lavellan’s attentions in their early days of dating. Despite that, his solemnness nearly gave Dorian a headache just from being around him, though Dorian continued to prod and flirt with Cullen without end to try to get him to loosen his steely control.

But that unsmiling, hardened man was completely gone and any traces of the burden of what he had witnessed as Templar vanished as Cullen howled with laughter at Dorian. Cullen’s pale face and his ears went red, tears leaked from the corners of his amber eyes, and he was nearly doubled over in the passenger seat of Dorian’s car with his arms wrapped around his stomach.

“Are you finished now?” Dorian snapped peevishly, his grip tightening on the steering wheel as he drove Cullen and Lavellan to Varric’s sports bar, the Hanged Man, to meet the Iron Bull for the game that afternoon.

“I’m sorry, Dorian,” Cullen apologized once he caught his breath, though Dorian doubted his sincerity as he wiped at his eyes and stray chuckles escaped from his lips. “But Maker’s breath, only you could get yourself into this situation. Honestly, you flirted with this Qunari’s long term boyfriend, then said Qunari caught you flirting with his boyfriend, and he just happened to invite you out on a friendly outing?”

“This is why you and Lavellan are coming with me,” Dorian ground out and regret filled him for inviting Cullen and Lavellan out with him and telling them about the Iron Bull. “Besides, the Iron Bull was perfectly civil at Hawke’s party last week.”

Just the mention of Iron Bull’s name sent Cullen into another round of giggles.

“It’s really not that funny, Cullen,” Lavellan chimed in from the backseat, but her mirth was evident as the shadow of a smirk started creeping up on her face. “We will be the ones responsible for peeling Dorian off of the floor after he gets himself beaten up by the Iron Bull.”

The comment and a high pitched giggle from Cullen only made Dorian scowl.

“I hope the Mabaris lose.”

Cullen’s laughter died off and his eyes flashed dangerously in the afternoon sun at Dorian. “Don’t say things you can’t take back, Pavus.”

“I hope they suffer a most humiliating loss to Seheron, I hope they don’t score a single point, and that their star player breaks his own face.”
“You can’t mean that! I know the Dragons are your team, but you must have some loyalty to Ferelden.”

“Not an ounce.”

“Well, Ellana loves the Mabaris!”

“No, I said I love our mabari. And don’t pull me into this, you know I don’t root for any shem teams,” Lavellan sniffed and pointed to the green and brown Arbor Wilds Sentinels’ jersey that she wore with pride.

Dorian just sighed through his nose and ignored Cullen and Lavellan’s indignant bickering. It was nothing heated, as always their exchange was one of playful exasperation of long held disagreements that were more funny than hurtful in the grand scheme of life. Cullen and Lavellan hardly ever said a cross word to each other, but they reveled in making fun of each other. Their repartee was a dance they could do in their sleep, years of practice and a depth of feelings guided their steps.

Downtown Skyhold was insufferably crowded that afternoon, eager Redcliffe fans dressed in red and white were migrating towards their favorite bars and the Hanged Man was no exception as Fereldans made their way inside. Dorian regretted driving into the city as he was forced to drive around the surrounding city blocks more than once and his ire rose at the sight of a spot on the street blocked by a poorly parked car. He finally pulled over to the side as if he was able to parallel park and very careful tapped into his mana, then ever so gently, pushed the other car forward until there was enough space for him to squeeze his own car in.

Cullen lifted an eyebrow, but made no comment as they were parked right in front of the Hanged Man. Dorian’s casual usage of magic always produced results.

Inside, the bar was overly chilled and packed with football fans, or as the Fereldans called it, soccer. The crowd was awash of red and white with a smattering of people wearing their favorite teams’ colors. The anticipation was almost palatable as the favored team had not graced the playoffs in over a decade and loyal fans were alight with excitement.

One individual stood out amongst the red horde. Iron Bull stood a head taller than everyone else and was notably dressed in the white and grey of the Fog Warriors, the single visible fan of Seheron in the throng. He was guarding a tall table with a tall pitcher of golden, foamy beer and a pair of pint glasses as his single eye scanned the tops of people’s heads until he caught sight of Dorian. The Iron Bull grinned widely at Dorian with little crinkles forming around his eye as he waved Dorian over to join him.

An anxious desire to talk to Bull, to let the other man tease him, to banter with him over their cultures like they did at Hawke’s party, rose up in Dorian at the sight of the Qunari. However, that desire was balanced out with the humiliating memory of his first encounter with Bull and Dorian had to remind himself that Bull was the one who invited him out. Nothing in Bull’s behavior indicated that he held any animosity towards Dorian and if anything, everything in Bull’s actions indicated his own wish to get to know Dorian better.

That thought gave Dorian confidence as he squeezed his left hand, his ring digging into his other fingers, and he walked towards Bull with a small smile of his own. Cullen, on the other hand, had no reservations about the man he previously speculated would beat Dorian up and instead quickly moved towards the table. Dorian’s friend marveled at the table Iron Bull was able to snag, situated within easy distance of the bar and with a good view of at least three TV screens.
“Glad you could make it, Dorian!” Iron Bull beamed, his wide palm slapping Dorian’s back companionably. He noticed Lavellan and Cullen right away and held his hand to them with the same ease and friendliness that he demonstrated towards Dorian. “I’m the Iron Bull, but go ahead and call me Bull.”

“Ellana Lavellan, this is my husband, Cullen Rutherford,” Lavellan’s thin, but strong, hand disappeared in the Iron Bull’s grip, as did Cullen’s. “We’re friends of Dorian’s and football enthusiasts.”

“Soccer,” Cullen corrected in a rare display of cheekiness.

“Oh, let’s not start in on this, you’re out numbered right now.”

“Good to meet you! Glad to see that I’m not going to be overrun by Fereldans at the table,” Iron Bull nodded at Lavellan’s shirt and he grinned at Dorian’s own black and gold Dragons’ jersey. “Vints are always prettilying themselves up, even with their football uniforms.”

Dorian turned his nose up and retorted, “Don’t resent us because we have a superior sense of fashion in all aspects of life.”

Iron Bull laughed off Dorian’s haughtiness. “Let me rustle up a couple more glasses. All they have on tap are Redcliffe microbrews today, so I hope you don’t mind that I already got us a pitcher of the lager.”

“Nothing beats a Fereldan beer,” Cullen nodded in approval. Dorian couldn’t stop his eye roll, making Cullen snort, “You know you love it, Dorian.”

“Great, I’ll be right back.” Iron Bull left briefly to obtain more pint glasses and a couple of stools for the added company.

He returned quickly as not many were willing to deny the tall Qunari his gains or get in his way, even while wearing the uniform of the opposing team. They sat down on the stools with the pitcher of beer in the center of the table and the glasses filled, idly chatting as the sports commentators speculated about the match on the wall mounted TVs.

“I take it that from your jersey, Bull, that you’re either from Seheron or you have a death wish,” Lavellan noted, eyeing Bull’s outfit.

“Par Vollen actually,” Iron Bull admitted, half shrugging, “but I spent some time in Seheron right after I left the Qun. It’s a pretty place, still recovering from a couple centuries of on and off wars, but the people there are great and they make these little fish with pastry wrapped around them that I still dream about.”

“So since Seheron isn’t your homeland, you really have no real excuse for backing the wrong team. It’s just poor judgement,” Dorian said lightly, though he felt a twinge of nervousness over being misunderstood and thought of as standoffish.

Bull’s shoulder gently bumped into Dorian’s and his expression was amused. “Hey, Par Vollen doesn’t have a team and I was in Seheron the first time I ever saw a football game, so that’s close enough to a home team. Besides, who’s in the playoff this year?”

“Even I can admit that Minrathous cannot win every year.”

Bull just shook his head with a grin.
Their attention was soon drawn away from each other as the game started. Both Bull and Cullen were deeply invested in the event, their eyes were glued to the closest TV screens and immediately were shouting at every kick, every potential foul, and every attempt at the goal. Lavellan took it upon herself to make sure their pitcher remained filled with beer and ordered fried food to sop up the alcohol in their bellies.

Dorian found himself more diverted by the game than he anticipated. Beyond the pleasure of hanging out with his friends and sipping on a cool Fereldan beer, he was taken in by Bull’s sheer joy over the spectacle. And Dorian quickly found that Bull was a tactile person in his excitement, his hand would grip Dorian’s arm whenever Redcliffe got close to scoring a goal, he softly thudded Dorian’s back during the nail biting moments, and he would throw his long arm around Dorian’s shoulders for every gain made by Seheron.

Nearly halfway through the game, Bull leaned in close, his breath tickling Dorian’s ear and the nearness ensured that his voice rose above collective groans from Redcliffe fans at a failed shot at the goal. “That goalkeeper was just a rookie when during the first game I saw in Seheron, now she’s a beast on the field.”

Dorian’s mouth curled into a smile as he thought of a younger Iron Bull sitting in the stands of his first football game, his pale blue eye wide with wonder with a beer and a little fish wrapped in pastry in each hand. It made Dorian think of the countless games he and Felix went to in Minrathous with the heat of the sun on the back of their necks, frosty cold beers in hand, and the way their fingers brushed discretely as they both reached into the bag of spiced cashews sitting between them.

“I imagine you were as enthusiastic of a fan back then as you are now,” Dorian murmured back before turning his face back towards the TV, his cheeks warming as he caught Lavellan’s brown eyes watching him and Bull. She turned her head away quickly and the expression on her face was lost to Dorian.

The game was close as good games are and at the end it was Bull, the lone Seheron fan in the building, who whooped in victory while the mass of red clad Fereldans mourned their loss.

“We won!” Bull squeezed Dorian tightly in a hug, lifting him onto his toes.

Dorian let out a breathless chuckle, his face mashed up against the white and grey uniform, and he relaxed into the embrace. “Yeah, your team won.”

“This is a victory for all northerners,” Bull countered before letting Dorian go. “You know there’s a large population of vints in Seheron.”

“Yay on me then,” Dorian laughed.

Lavellan rubbed Cullen’s back as the former Templar slumped forward in his seat, his head cradled in his hands. “This was just the first game,” Lavellan said with as much sympathy as she could muster over a shem team losing, “they haven’t been eliminated yet.”

Cullen only moaned in despair.

“This, uh, might take minute. Want to wait outside for us, Dorian?” Lavellan looked up at Bull, her stare lingering on the white and grey of his jersey. “Maybe you would take a step outside with Dorian, Bull.”

“No problem, I’ll keep him company.” Bull gently patted Cullen’s shoulder, though it was little
consolation to the desolate Ferelden. “This was anyone’s game, Cullen, Redcliffe played well.”

“Yeah, that’s probably not helping,” Dorian smirked at his poor friend and escorted Bull away from Cullen.

The summer air was cooled as they stepped outside, the breeze that swept through the downtown chilled Dorian’s exposed skin, making his hair raise on his arms. But Dorian was riding high on the Fog Warriors’ win and for once he hardly even noticed the cold. Bull’s enthusiasm was infectious and good natured enough that not even Cullen could have resented him.

“This was fun,” Bull commented, his face soft and pleased by something beyond the victory of his team.

Dorian stuffed his hands into his pants pockets. “Your team did win.”

“Well, yes, there’s that, but spending time with you and your friends was fun too.”

“And you did manage to convince me that this bar is not so terrible with the right company and under the right conditions,” Dorian allowed cautiously.

Bull’s smile widened. “I had no doubt you’d see things my way.”

“Beer and a good football game? That was a safe bet.”

“I’m happy that you had a good time. By the way, Adaar wants to know if you’d like to go out to dinner with us later in the week. He’s grumpy that he didn’t get to come.”

Dorian swallowed and replied, “He certainly could have joined us.”

“And listen to all of his questions during the entire game? Nah, it was better for everyone that he stayed away. So, dinner this week?”

The thought of seeing Adaar peeked Dorian’s interest and the temptation to be admired about his work and to be engaged intellectually was too much for Dorian to overcome. Without hesitation, he answered, “I should be free.”

“Great, we’ll text you.”

Something fluttered in Dorian’s stomach that had nothing to do with beer or fried food. He stomped down the feeling and pushed it away.

Finally, Lavellan and Cullen made their way outside and they all said their goodbyes to Iron Bull and headed back to the car. Cullen sulked in the backseat, slumped down far enough that his eyes were level with the base of the window. He looked like a teenager who was unfairly unpunished by his parents, a posture that Dorian donned more than once in his youth. Both Dorian and Lavellan were merciful enough not to bring up Redcliffe’s loss to Cullen and Lavellan’s mind wandered elsewhere.

“Bull is really nice,” she observed as Dorian drove them out of the downtown area, the sun sinking closer to the horizon and its light streaming in between the towering buildings of the city.

“He is,” Dorian agreed.

“You bonded with him rather quickly,” she continued. “He seems to like you a lot.”

Dorian shrugged, his eyes were fixed ahead of him and he found himself oddly unwilling to look at
his friend. “Well, our people aren’t exactly at war anymore and it’s hard to find a good northerner to relate to.”

“Hm,” Lavellan hummed neutrally before concluding, “He’s a flirt.”

“So am I and not even Felix could cure me of my habit,” Dorian reminded her.

“Yeah, but you were Felix’s flirt,” she said, the corner of her mouth twisting upward as she watched the city pass them by. “Bull is nice,” she repeated, “for a giant flirt.”

“It’s not like I am going to see much of him anyway,” Dorian replied, though he wasn’t sure if he said it for her sake or his own.

Quiet overtook the car, filled only by the rumbling of the tires on the road.

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“You won’t believe it, amatus, I’m about to go see them for the sixth time in three weeks. I think you would like Bull and Adaar, they’re the kind of couple we’d have over for dinner and talk to about how uncivilized southerners are. Such as it is, I just spend time with them and play the third wheel …”

Dorian trailed off as he smoothed out his t-shirt in front of the full length mirror in his bedroom, getting ready to meet Adaar and the Iron Bull at their house for dinner. Over the last few weeks Dorian’s social calendar became obscenely full.

He had followed through with the plan to go out to dinner with Adaar and Bull after watching the Redcliffe and Seheron match with Bull. That dinner prompted Bull to extract another promise to watch another playoff game with him, which in turn became plans to go see a movie to cheer Bull up after his team lost. The movie then allowed for plans to be formed for seeing a new exhibit at the Skyhold Natural History Museum, and then Adaar asked Dorian to come over for a home cooked meal.

“This all spiraled out of my control rather quickly,” Dorian mused.

His eyes shifted over to the silver framed graduation picture of Felix on the dresser, his smile was bright and unjudging, and his eyes were filled with hope for a fruitful future that would never come to pass. Dorian forced himself to look back at the mirror and kept his gaze fixed the clean lines of his shirt instead of at his smarting eyes and heated cheeks.

“It’s not like hanging out with Lavellan and Cullen, they’re the closest thing to family that I have out here. Adaar and Bull are different, they … Kaffas, I like Adaar, amatus, I like him a lot,” Dorian admitted aloud. “The worst thing is that I also like his boyfriend. This would all be so much easier if I despised Bull and I would be able to untangle myself from this without a second thought. But I find Adaar so interesting, he’s most engaging in conversations, he’s surprisingly cute, and he adores my library and I adore him for it. Bull makes me laugh, he makes me forget myself, and Andraste help me, those arms. I’ve never fantasized about a Qunari in my life, but I seriously am now.”

Closing his eyes, Dorian let out a long sigh.

“I shouldn’t go. I need to stop coveting their relationship and let Cullen continue to set me up with his endless train of Templars. Maker’s breath, how can so many good looking men be so dull? The last one I went on a date with nearly put me to sleep.”
Opening his eyes again, Dorian smoothed out his shirt with his hands and checked his makeup and hair again. He chose the dark jeans that hugged his ass perfectly, the color of his shirt was most flattering against his skin, a thin line of kohl brought out the silver in his eyes, and there was the slightest hint of powder on his face to highlight his cheekbones. He wouldn’t have put half such an effort to go over to Lavellan’s house for dinner nor a quarter of an effort to visit Sera.

“Don’t be jealous though, amatus, none of them hold a candle to you,” Dorian’s voice wobbled at that sentence and he firmed up his jaw. “Ah, well, none of that now, not when I’ve just finished my eye makeup. Now, am I presentable, amatus?”

Silence was his answer.

Satisfied with his appearance and stepping away from the mirror, Dorian left the room and went downstairs to the kitchen to grab a bottle of wine for dinner. Of course, he would not back out on his acceptance of Adaar’s invitation to come for dinner. Instead, Dorian would go to enjoy Adaar’s attentions, to bask at his unashamed praise for Dorian’s work, and to admire Adaar and Bull’s muscular forms. He would also go to feel that sharp stab of envy as Adaar and the Iron Bull played the role of a perfect couple flawlessly. Each little touch, every smile, all the gentle teases, and warm pet names served to remind Dorian of what he lost. It was a fitting punishment for his wandering eyes and heart.

The drive to Adaar and Bull’s house was a short one, it was only a couple of miles away from Dorian’s neighborhood, through rolling hills peppered with houses and down quaint streets lined with trees that blossomed in the spring. It was a nice area, parks with lush green fields, a brand new community center and public pool, and Bull’s beloved Divine Justina Elementary School with its brightly colored playground and sleek, modern building.

It was a perfect area to raise a family, Dorian thought as he turned down their street that was filled with proper houses and real yards. Parking on the street, Dorian took a good look at the house. He had been there before briefly to pick up Bull and Adaar for the movie, but he had never been inside.

The small, two storied, cottage styled, dawnstone pink house sat back from the street with large windows giving off a soft yellow light from inside. There was a rust red brick pathway cutting through the lawn from the front porch to the sidewalk and a small, newly paved drive led down the right side of the house where the detached garage sat. Light violet hydrangeas were in full bloom in front of the porch and vines of honeysuckle intertwined with the short, white painted fence that surrounded the property, giving off a thick, honeyed scent that assaulted Dorian when he finally got out of the car.

As he walked onto the porch, Dorian noticed the welcome mat which had the Qunlat word for home on it. Dorian blinked as he thought about the mat that Felix bought which used to sit on his front step with the Tevene word for welcome, before it was stolen within their first month of moving into the townhouse. He shook his head at the sudden memory and found himself staring incredulously at an offensively tacky onyx door knocker that was in the shape of a dragon’s head with a ring in its mouth.

Thankfully, the front door opened without Dorian ever getting to use the awful door knocker. On the other side was Adaar, all smiles as he shuffled aside to let Dorian cross the threshold. The house was cooled by the breeze coming through opened windows and smelled of warm spices and bread that made Dorian’s mouth water instantly. Catching sight of Adaar’s bare feet on the hardwood floor, Dorian mindfully toed off his shoes before stepping any further into the impeccably clean house.
“It’s good to see you, Dorian! I’m so glad you could come,” Adaar ushered Dorian inside towards the kitchen. “Bull is almost finished with dinner.”

“Hey there, big guy,” Bull nodded at Dorian as they walked into the kitchen. He was standing at the island in the middle of the open concept kitchen that flowed into the living room, busy throwing together what looked to be a salad to go with dinner. “Ah, great! Thanks for bringing the booze.”

Dorian handed over the bottle of wine to the Iron Bull, who was notably wearing a frilly, pink apron and not much else beyond his pants. “This is not booze, this is a fine Antivan cabernet.”

“Eh, it tastes like red, right?”

Dorian turned to Adaar and demanded, “How do you live with this man?”

Adaar shrugged his massive shoulders with a lopsided grin. “He’s great in bed.”

“Maker help me,” Dorian muttered in half seriousness.

Adaar hid his smile as he took the bottle from Bull and opened it with a satisfying pop of the cork to let the wine breathe.

A sudden and sharp knock rapped upon the front door, making Dorian jerk at the unexpected noise, and Bull explained as Adaar went to go answer it, “That’s our friend Krem, he’ll be joining us for dinner tonight.”

“The more the merrier,” Dorian replied as the suspicion of being setup with someone filled Dorian’s mind until he shook it off. That was the territory of Lavellan and Cullen, seizing upon Dorian’s renewed interest in dating and eager to fill the void with any single man they knew.

But upon seeing Krem, or Cremisius Aclassi as he introduced himself in fluent Tevene, Dorian began to hope that this was an arrangement for being setup. Krem was undoubtedly Tevinter, his accent marked him as such, and his fine features were familiar to their people. His handshake was strong and his smile was rather pretty with small dimples pressing into his cheeks as he flashed a grin at Dorian. Krem was on the short side, appeared to be a little younger than him, and his face was bereft of any facial hair, but those were things Dorian found that he could easily overlook.

“Good to meet you, I hear you’re a Dragons fan,” Krem said as he let go of Dorian’s hand.

“Of course, any citizen of Tevinter is.”

“Damn straight.” That charming smile curled on his lips and Dorian found himself smiling back.

A strange inkling of familiarity filled Dorian the longer he admired Krem, like he had met the young man before. It was an itch Dorian could not reach, an irritation that clawed at him and demanded his attention, but he ignored it as Adaar started moving everyone outside for dinner.

There was a parade of dishes, serving bowls of food, bottles of wine, glasses, and flatware, that all needed to be taken outside to the back patio where they were going to have dinner. The large patio was neatly furnished with well-tended to potted plants, comfortably cushioned chairs, a glass top table, and a hot grill with slabs of spiced druffalo steaks cooking for dinner. A salad lightly dressed with lemon vinaigrette, herbed roasted potatoes, and freshly baked Qunari style bread rounded out the meal.

“I know you from somewhere, Dorian,” Krem declared once the salad was passed around and they
all started in on their dinner with ample praise given to the Iron Bull for making the meal. Krem’s brow was furrowed in concentration and Dorian was suddenly afraid that Krem might know him from his more infamous scandals during his youth in Tevinter, begging the question of how long Krem had been in Ferelden.

“Really?” Adaar brightened at the potential acquaintance right as Dorian began to dread it.

“Do all vints know each other? Like a special vint club?” Bull asked.

“Vint Town! That’s where I know you from!” Krem snapped his fingers as his eyes light up in recognition, referring to the part of Skyhold that was jammed pack with Tevinter immigrants and their businesses. “You used to always shop at that grocery store between the tea house and bakery.”

“That’s right! The grocery ran by that surly couple, I think they were from Asariel, or at least that’s what their accent sounded like.” A weight lifted from Dorian and that itch of recognition was satisfied as he was finally able to place Krem in his jumble of memories.

“Yeah, but they have the best selection of Tevinter foods. You were always there with that boyfriend of yours. Nice guy, I talked to him in line a couple of times, but that was a few years back.”

“Oh! You mean Felix, my husband.” The words came out automatically and without thought, Dorian had forgotten himself for a brief moment, caught up in the shared memory of the little grocery store. “My late husband,” he corrected himself.

That statement hung heavy in the air and Dorian feared that he took the life out of what otherwise promised to be a pleasant dinner. It made him feel self-conscious about interrupting the happy lives of these people with their perfect relationships and pretty smiles with his baggage. For the last few weeks Dorian got to pretend that it didn’t exist, he could leave it behind at his home while he hung out with Adaar and Bull. That was gone now.

If Adaar and Bull invited Krem over to try to set him up with Dorian, then he felt sorry for the younger man.

“Aw, I’m sorry to hear that,” Krem shifted uncomfortably. “How did he—?” Krem caught himself and his cheeks pinked under his bronze skin.

Dorian quickly put an end to his curiosity. “Complications from the Blight,” just saying it still hurt, still dug into Dorian over the unfairness of Felix dying of an ancient disease that hardly anyone contracted anymore. “He was exposed to it during a camping trip near what was an unmarked old Grey Warden outpost.”

“I’m sorry,” Krem repeated, the words were in a soft murmur of condolence and embarrassment. “He seemed like a really good guy.”

Neither Adaar nor Iron Bull looked surprised, but given how many people they knew in common they might have already heard the woeful tale. Still, both gave Dorian the usual sympathetic looks he supposed he would never be rid of.

“He was the best,” Dorian said without a beat. Taking a deep swallow of wine, Dorian brushed off the concern. “It’s been a couple years now. Anyway, I haven’t ventured into Vint Town much lately, so you must tell me, Krem, if that bakery is still making the most divine Tevinter style cakes this side of the Waking Sea.”
Thankfully Krem relaxed and grinned easily at Dorian. “Thank the Maker they still do! I don’t know what I would do if they went out of business. I brought one for dessert.”

“I certainly hope it’s their delightful spice cake with the butter cream.”

“What else would I buy?”

“I knew there was something I liked about you.”

Dorian warmed to Krem, not in the same bold way his feelings warmed when he was around Adaar or Bull, but in a slower way that curled in the pit of his stomach. Krem, in his conversation and laid back personality, was far superior to any of the men that Cullen and Lavellan were lobbing at Dorian. And Dorian flattered himself in thinking that Krem appeared to be interested in him, his look was evaluating, he asked personal questions to get to know Dorian’s character, and he teased like he was testing the waters.

A little ball of hope grew in Dorian, encouraged by the second bottle of wine that Adaar opened and the alcohol helped to silence Dorian’s doubts.

Then Adaar asked Krem, “When does Lace get back from her conference?”

“Tomorrow, which means I need to get back home after dinner and try to clean up our apartment before she gets back,” Krem looked sheepish. “She’s going to put me through the wringer if she sees how I live when she’s gone.”

“I think Lace is savvy enough to know about your faults before you two moved in together.”

Disappointment sank Dorian’s expectations, but he was good enough not to let it show. Always looking for love in the wrong places, he thought wistfully of Felix’s affectionate reprimand of him before they were together and Felix had to suffer through Dorian’s ill thought out trysts. The people he was dining with were all confirmation of the truth of Felix’s words back then, but at least Dorian was wiser and knew not to chase those he couldn’t have.

Beyond his own blunders, dinner was an agreeable affair and Krem got along with Dorian well, bonding over their shared heritage and a mutual love for football. Krem even seemed to feel comfortable enough to throw in a few lighthearted jabs at Dorian’s obvious Altus upbringing.

Krem departed soon after dessert, much to Dorian’s relief as he was quite finished with reliving a shade of the mortification he experienced with Adaar when they first met. But with Krem gone, the reminder Dorian’s previous hopes and his esteem for Krem faded away and his attention was refocused on Bull and Adaar.

Dorian worried that Adaar and Bull might have questions about Felix, probing at old wounds that were only just healed over. So it surprised Dorian when no questions were forthcoming and no morbid curiosity came out, and the only thing Adaar and Bull said to him once Krem left was the insistence that he didn’t have to help with the dishes.

“Leave those alone, you’re our guest,” Adaar admonished Dorian.

“I was not raised in a barn you know, I certainly have enough manners to help with the dishes after being provided with an excellent meal.” Dorian batted Adaar away as the other man touched his shoulder, trying to pull him away from the sink.

Nothing could prepare Dorian for the indignity of being lifted clear off his feet by Adaar. The ungraceful squawk he let out only increased his embarrassment and being in Adaar’s arms did
absolutely nothing for his composure. The heat of Adaar’s body and the scent of his cologne were instantly imprinted into Dorian’s mind, much to his combined pleasure and chagrin.

“Bull cooks and I clean up, that’s our routine,” Adaar said, depositing Dorian onto the oversized couch next to Bull. “Start up a movie, kadan.”

“Sure thing, boss.”

“Is he always like this?” Dorian asked as he settled in on the couch, cautious to leave several inches between himself and the Iron Bull.

“Why do think I call him boss?” Bull smirked. “What do you feel like watching? We just got The Hero of Ferelden in the mail.”

“A classic. Start it up.”

The movie ended up being less of a good idea than Dorian anticipated. Stuffed with a delicious meal and too many glasses of wine, Dorian’s eyelids felt heavy as he tried to focus on the flickering screen in front of him. It didn’t help that the Iron Bull was particularly warm, on top of the summer heat seeping into the house, while Dorian was thankful that Adaar and Bull didn’t run the frigid air conditioner, it did nothing to help Dorian’s drowsiness.

Following the movie was completely out of the question and nothing could hold his attention beyond the comfortable body next to him and the faint smell of smoke from the grill that clung to the Iron Bull’s skin. His last thought before closing his eyes to rest them, was wondering what kind of aftershave Bull was wearing as its woody smell tickled his nostrils.

The dream that followed was a familiar one, plucked straight from Dorian’s memories of being curled up on the couch with Felix. He dreamt of being securely wrapped up in Felix’s arms, breath tickling his scalp, and dry, cool lips brushing against his forehead. Then there was a jolt of being shaken, Felix complaining that his arm was falling asleep, but Dorian ignored it by burrowing deeper into the warmth next to him.

There was a deep laugh and a voice, much lower than Felix’s, conceded, “Ok, ok, you can stay where you are.”

When Dorian finally opened his eyes again, he was no longer sitting on the couch. At some point, Dorian was tucked into a soft bed with and covered with a handmade quilt with his head resting on an overstuffed pillow. His glasses, keys, wallet, and cellphone sat on the nightstand along with a glass of water. The grey light of dawn was filtering through the sheer, white curtains over the window and it took Dorian far too long to realize that he was not in his bedroom.

Getting up and out of bed, Dorian ran a hand through his hair, wincing at the feel of old hair product stiff in his dark locks. A glance down at his body showed the creases in his rumpled clothes, skewed from his normal tossing and turning in bed. A large, oval mirror over a short set of drawers helpfully revealed his smudged kohl and bleary eyes. He peeked out the window, noting how early it was and that he was up on the second floor of the house.

Exiting the room, Dorian silently closed the door behind him and gently stepped across the floorboards of the hallway, his sock covered feet helping to muffle the sound of his footsteps. He paused halfway down the hall, keeping an ear out for any disruption of the loud, rumbling snores coming from the master bedroom at the end of the hall. Satisfied that he didn’t disturb anyone’s sleep, Dorian quietly made his way down the stairs and towards the front door where his shoes were.
“It’s a bit early for breakfast, but I can make you a cup of coffee.”

“Kaffas!” Dorian hissed out as his heart leapt into his throat, pounding away like a jackhammer. He turned to see the Iron Bull behind of him, a smug grin on his face and dressed only in the most awful striped pajama pants Dorian ever had the misfortune of seeing. “Did you have to sneak up on me like that?”

“No, but it sure was fun. Come on, big guy, I’ll make us some caffeine. We’ll have breakfast once Adaar gets up.” Bull didn’t wait for Dorian to respond before disappearing into the kitchen.

Dorian’s heart was still calming down and his limbs felt shaky, but Dorian obediently followed Bull and watched as Bull started grinding the beans for the coffee. He couldn’t suppress his wince at the noise nor could he hide his glance up towards the ceiling in concern over waking Adaar up, causing the Iron Bull to chuckle at him.

“Don’t worry, Adaar sleeps like the dead, he’s not going to be woken up by the sound of the coffee grinder.”

“I’m sorry for waking you up, I tried to be quiet.”

“You were quiet, but I’m usually awake at this time of the morning anyway.”

“Still, I don’t mean to impose even more than I already have,” Dorian protested. “You should have woken me up last night.”

Bull snorted and shook his head, “It’s no imposition, as I said, I’m up pretty early and it’s nice to have company for once. Anyway, you looked tired last night and we agreed that we didn’t want you driving home like that, I know you don’t live far, but better safe than sorry, right?”

“Uh, yes, I suppose.”

“Did you know that you’re adorably grumpy when someone tries to wake you up?”

Dorian stiffened and huffed, “There is nothing adorable about me.”

“Whatever you say, big guy,” but the smile on Bull’s face said otherwise.

Once the coffee was made, Bull took down two mugs from the cupboards and poured them each a cup. Dorian wrinkled his nose at the Seheron Fog Warriors mug that Bull gave him with fiendish delight, but Dorian didn’t utter a word beyond a thank you. They shuffled out to the back patio to enjoy the morning sun and the slight coolness of the breeze, not yet warmed by the summer day. The little backyard was much more peaceful than Dorian’s own back deck, a smallish space that he and Felix never figured out what to do with other than to put out a couple of chairs.

“You have a lovely home,” Dorian said between sips of dark, smooth coffee.

Bull shrugged, “It’s mostly Adaar’s doing, he tells me what he wants done and I do it.”

“A smart man.”

“I do ok. So, did you want pancakes or waffles for breakfast?”

An odd sense of guilt traveled through Dorian from already having spent the night unexpectedly and now he feared trespassing upon their private time, of intruding in on a space that he didn’t belong in. “I really should be going.”
“Where to at six in the morning?” Bull lifted an eyebrow and then in a kindly tone, said, “You know, we like having you around.”

Dorian blinked slowly at Bull from over the rim of his coffee cup.

“We really like you, Dorian.”

A blush stained Dorian’s cheeks and he swallowed down his coffee to give himself a moment.

“Yes, well, of course, I am magnificent,” Dorian managed. “And you and Adaar are not such terrible company either.” The statement only scratched the surface of what Dorian thought of both Adaar and Bull, of what their company meant to him, and the hope, that if he didn’t screw things up, that Dorian was well on his way on making lifelong friends.

The gentle smile on Bull’s face told Dorian that he understood.
Dates

Chapter Summary

Dorian goes on dates and struggles with his feelings.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I’m giddy. Maker, I’m actually giddy. This is like finding the Urn of Sacred Ashes or discovering the remains of the first Inquisitor.”

“You know that we have tour groups of elementary school children come through here,” Dorian rolled his eyes at Adaar as the Qunari finished signing into the guest registry for Herald University’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

“But they don’t know what they’re looking at!” Adaar protested, though he couldn’t keep the goofy grin off of his face. “And we’re here after hours, which makes it even better, it’s like we’re not even supposed to be here.”

“It’s four-thirty in the afternoon and only the reading room is closed. Most of the staff is still here and I’m the director of this place, so I’m giving us permission to be here,” Dorian explained with playful exasperation.

“You’re ruining my fun, Dorian.”

“Ok, ok, we’re here after hours, we’re not supposed to be here, this is greatly scandalous, blah, blah, blah.”

“You are totally not helping.”

“Are you quite done? Good. Follow me and for Maker’s sake, don’t touch anything!”

In the course of their short, but quickly deepening friendship, Adaar secured a promise from Dorian to give him a behind the scenes look of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. In the lull between the rush of scholars and graduate students using the library during the summer break and the start of the academic year, Dorian at last arranged a time to give Adaar his promised tour.

Dorian led Adaar past the darkened reading room, closed for the day with its sleek, hardwood tables and walls lined with reference materials, and towards the staff area of the library that the public rarely saw. There was a low level hum of activity as there always was in the staff area. The library staff was busy in their individual offices and cubicles, cataloging books, processing manuscript collections, answering questions from offsite researchers, and a variety of other tasks that kept the library running.

Pride swelled within Dorian, blossoming through his chest and making him smile as he passed by his team of librarians, archivists, reference staff, and graduate students. They were all hard workers and dedicated to their jobs, and while he infrequently said it out loud, Dorian held them all in high esteem. The staff greeted him cheerfully, many stopped their work to introduce themselves to Adaar, and all were happy to received Adaar’s platitudes of admiration for their library.
Adaar could hardly contain his anticipation as Dorian brought him to the door leading into the secured stacks. Dorian swiped his ID card through the electronic card reader and the little light on the card reader flipped from red to green with a sharp click as the bolted lock came undone. A burst of cool air hit their faces as they walked into the temperature and humidity controlled room and light flickered into life as Dorian flipped the switches next to the door.

It was not a terribly exciting room with its sterile and blank walls, shiny white tiled floors, and tall retractable shelves, each one uniform and laden with books and manuscript boxes. The only break in the scenery were the colorful book trucks parked in the aisles for moving the materials and the large sets of steel grey flat storage drawers for oversized items and maps. Despite the monotony of the room, Adaar stood stock still and his large green eyes took it all in.

“This is so cool,” Adaar breathed, his voice was just above a whisper.

The pride in Dorian amplified, enough so that he half expected to be approached by a Pride Demon. The sight of Adaar’s open wonder also made his chest squeeze as something both warm and painful clutched at his heart and refused to let go.

“Show me all of your favorite items. Wait! First show me the oldest book here. Can I see your earliest printings of the Chant of Light? No, no, I want to hold Dreamer Telana’s diary first,” Adaar rattled off. “If I lick it, does it become mine?”

Dorian snorted with a mixture of humor and disgust and started pushing at Adaar’s chest as if to try to shove him towards the door. “Well now, the tour is over, so is our friendship, time to leave.”

Adaar laughed, not moving an inch despite Dorian’s halfhearted shoves and he easily caught Dorian’s wrists in his hands. He pulled Dorian in closer, bringing Dorian into his space and near enough that Dorian was well aware of the scent of the subtle, citrusy cologne Adaar wore.

“Nope, you can’t get rid of me. Now that I’m here, I’m going to live in these stacks. All I need is a comfy chair, a sweater, and a cup of tea.”

“Tea??” Dorian nearly shrieked, his voice carrying through the high ceiling of the room. “Ok, our friendship truly is done with. Over my dead body will you bring tea anywhere near my books and manuscripts.”

His reaction only served to increase Adaar’s laughter and he shook his grey head. “You’re too easy, Dorian.”

“I certainly am not,” Dorian sniffed. “Ask anyone in this building and they will tell you that I am quite difficult.”

Adaar gave Dorian an affectionate look, then he carefully tightened his grip of Dorian’s wrists before releasing them and Dorian immediately missed the feel of the pads of Adaar’s fingers on his pulse points.

“Show me around,” Adaar urged softly.

Dorian gave him the grand tour, showing off elaborately decorated prints of the Chant of Light, opening up drawers in the flat storage to reveal large hand drawn maps of Thedas, and pulling out rare books on early theories about the Fade. And he even let Adaar hold the diary of the Dreamer Telana, the lover of Inquisitor Ameridan, albeit while wearing cotton gloves and only for a short amount of time before Dorian whisked it away and anxiously placed it back into its protective box. It was an item that was seldom handled, years ago they carefully created a digital version of the
ancient diary for access purposes to protect the original item and since then the staff treated it with hushed reverence.

“I touched a diary that Telana touched and wrote in, something that she took with her on her adventures with Inquisitor Ameridan. Oh Maker, maybe even Inquisitor Ameridan touched it as well!” Adaar was breathless after Dorian took the diary away and he couldn’t stop looking at his hands. “This was indescribable! I can’t believe that you manage all of this, that you obtained these materials for the library.”

“I didn’t collect everything,” Dorian qualified with an uncharacteristic touch of modesty, “and the library had an impressive collection to start with.”

“But you made it better,” Adaar insisted, undeterred by Dorian’s feeble attempt at humility.

Only Felix was ever that enthusiastic about Dorian’s work and that was because Felix loved anything Dorian loved. Adaar was practically glowing with his excitement and he was even more beautiful in that moment than Dorian had ever seen him. Not for the first time, Dorian silently wished that Adaar was single and he longed to brush his lips upon Adaar’s mouth. Though he quickly admonished himself, knowing what a wonderful person and perfect boyfriend the Iron Bull was.

The thought caught him off guard, shamed him, and made Dorian question the sense in spending time alone with Adaar and Bull as individuals. When they were together, Dorian could firmly remind himself that they were a couple and off limits to anything but friendship, but when he was with only one of them, the quiet burn of attraction would flare up. Then instantly, a simple activity like showing Adaar where he worked felt exceedingly intimate, too close to a date.

They finally left the stacks and Adaar lingered around the exhibit area while Dorian finished up some last minute work in his office before they headed out to meet with Bull for dinner. Their destination was a popular burger place right next to the university, the Gull and Lantern, and even without most of the students in town, the place was still packed in the early hours of the evening. Fortunately, Bull made it there early enough to get them a table in the back of the restaurant and his bright purple button up shirt made him quite visible, but Dorian was taken aback by the small crowd at the large table Bull snagged for them.

“Look who I found!” Bull boomed out over the dull roar of chatter in the restaurant, gesturing to Lavellan, Cullen, Sera, and Dagna, who were all sitting with him as Adaar slid into the seat next to Bull and Dorian ended up at the end of the table. “I swear half this city works for a university.”

It spoke to the smallness of Dorian’s world that his various friends, whom he through various events and workplaces, were all acquainted with each other. Skyhold, while being a fairly large city, managed to have a close knit community.

“We all ran into each other on campus this afternoon and we decided to crash your dinner,” Cullen explained. “One can never say no to a burger and beer at the Gull and Lantern.”

“Iron Bull was just telling us about the bake sale he and the other teachers at his school are having in a couple of weeks,” Dagna caught Dorian and Adaar up on their conversation.

“Raising money to buy school supplies for the kids who need them, it’s nice, but I can’t believe you live in such a posh area and your school can’t afford crayons,” Sera added crossly, her mouth partly filled with an appetizer of fried cheese.

Bull sighed into his beer. “There are always families who struggle in every school district. I just
want to help the kids out and make sure they’ve got what they need for the school year.”

Dagna cooed, “I think it’s sweet.”

“Bull is such a big marshmallow,” Adaar said fondly, leaning in towards Bull and his curled horn gently brushed against Bull’s cheek. “He did a similar sale at the school he was student teaching at back in Val Royeaux before we came out here and it was a huge success, so he started it back up during his first year here.”

“I’m only successful because my kadan helps me,” Bull nudged his boyfriend. “I’m good at getting the teachers together and Adaar’s better at strumming up support from the community.”

“Ugh, you two are sickly sweet,” Sera wrinkled her nose, but her words were lighthearted.

“The same can be said of you and Dagna,” Lavellan rolled her eyes.

“I can’t help it! Not when Widdle is so squeezy cute!” Sera practically launched herself at Dagna to squish her cheeks.

The group laughed at Sera’s antics and Bull ducked his head to whisper something into Adaar’s ear, whatever was being said made Adaar grin and the happiness lighting up on his face compared to nothing else. Dorian felt regret of his envy of Bull earlier that day, of his wish to deprive Adaar of such a loving man. Watching the two of them, he could easily see how well Adaar and Bull fit together. Something bittersweet twisted inside of Dorian, he was happy for his friends, but at the same time he was missing his own connection with Felix.

He would always miss Felix, but sometimes the feeling was sharper, clearer, and it was crippling in its pain. It was a knife that pierced through Dorian at strange and unexpected moments. Like when he was chopping vegetables for dinner when Felix would have otherwise done so, in the mornings while shaving in the bathroom and seeing only his own reflection, or hanging out with friends at Felix’s favorite place to get a burger.

Looking around the table, Dorian tried to push down his sudden wretchedness bred of his longing for his husband. Sera was sitting close enough to Dagna to almost be in the dwarf’s lap and was not shy with her physical affection. Cullen and Lavellan sat side by side, their shoulders pressed against one another with Cullen’s fingers occasionally stroking the knuckles of Lavellan’s hand. And Bull sat with his arm around Adaar as he often did, his hand resting comfortably on Adaar’s shoulder.

The building tightness in Dorian loosened some as Adaar’s knee knocked against his own under the table and stayed there, a small, casual touch that dislodged the tangle of loneliness that had been growing. Above the table, Adaar smiled at Dorian, but his look was concerned and he continued to shoot Dorian worried gazes for the rest of the dinner.

Adaar wasn’t the only one. Lavellan picked up on Dorian’s change in mood right away and he could not escape her apprehensive looks from across the table. He just gave her the most charming smiles he had and pushed himself to engage in his part of the conversation.

When the group stepped out of the restaurant after dinner, the late summer night air had a lingering bite to it and they waved goodbye to Sera and Dagna as the couple piled into Sera’s beaten up car to head on home for the evening. The rest of them loitered outside of several minutes chatting until Adaar offered Dorian a ride home, knowing that Dorian took the light rail train into work that day. There was also something anxious in Adaar’s body language that wasn’t there before. There was also a small flinch in Adaar’s hands and shoulders, a stilted movement towards Dorian that was
quickly aborted.

“We’ll take Dorian home,” Lavellan interjected swiftly and firmly, her head tilted up to meet Adaar’s eyes with her unyielding stare. “His place is on the way to our house.”

There was a stretch of silence, Adaar and Lavellan seemed to stare each other down while both Bull and Cullen shifted uncomfortably next to their significant others before Dorian intervened.

“My place is a bit out of your way, Adaar. Thanks for the offer, but it’ll be easier for Lavellan and Cullen to drop me off.”

Adaar looked like he wanted to insist, but Bull cut in, “Ok, we’ll see you later then.”

Adaar’s gaze moved from Lavellan to Bull, they were speaking to each other through miniscule changes in movement and hard blinks. Silently, Adaar relented and let the situation slide, bidding a goodnight as he and Bull left for their car. Then Lavellan grabbed Dorian’s arm and tugged him back towards the campus, “Come on, I forgot something in my office.”

Cullen seemed to understand what his wife was up to and told them that he could get the car and bring it by the office to pick them up, heading off in the opposite direction. Dorian knew that there was nothing that Lavellan left behind in her office, but he followed his friend through the campus.

They made their way towards the history building near the main quad of the university. The campus was quiet in the evening, long shadows were cast by the old stone buildings and down upon the brick pathways winding through school. Beyond the occasional bird chirping in the trees and the background hum of insects, for a moment it felt like he and Lavellan were the only two creatures at Herald University.

“Talk to me, Dorian.”

“Ah, where to begin?” The corner of Dorian’s mouth curled up in self-deprecation. “I was just feeling Felix’s absence a little too keenly today.”

Lavellan looked away guiltily. “I’m guessing that hanging out with a bunch of couples doesn’t help matters.”

“It’s not that, well, not only that,” Dorian shook his head and he slowed his pace. “I think starting to date is making me acknowledge again that moving on is just that and I’m moving away from my life with Felix.”

“Dorian, if it’s still too soon, if dating is hurting you—”

“No, no, I’m fine, I need to do this,” Dorian interrupted. “But dating is more work than I remember it being and I’m just tired of being alone,” Dorian answered morosely. Then, he cheerfully complained, “Besides, it is no wonder I am making no progress in dating, your husband has terrible taste in men and yours is just marginally better.”

“What are you talking about?” Lavellan balked, taking Dorian’s lead and letting Dorian’s baggage lie. “Have you seen Cullen? He’s a catch!”

“Must I remind you about Solas?”

Lavellan groaned loudly in real distress at the mention of the man she was seeing before meeting Cullen. “Please never remind me about Solas ever again. But I swear my taste in men isn’t as bad as it seems, actually I know someone in my department who you might like, let me set you up with
him.”

Dorian stared at her doubtfully.

“Bram Kenric is a professor in early Chantry and Inquisition history. He’s smart, interesting, pretty cute, and he thinks you run the best rare book library in all of Thedas,” she pressed.

“Well,” Dorian laughed softly, “I suppose that’s as good of a start as any.”

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Bright sunlight filtered through the windows of the main hallway of Divine Justinia Elementary School. The unoccupied hall smelled of a combination of waxed floors, fresh paint, and lemon cleaner, a noxious mixture. Everything in the school was cleaned and ready for the children who would be returning to the empty classrooms the following week.

The summer had passed by quickly, as it always did in Ferelden, and the chill in the air signaled the start of the school year. Dorian could hardly believe that the summer was at its end, students at the university had already returned and the last strings of the season were about to be cut as the grade school children returned to their desks. Dorian’s own summer was filled with a tiring string of first dates balanced out with the pleasure of his life becoming more and more intertwined with Adaar and Bull’s. The fact that Lavellan was walking into the elementary school with him was proof enough of that entanglement.

The soles of Dorian’s shoes squeaked upon the spotless floors and Lavellan’s hard heeled boots clicked incessantly, increasing Dorian’s self-consciousness with every step. It was not every day that a Tevinter mage walked down the hall of a Fereldan elementary school with a Dalish elf, and the anticipation that someone would come out and question what they were doing there became almost overwhelming.

Thankfully, Bull’s classroom was quick and easy to find at the end of a main hallway, the door was propped open and the sound of Bull and Adaar’s voices filled the otherwise silent school.

Dorian and Lavellan walked in and were greeted by the sight of a spotless and tidy classroom, waiting for the chaos that nearly twenty second graders would bring. There were clusters of freshly cleaned desks with tiny chairs that were grouped in front of a large whiteboard. On top of each desk was a pink name tag cut out in the shape of a nug and a much larger desk loomed in the back of the room with its own pink nug shaped name tag with the name “Mr. Bull” on it. The room was filled with bright posters with all sorts of animals on it, large swathes of colorful butcher paper covered the walls for children’s artwork to adorn, there were tubs with blocks and stuffed animals, a chart with the Common alphabet with a corresponding picture wrapped around the top of the walls, and books were everywhere.

Adaar and Bull were in the middle of unpacking a box of personal items for Bull’s desk and perked up at the sight of Dorian and Lavellan. Then both of their jaws dropped at the sight of the large, clear plastic tubs that Dorian and Lavellan were carrying.

“I thought you were going to drop off a few things,” Adaar said with surprise as he hurried to take Lavellan’s tub and placed it on one of the desks and Dorian followed suit.

“Sera did a drive for school supplies at the Hanged Man, I think she was giving out mystery shots in exchange for crayons. She’s got unorthodox methods, but you can’t argue with the results,” Lavellan slapped the lid of the tub which was filled with pencils, crayons, markers, notebooks, pencil boxes, rulers, binders, and art supplies.
“Didn’t Sera quit bartending at the Hanged Man the other week?” Adaar asked.

“I thought Varric fired her,” Bull countered.

“Well, she’s working there now,” Lavellan shook her head, long understanding that there was no accounting for Sera. “Either way, you’ve got more than enough supplies for your kids this year. Dorian and I got some of our colleagues at the university to chip in as well.”

“Aw, guys, this is great, more than I could ever hope for.” A wide grin took over Bull’s features. “I don’t know how to repay you for this.”

“It’s nothing.” Dorian brushed off the gratitude. “This was the only way to assuage our guilt after we pitied you so greatly for that sad bake sale you and the other teachers put on the other week to raise money for supplies.”

There was a truth to those words after Adaar invited Dorian to the bake sale and he, Lavellan, and Cullen attended. Dorian attended the most prestigious schools that money could buy in Tevinter, his teachers never had to worry about things like having enough art supplies for their students or that their students might be too poor to buy a proper pencil box. The fact that Bull and his coworkers worried about that constantly dug into Dorian, it pressed upon the parts of him that sympathized with people in need and made him want to do something other than sit back and lament with other privileged peoples about the state of the world.

It was the part of him that made him a good person as Lavellan often asserted.

Bull pulled both Lavellan and Dorian into a hug, nearly crushing them with the physical force of his gratitude. “You big softies, you’re the best.”

Adaar also hugged them once Bull released them from his grip, his green eyes watering as he said, “This is really above and beyond, thank you so much.”

“Think nothing of it, this is just friends helping out friends,” Lavellan insisted, though Dorian knew of her generous spirit and her willingness to help someone in need. She was at best an amateur philanthropist and at worst a busybody. “Anyway, I need to get going and pick Cullen up from his doctor’s appointment. I’ll see you all at Varric’s house for Wicked Grace tonight?”

“Yeah, we can’t wait,” Adaar confirmed.

“I will actually not be attending,” Dorian admitted.

Lavellan’s head snapped towards him and she flashed her teeth at him in an overly pleased smile. “Are you seeing Bram tonight?”

“If you must know, yes.”

“That’s what? Your seventh date so far?”

“Sixth.”

Adaar blinked in confusion, his eyes darting between Dorian and Lavellan, and with some disbelief, he asked, “Are you talking about Bram Kenric?”

“Yeah, he’s a professor of early Inquisition and Chantry history in my department. I set him and Dorian up a couple weeks ago and it seems to be going well,” Lavellan said with obvious relish. “Do you know him?”
“Yes,” Adaar nodded, his tone more subdued than it was just a minute ago. “We were actually classmates at the University of Orlais, I did a second major in history, but he was a couple years ahead of me. I’ve been meeting up with him every once in a while ever since Bull and I moved to Skyhold.”

“Bram might be the only person alive who has more enthusiasm for Inquisition history than you, Adaar,” Dorian said offhandedly.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Adaar replied in mock offense, but his usual vibrancy in his teasing was lacking. “Kenric is an excellent historian, I’ll give him that, but no one can match my passion.”

“This isn’t a competition, kadan,” Bull chastised Adaar lightly. “So things have been going well with Kenric?” Bull asked, sounding more sincere and curious than Adaar’s initial reaction, but Dorian could sense his own reserve.

“Ah, well,” Dorian hesitated, “better than anyone Cullen has set me up with, but that was a low bar to clear.”

“Which means I’m totally beating Cullen,” Lavellan pumped her fist into the air. “You should take Bram to the reception.”

“Reception?” Adaar asked.

“Dorian is getting an award from the dean of the College of Magi for his work in building up the Rare Book and Manuscript Library’s collection in ancient texts on magic. There will be a reception where he and some of our colleagues will be honored. Dorian has one extra ticket to bring someone with him and I’m sure Bram would love to go,” Lavellan suggested with enthusiasm.

“Oh, Dorian, that’s great!” Adaar’s usual excitement returned in strength. “I’ve always said that what you do is great contribution to scholarship.”

“Congrats, big guy!” Bull slapped Dorian on the shoulder.

“It’s just an opportunity for the College of Magi to show off to donors and alumni in the beginning of the academic year,” Dorian explained, “but if they want to fawn over me and wine and dine me, all the better.”

Lavellan left soon afterwards and Dorian stayed behind to help Adaar sort through the supplies, placing them in plastic bins for easy access. Bull stepped out to help another teacher pin up some posters and butcher paper in her room, leaving Dorian and Adaar alone. For once in their short acquaintance, Adaar looked uncomfortable from the way his eyes darted towards Dorian and the small frown that tugged down the corners of his lips. A knot of anxiety formed in Dorian’s chest, wondering if he crossed some unknown boundary by dating Adaar’s friend.

“I didn’t know that you were seeing Bram,” Adaar started as he placed another box of crayons into a red bin.

Dorian shrugged indifferently and forced flippancy in his tone that he did not feel. “Honestly, I’ve been on so many first dates this summer that it’s gotten easier just not to talk about them. I can hardly keep them straight and I certainly don’t expect my friends to keep track of them all.”

“Yeah, but this isn’t your first date with Bram.”

A small laugh filled the silence as Dorian tried to express himself, though he barely knew why he didn’t tell Adaar and Bull about Bram. “True, but I suppose I hardly noticed it myself. Lately these
things tend to go wrong for me rather quickly, so it was a bit of a shock that things didn’t go poorly right away. Perhaps I didn’t want to jinx it by becoming too hopeful.” He paused as uncertainty threatened to overcome him. “Are you ok with me seeing Bram?”

“What?” Adaar jerked his head up from the tub of school supplies and his eyes were wide. “Oh! Of course I’m ok with it! I guess I’m just surprised that you’re seeing him. He doesn’t seem like your type at all.”

“I have a type?” Dorian lifted an eyebrow.

Adaar tilted his head and his eyes were fixed on Dorian as he smiled shyly, “I just imagine you with someone who’s more energetic than Bram. I mean, Bram is passionate about history and I’m sure you’ve had a lot of really interesting conversations with him, but he’s not very romantic, you know? I think of you with someone who’s both smart and kind, who’s dashing and sweeps you off your feet. I often picture Felix like that.”

Dorian couldn’t help but laugh, his laughter was soft and rueful. He was admittedly touched by Adaar’s romantic notion of an ideal partner for him, but Adaar missed the mark on how Felix was. Felix was everything one could expect in a good man, filled with warmth and humor, sharp intelligence and boundless generosity, there were few virtues that Felix did not have and Dorian loved him fiercely for it. He was also an awkward klutz.

“Felix was all of those things and more, but dashing?” Dorian laughed again, a gentle sound filled with both an old longing and fondness. “He stepped on both my feet during our first dance at our wedding, after we spent nearly half a year practicing and spent so much money on lessons! He dropped my engagement ring, twice mind you, when he proposed. And he once fell into the fountain on the main quad at the university! Felix was reading and walking at the same time, but he somehow didn’t see the fountain and fell in! Maker, who does that?”

The memory still tickled him all those years later. The image of Felix in a full suit and sopping wet in the fountain, his dark eyes blinking up at his husband in surprise from where he was still sprawled out on his butt from his sudden fall never failed to make Dorian smile.

Then Dorian caught Adaar staring at him, his expression was soft as a small grin played across his lips and little lines crinkled around his eyes. Dorian diverted his eyes and he felt flustered, knowing it was the same look that Adaar often gave Bull.

“I like the way you look when you talk about him, when you talk about your happier memories with Felix,” Adaar said quietly, though his voice sounded overly loud in Dorian’s ears. “You always look so happy, so affectionate, I wish that I …” Adaar trailed off and shook his head. Whatever he wished remained a secret as he continued on, “Well, if Bram makes you feel that way, then I’m sorry to have misjudged him so harshly.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Dorian admitted. “You were right when you said that we must have interesting conversations, he has a lot of fascinating knowledge in his head, but Bram is how shall I say? Well, you were right when you said he is not dashing or very romantic. But I suppose I get along with him well enough and he is not unattractive.”

Adaar offered a small, mischievous smile, “That is some love poetry you’re waxing there, Dorian.”

“The love poetry I know is not fit to be repeated in this building.” Dorian finally relaxed as Adaar did, the uncomfortable posture he donned earlier was gone and the easiness of their friendship reasserted itself.
It was with no small amount of reluctance that Dorian left Bull’s classroom half an hour later. He knew himself too well not to give ample time to get ready for his date and while he never minded being fashionably late, Dorian quickly discovered that tardiness made Bram skittish.

“We’ll get together soon, don’t think you’re off the hook for not telling us about Kenric,” Bull teased after he returned to the classroom and Dorian was about to head out.

“Perhaps dinner this weekend? I will regale you with all the sordid details of the history lessons I’ve received,” Dorian promised and said his goodbyes.

As he walked down the hall, Dorian chanced a quick glance behind him, catching Bull and Adaar in intimate moment. They stood close together, their foreheads were leaning upon each other, and Bull’s hand was resting on Adaar’s neck as his thumb stroked soothing circles on the nape. Adaar’s lips were moving, his hushed words were only for Bull, who silently listened and his whole world seemed to be encompassed by Adaar. Dorian turned his head quickly before either could notice as it was not a moment to be shared with him.

But even as Dorian left Adaar and Bull, Adaar’s reservations about Bram Kenric stuck to him. Adaar’s welling meaning words clung to Dorian as he dined with Bram that evening at a cozy Orlesian café in downtown Skyhold. There was a romantic vibe to the café, the dining room was lit mostly by flickering candles and the dwindling sunlight, and the sound of quiet murmurs over the melody plucked out by the pianist in the corner filled the establishment. And sitting adjacent to Dorian was Bram dressed in a brown sports coat and white button up shirt, looking more prepared to give a history lecture than to woo Dorian, though his expression spoke of the pleasure he received from being in Dorian’s presence.

Bram Kenric was a good man. He smiled easily and became animated as he told stories of expeditions he went on and the work his research assistant, Colette, was doing. His intellect and his genuine friendliness drew Dorian in, but little else held him there. The Free Marcher professor was not unattractive, his pale complexion and red hair suited him, and he was fit for someone who spent most of his time lecturing, but Dorian found his mind wandering to other stronger physiques. Bram was zealous about his work, but in other interactions he was overly formal and stiff, reminding Dorian faintly of the guests at his mother’s parties.

Dorian found himself missing Adaar and Bull’s company. He missed the easiness of his interactions with them, the way that Bull made him laugh and Adaar’s adorable mannerisms.

“Are you unwell, Dorian?” Bram asked over his glass of wine, real concern creasing lines on his face. “You’ve been rather quiet tonight.”

Dorian straightened in his seat, embarrassed that he had been caught letting his mind wander. “Oh, uh, no, just a touch tired today,” he fibbed.

“I can call the waiter, get our dinners to go, and take you home.” Bram’s offer was sincere, eager to please and be useful when he could.

“I can call the waiter, get our dinners to go, and take you home.” Bram’s offer was sincere, eager to please and be useful when he could.

“No, no, I’m fine, something to eat will perk me up.” Dorian made a show of fetching a piece of fluffy, white bread from the basket on the table. “Please, do go on, I am quite intrigued as to the trouble your research assistant got into in the Frostback Basin.”

Bram grinned bashfully, “Well, Colette didn’t get into too much trouble, though I certainly didn’t help matters.” And he continued on with his story.

Dinner was perfectly fine and Bram was acceptable company, but Dorian continued to feel a
distinct lack of strong attraction and affection. Bram’s hand was cool and dry in Dorian’s as they walked out of the restaurant and not once did Dorian’s heart skip a beat nor did his stomach flutter. The kiss that Bram pressed upon Dorian’s lips at the door of Dorian’s townhouse was fleeting, sweet, and chaste, and Dorian made no move to deepen it.

He could have invited Bram inside and offered him a cup of coffee or tempt him with dessert. He could have easily convinced Bram into his bed and share an intimate encounter. But instead Dorian stepped into the townhouse alone and waved goodbye to Bram. Once Bram’s car was out of sight, Dorian closed the door and made a beeline to the kitchen to pour a glass of wine and flopped down onto the couch in the living room.

Taking a deep drink from his wine glass, Dorian wondered what was wrong with him. Bram was a perfect gentleman, smart, and sweet, but he didn’t stir anything within Dorian. Not that Dorian was ever adept at falling for men who were good for him, with Felix being the only exception. It was as if Felix was the only person Dorian could love properly, that he was the only person untainted by marriage, scandal, or an unsavory disposition that Dorian could ever want. There was nothing wrong with the men that Cullen and Lavellan set him up with, Dorian acknowledged, it was all him.

A cheerful beep from his phone cut through Dorian’s melancholy and his lips curled into a smile at the text message waiting for him.

Adaar wrote, *Hope the date is going well! Also Cullen just lost his shirt to Dagna in the last hand of cards, she’s wearing it as a cape.*

He replied directly. *The history lecture was riveting and I am glad that Cullen has not stopped betting his clothes in card games.*

Only a few moments went by before Adaar messaged back. *Was? Are you home already?*

*It was a short lecture tonight. I might have been better off watching Cullen lose his shirt.*

Instantly, Adaar wrote back, *Want to come over to our house and watch a movie? It’s still pretty early and Bull baked some brownies earlier if you didn’t have dessert.*

It was a tempting offer as Dorian liked watching movies with Bull and Adaar, sitting close to one of them with a big bowl of popcorn. He liked the warmth their bodies gave off, sinking through his layers of clothes and into his chilled bones. He enjoyed the way arms and knees brushed against each other whenever someone shifted and the casual weight of Bull’s arm when he stretched it over of the back of the couch, brushing against Dorian’s neck.

*Thanks for the offer, but I’m going to go to bed early tonight.*

*Ok, goodnight! We’ll get dinner this weekend!*

After draining the last of the wine in his glass, Dorian went up to his bedroom and turned in for the night early. Stripped of his clothes and makeup, Dorian laid on the bed, turning onto his side and looked at the unoccupied bed space next to him. There were no words that night and instead Dorian stretched out his hand over to the empty side, remembering a time when it was filled.

The next day found Dorian sitting out on the small deck behind of his townhouse in the evening, slumped in a chair, and absorbing the heat from the sun, knowing that soon the world would be chilled by the rapidly approaching autumn. Just a few weeks ago, the deck only boasted a pair of lawn chairs, but now it was also embellished with a small, wrought iron table, a couple of well
cared for potted plants, and a small dawnstone dragon garden statue. On top of the table was a cold beer, beads of condensation sliding down the glass bottle and pooling at the bottom.

In his hands, he fiddled with the thin envelope holding the two tickets to the reception that was rapidly approaching. He didn’t want to go alone, but just that afternoon after work, Dorian gently told Bram about his lack of interest in continuing to date. The image of Bram flushing was stuck in Dorian’s head, the pinkness that stood in deep contrast against Bram’s pale skin, self-conscious smile he gave Dorian, and the comment about how Dorian was out of his league anyway.

“I wasn’t out of Bram’s league, amatus,” Dorian said. “It’s … It’s just me. You know, he was not so wholly unlike you. He was an academic, kind, gentle, but he wasn’t you.” Dorian closed his eyes and added, “He wasn’t Adaar or Bull …” Dorian trailed off, knowing better than to continue on that train of thought.

“I emailed your mother about my award this morning and she called right away to chastise me for not giving her more notice so she could make travel plans to attend the reception. I knew she’d want to come, but I know how much trouble it causes with your father.” Dorian paused and took a deep breath as he grabbed his beer and put the envelope of tickets down on his leg. “Well, you know how your father is, amatus.”

“Better than your arsehole dad at least.”

Dorian fumbled with his beer, the slick bottle nearly fell from his hand as Sera’s head popped out from behind the sliding glass door. She had invited herself into the townhouse as she often did and stepped out onto the deck with a beer of her own in hand. No offense was taken over Sera’s familiarity with Dorian’s home. In the immediate days after Felix’s death she became a resident of the townhouse, a stay that lasted for over half a year, and prevented Dorian from having to face the emptiness alone. Ever since then, she was welcomed into his home without an invitation.

Sera sat cross legged on the empty lawn chair and faced Dorian.

“Still talking to him, huh?”

Dorian nodded.

“Tell smarty britches I say hi.”

Dorian gave her a weak grin. “Amatus, Sera says hello.”

Sera took a long drink from her bottle. “Got your text about what’s his face, you know, the boring one. Thought you might want some company.”

“I am hardly heartbroken over a history professor I went on half a dozen dates with.”

“Doesn’t mean it doesn’t suck.”

Dorian’s only reply was to hold up his beer to Sera and clicked his bottle against hers.

“What’s that?” she pointed to the white envelope of tickets.

“Tickets for the reception.”

“Bright side is now you don’t have to invite the boring guy. Go with Widdle, she was invited to that fancy pants shindig too.”
“You’re not going with her?”

Sera snorted loudly and Dorian smiled at his own foolish question.

After a moment of hesitation, Dorian asked carefully, “Would it be a terrible thing to invite Adaar?”

“How would it be terrible?” Sera shrugged. “I like him, he’s a bit of a big wig, but doesn’t let it get to him, yeah? Plus, he and his boyfriend make me wonder about stuff about Qunari women. Woof.”

“I know you like him, but it wouldn’t seem forward of me?”

“Forward? What you mean?” Sera cocked her head to the side and furrowed her brow at him.

Dorian sighed loudly. “I mean that I’d be inviting him to a formal event with wine and champagne, and I only have one ticket, so I can’t invite Bull too.”

“Then invite the Bull afterwards for drinks. You know that you can spend time with them separately and it’s not like you’re trying to get into Adaar’s pants. Look, it’s only weird if you make it weird.”

He hated to admit that there was wisdom to Sera’s words, but he gave credit where it was due. “I suppose you’re right.”

“Always am.”

Later that night as Dorian made dinner and fortified his courage with a glass of wine, he sent Adaar a text.

_I have an extra ticket to that award ceremony on Friday. Want to come with me? I only have the one ticket, but this seems more like your pace than Bull’s and we could meet up with him afterwards._

The text left an unsettled feeling in the pit of Dorian’s stomach that churned for a full minute before he received a reply.

_I’d love to! It’s a date!

Chapter End Notes

I pinky swear that one day we will get to Dorian/Adaar/Iron Bull-ness.
Mistakes

Chapter Summary

Dorian and Adaar go out and the night does not end as Dorian expected.

The doorbell rang sharply through the townhouse, causing Dorian’s hand to still in the middle of applying his eyeliner and he blinked in surprise. Taking a quick look at the small clock on the bathroom counter, Dorian cursed silently for letting the time get away from him, but he knew that perfection could not be rushed. Finishing the line of dark kohl around his eyes and slipping on his glasses, Dorian managed to escape the bathroom before the doorbell rang a second time.

He bounded down the stairs and to the front door, wrenching it open to find Adaar and the Iron Bull on the other side. Dorian’s breath got caught in his throat at the sight of Adaar. Dressed in a deep red dress shirt, tie, dark slacks, and a matching vest, Adaar looked even more striking than he usually did. The cut of his clothes flattered his strong physique, emphasizing his broad shoulders and hugging his chest closely, reminding Dorian of how strong the nerdy Qunari really was.

“Is the reception an informal event?” Bull joked from behind of Adaar, his single eye raking up and down Dorian’s body.

Standing in only an undershirt and pajama pants, Dorian’s cheeks flushed self-consciously. “I am not quite ready yet.”

“I can see that.” Bull grinned and strode forward, pulling Dorian into one of his bone crushing hugs. “Anyway, since I was dropping Adaar off I wanted to come in and say congrats again and that I’ll see you after the reception.”

“I think you’ve broken three of my ribs,” Dorian protested from where his face was buried in Bull’s bare shoulder, the man wasn’t wearing a shirt and Dorian found an uncomfortable amount of himself pressed against Bull’s skin. Dorian felt no small amount of relief when Bull finally released him, not because he disliked the feel of Bull’s overly heated grey skin, but that he enjoyed it far too much for a platonic friendship.

“Have fun at Rocky’s party, tell him I said happy birthday,” Adaar kissed the corner of Bull’s mouth as his hand grasped Bull’s bicep. “I’ll see you tonight.”

“Enjoy the reception, kadan.”

Bull headed out and Dorian closed the door behind him, giving Adaar an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry if I’m keeping you from a friend’s birthday.”

“It’s no problem at all, I wouldn’t want to miss this and I’ve seen Rocky blackout drunk on more than one occasion.” Adaar took in Dorian’s appearance with amusement. “So, does this mean I get to pick out your clothes for tonight?”

“Absolutely not!” Dorian was aghast at the suggestion. “I already have my outfit picked out, I just need to finish getting ready.”

“Let me see what you’re wearing,” Adaar insisted and headed up the stairs towards the master
bedroom with Dorian on his heels.

Laid out on the bed was an ash grey suit with a vest, tie, and a silk dark blue shirt paired with a matching pocket square. Adaar hummed appreciatively at Dorian’s choice, his fingers rubbing the fabric of the suit appraisingly, but then he moved towards the open door of Dorian’s closet. It didn’t take long before Adaar pulled out a dress shirt colored not unlike the one he was wearing and held it out to Dorian eagerly, holding it up to Dorian’s chest.

“Wear this one so we’ll match!”

Dorian reeled in disbelief. “Fasta vass! Never! Maker, don’t tell me that you wearing matching outfits with the Iron Bull.”

“Just on holidays and sometimes on Pantsless Fridays.” Adaar grinned at the growing horror on Dorian’s face. “Hey, can I pick out your tie?”

“I already have one!”

Adaar snorted and dove back into the closet, this time taking out an admittedly well-chosen textured silver tie with thin blue stripes. “Wear this one,” he held it up to Dorian’s throat, his knuckles lightly brushing upon the column of sensitive flesh, “it matches your eyes.”

“You’re a menace,” Dorian accused, trying not to swallow as he pushed Adaar’s hands away, but he took the tie. Then he waved Adaar away, “Shoo, I need to get dressed.”

“Ok, ok, I’ll protect your modesty. I’ll be downstairs rearranging your kitchen.”

“You leave my kitchen alone, Kaaras Adaar!”

“I can’t, your pots are stacked in the most impractical way and you arrange your silverware completely wrong!”

Dorian rolled his eyes and closed the door behind of Adaar with a purposeful thump, unable to stop his breathless chuckle.

Getting back to the task at hand and deciding not to worry about the havoc being wreaked upon his kitchen, Dorian finished getting ready. Once he was dressed in his suit, Dorian examined himself in the mirror, straightening out his shirt and readjusting his clothing to make sure everything was perfect. Taking a good look into the mirror, Dorian found that the man in the reflection stunned him a little.

He was handsomely dressed in one of his best suits, his hair and moustache were flawlessly styled, his makeup was impeccable, and he was wearing his favorite pair of glasses, but what was more shocking was the happiness the lightened his features. The constant lingering smile accompanied by cheerful little crinkled lines around his mouth and eyes, the brightness of his silver irises, and the easy expression of contentment were all an unusual sight. Though, as Dorian thought about it, there was nothing to be surprised about. He was about to be recognized for his work in front his friends and colleagues, provided with fine food and wine, Adaar would be at his side and flattering Dorian the entire time, and Bull would meet with them later to drink and express his sincere and hearty congratulations.

There was much to be happy about that night.

Dorian took a moment to twist the silverite ring that rarely left his middle left finger. “I hope I look acceptable, amatus,” Dorian murmured, a faint smile on his lips.
Heading downstairs, Dorian spotted Adaar in the middle of reorganizing Dorian’s collection of tea in the pantry.

“You just can’t leave well enough alone,” Dorian chastised his friend.

Adaar popped his head out of the pantry and opened his mouth to defend his actions, but no words came out and Dorian couldn’t help but preen.

“I know, I know, it is rare for you to come across such perfection since the Iron Bull is more rough than diamond, but you mustn’t leave your mouth open like that, Adaar, you’ll certainly attract flies.”

Adaar crossed the room in a few, long strides and his hands were immediately upon Dorian’s person. His palms smoothed out nonexistent wrinkles in the suit jacket, running along Dorian’s chest and shoulders, before his fingers wrapped around the knot of Dorian’s tie, idly readjusting it.

“You look lovely, Dorian.”

“I always do.”

“I’ve noticed, but tonight you are especially so.”

Dorian’s throat tightened and he had to blink a few times before he could gather his wits. “I cannot leave my adoring fans wanting, can I? Now, we need to be off before we’re more than just fashionably late.”

“Lead the way.”

Dorian drove them to the university with Adaar chatting the entire way, talking about the current classes he was teaching, an overly helpful undergraduate student named Sutherland, his eager new research assistant, Lysas, and about Bull’s hilarious new group of students. But Adaar’s happy prattling trailed off as they approached the College of Magi building, climbed the stairs to the entrance, and stepped inside.

The reception, a small event of carefully selected alumni, donors, and faculty, was held on the first floor foyer of the College of Magi building. It was a superior space compared to the bland conference rooms where other university events were held as the building showed off the influence held by the College of Magi. Founded not long after Mage Circles were dissolved in the Dragon Age, the college was the start of what would be later known as Herald University and their status and esteem showed.

The floor was a white marble which was still polished and pristine at the start of the year, the vaulted ceilings were ornate and gilded in gold leaf, portraits of the founders of the College of Magi hung on the walls, and at the center of the foyer was a grand staircase leading up to the second floor with a beautiful nevarrite statue of Andraste on the landing with her arms spread open, welcoming the students into the halls of learning. It was an ideal space for the college to flex its muscle and to show off, and from the pleased look of First Enchanter Solona Amell, dean of the college, she was well aware of it. Guests were already nibbling on food, sipping on their drinks, and enjoying the string quartet that was quietly playing as they stood in awe of the building.

“Maker, I’ve been living in Skyhold for over two years and I’ve never stepped foot in here before, now I’m wondering why it’s taken me so long,” Adaar breathed, his eyes were busy looking all around him and Dorian could almost see the wheels turning in his mind, wondering what the classrooms and offices looked like. Skyhold University had its own respectable College of Magi,
but it wasn’t nearly as revered as Herald University’s college nor was it as well funded.

“I see you’re well pleased with it then? Might you say that it compares to the grandeur of the University of Orlais?” Dorian teased, but he was delighted about the impression of the College of Magi made upon Adaar. He wanted to continue to impress Adaar, Dorian could never get enough admiration and Adaar was always eager to supply it.

“That’s an understatement. You and Felix did your graduate programs here, right?”

“I got my masters here, but Felix actually went to Skyhold University for his doctoral program before he was hired as professor at Herald’s math department.”

“What? Your husband dared to go to a public school?” Adaar pretended to be scandalized.

“Skyhold admittedly has a better mathematics department and Felix never had any real talent for magic. His greatest accomplishment was figuring out how to conjure up snow to flick at me. He was actually accepted into the program at University of Orlais,” Dorian told Adaar, who looked astounded at the news as people simply did not turn down an acceptance into the University of Orlais. “But he went to Skyhold because he knew that Herald University had a College of Magi that rivals any school in Tevinter and he wanted me to come with him.”

“Were you two involved then?”

Dorian laughed and shook his head. “No, we didn’t start dating until he asked me to move to Skyhold with him. It was all very sappy and dramatic, we were pining and dancing around each other for years, but both of us were too afraid to say anything about it. Then Felix announced that he was planning on leaving Tevinter, which made sense, he could get a better graduate education in his field in the south, but I was completely devastated. Well, devastated for about a whole two minutes before Felix said he didn’t want to go without me. We declared our love for each other, such as it was at that point, and I left Tevinter. It was all rather disgustingly emotional now that I think back on it.”

“I think it’s sweet,” Adaar said, his smile was unrestrained and his eyes were bright in the low lighting of the foyer. “Felix chose a place where you could get a good education and be happy because he wanted you by his side.”

“I would have followed him into the Western Approach and gotten my master’s degree in beating sand out of my underwear, if he had asked me to.” A warm feeling always bloomed in Dorian when he thought about his early days of dating Felix. It was a hefty mixture of nostalgia for the excitement of being in a real relationship for the first time, the pleasure of having his feelings returned, and ruefulness over how they had fumbled towards each other. “Well, all of this reminiscing has put me in the mood for a drink, shall we?”

“Let me get you one. Red wine, anything not Ferelden, right?”

“You know me so well.”

A couple minutes later, Adaar returned with two glasses of wine and he hissed, “The bar is opening up bottles of fancy Antivan wine and handing out drinks for free! I’m lucky if my university will pay for a cheap watered down Free Marcher lager for our events, anything else you have to pay for.”

“Ah, the perks of working for a school with a large endowment and ample donors,” Dorian smirked.
“Well, I am going to take advantage of this situation and I am going to drink my weight in this stuff. Also, I’m going to eat all of those little cakes over there.” Adaar took a much longer drink from his glass than a wine like that required, but he seemed determined to start on a second glass soon.

With drinks in hand, Dorian and Adaar mingled with the other attendees. Dorian introduced Adaar to his colleagues, everyone congratulated Dorian on his award and they were all pleased to meet Adaar, an esteemed scholar in his field of study, and more than one enchanter suggested that Adaar would be a welcomed addition to the faculty. They finally ran into Dagna, who was accompanied by Lavellan, and Adaar was enthused to see a pair of familiar faces.

“Where are Cullen and Sera?” Adaar asked Dagna and Lavellan after greeting them. “I don’t see either of them here.”

“Oh, Adaar, you can’t either of them anywhere nice,” Lavellan chuckled. “Sera hates anything with a hint of money to it and Cullen can’t stand these sorts of gatherings.”

Dorian hummed in agreement and explained to Adaar, “Cullen went to a banquet with Lavellan at the end of the last school year and he was propositioned at least twice and someone was bold enough to pinch his bottom.”

“In our colleagues’ defense, Cullen does have a pinchable bottom,” Lavellan smiled slyly as she took a sip of her wine.

“Quite.”

“And if I ever find out who did it, I will destroy them.”

“Don’t forget the person who pinched Cullen’s bottom at the last Spring Gala,” Dagna chimed in.

“And the two at the Wintersend Ball,” Dorian added.

“Wait, how many events does this university have?” Adaar asked, his eyes wide in wonder.

“A lot!” Dagna answered, her cheeks ruddy with her usual enthusiasm. “I think it’s so much fun and they’re so much better than the ones we had at Skyhold University. You know, we could always use more scholars who study Rift magic,” Dagna pressed excitedly. “Remember all the fun experiments we used to do?”

“Just because you abandoned Skyhold University, doesn’t mean I will,” Adaar answered, sniffing slightly in mock disgust. “Though I do admit your events are much fancier.”

“A mere fringe benefit,” Lavellan winked as Adaar finished his second glass of wine. “And remember, we never have a cash bar.”

“Ugh, but Herald University is as snooty as the rumors claim it to be.” Despite his protests, Adaar started making his way back to the bar for another drink.

“He’ll cave sooner or later, I did!” Dagna whispered loudly to Dorian, managing to sound both cheerful and conspiratorial.

Not long after Adaar returned from the bar, Dean Amell approached the podium situated in front of the grand staircase and the guests hushed at her presence. She made her opening remarks, thanking everyone for coming, and the joy she took in being able to honor so many faculty members in their contributions to the College of Magi. Dorian only partially listened as some of his other colleagues
were honored, he was instead far too aware of how close Adaar was standing next to him, the way his shoulder brushed against Adaar’s arm, and the maddening scent of the sandalwood cologne he wore that Dorian identified as Bull’s.

Dorian was also well aware of the looks Lavellan was giving him, who was standing on the other side of Adaar. Her big brown eyes kept sliding over to Dorian and Adaar, undoubtedly noticing how close they were and making Dorian embarrassed over the his proximity to his friend. Their eyes met briefly and Lavellan’s lips twisted into a stiff smile that didn’t reach the rest of her face.

“The College of Magi would now like to recognize Professor Dorian Pavus of House Alexius,” Dean Amell began.

At the mention of his name, Adaar seized Dorian’s wrist and clasped it in anticipation. Dorian couldn’t tell if the action was from a genuine thrill over Dorian’s commendation or if it was the three glasses of wine Adaar had consumed thus far.

“Professor Pavus, a fully ranked enchanter of the Minrathous Circle of Magi and an alumnus of this college, serves as director of the university’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library. During his tenure, Professor Pavus has taken an impressive collection and has elevated it to a library that is renowned throughout Thedas. He achieved this by focusing on one of the key tenets that this university was founded on, the pursuit of knowledge of the arcane. The Rare Book and Manuscript Library now boasts one of the foremost collections of manuscripts and rare texts on the Fade and is a boon to the scholarship of the College of Magi and to Herald University as a whole. Please join me in thanking Professor Pavus for his service to the university and his continued dedication to the study of magic.”

Dorian stepped up to Dean Amell and accepted his commendation, which was a thick piece of parchment with handwritten calligraphy set in a silverite plated frame. Shaking the dean’s hand with a brilliant smile, Dorian’s ego was completely satisfied by the whole exercise. The applause that arose from the crowd brought him great satisfaction, but standing a head above everyone else was Adaar, clapping furiously with unmistakable pride lighting up his face, which meant more to Dorian than he could dare to express.

Before Dorian could move away from the podium, Dean Amell added, “I am also pleased to announce that in honor of Professor Pavus’s work, the College of Magi will be making a donation to the Dr. Felix Alexius Memorial Scholarship for the Department of Mathematics in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Dr. Alexius, whom we lost two years ago, was a beloved member of our community and the late husband of Professor Pavus, and he served as an example of the achievements mages can make beyond the field of magic.”

Dorian drew in a shaky breath and grasped the dean’s hand again. Many of his colleagues tiptoed around talking about Felix in front of him, afraid of causing unnecessary pain, but in turn it caused Dorian to fret that Felix was so readily forgotten and he was beyond gratified to hear Felix acknowledged. In an almost inaudible tone, he whispered unsteadily, “Thank you, Solona.”

She smiled kindly at Dorian, her strong hand returning Dorian’s grip. “You’re welcome, Dorian.”

He walked back into the crowd and to Adaar’s side as the dean started thanking another faculty member, almost dizzy with the high of his emotions, rolling between being contented in the recognition of his importance, happiness from being in his friends’ company, and a deep appreciation for Solona’s thoughtfulness. Adaar slung his arm around Dorian’s shoulders and not even Lavellan’s mildly disapproving frown could bring Dorian down. Adaar’s excitement had yet to wane and it carried on to the end of the event, even as they walked out to the car to return to Adaar’s house to meet with Iron Bull.
“I can’t believe all of this was for you,” Adaar said for what might have been the hundredth time as he slid boneless into the passenger seat.

“Not all of it,” Dorian reminded him with a small chuckle. “You might have noticed the other dozen faculty members who also received commendations.”

“Nope,” Adaar let the pop from his lips, “I only noticed you.”

Dorian grinned. “While I was the only one worth noticing, I suspect that is more the alcohol talking than you.”

“I may have gone overboard on the wine and the little cakes.”

Dorian raised an eyebrow. “There is no question about it.”

The drive to Adaar’s house was quiet as Adaar watched the streetlights go by through the rolled down window, enjoying the cool air rushing into the vehicle, and Dorian concentrated on driving with the CD player providing a soft background of classical Tevinter music. Silence settled between them, but neither felt the awkward urge to fill the void and instead just enjoyed each other’s presence.

“You’re really pretty tonight,” Adaar eventually said as he rolled his head in Dorian’s direction as Dorian pulled the car up to the house, his face rosy from drinking and his normally bright eyes were glassy like two wide mirrors of green.

“I am, aren’t I?” Dorian smiled as he parked the car, noting that the house was dark except for the porchlight that illuminated the front of the house.

“We beat Bull here,” Adaar said needlessly as he fussed with his seatbelt, cursing the device under his breath when his fingers proved to be clumsy in operating the simple mechanism.

“Bull is either going to yell or laugh at me for letting you drink so much,” Dorian snorted at Adaar’s struggle.

“Laugh, he will definitely laugh.”

Dorian followed Adaar up to the porch and watched with exasperation as Adaar tried to find which key on his keychain would open the front door. The jingle of brass keys filled the otherwise hushed night, interrupted occasionally by a stray giggle or murmur from Adaar as he struggled with mundane task. Trying to help Adaar out, Dorian leaned in and closed his hand around Adaar’s, which held the correct key, but his hand was too shaky to line it up correctly with the lock.

“Ta-da! Like magic,” Dorian announced as the door swung open, the keys still swinging in the deadbolt lock.

He turned his face towards Adaar, realizing that he hadn’t let go of Adaar’s hand yet, but as he tried to move away, Adaar suddenly grasped his hand. Not a word passed between them as their eyes met in the yellow cast of light from the porchlight, Adaar’s face was partly obscured in the darkness, but Dorian could see his usual expression of warmth and gentleness, with something hungry underlying it.

Adaar’s thumb drew lazy circles on the underside of Dorian’s wrist and swiping over Dorian’s rapidly fluttering pulse. It was all Dorian could focus on, just the slide of Adaar’s fingers on his skin and the quiet puffs of Adaar’s shallow breaths. Dorian licked at his dry lips and parted to mouth to say something, but he words were lost when his mouth and tongue met Adaar’s.
There was no telling who initiated the kiss, only that they were both enthusiastic participants in it. Adaar’s mouth tasted of wine and the cloying sweetness of sugar, his lips were softer than Dorian expected, and his clean shaven face was warm and smooth against Dorian’s. His large hands encircled Dorian’s waist clinging onto him as the Qunari pushed Dorian backwards into the house, where they were allowed a veil of privacy within its walls.

The kiss was an unbelievable release for Dorian, the tension that was always present in his body and the smoldering burn of desire was finally expressed and reciprocated. His fingers clung desperately at Adaar’s shirt, wrinkling the fabric in his grip as he was nearly washed away by the sheer elation and pleasure he experienced.

Dorian made a small noise as his back made contact with a wall and Adaar pressed in close, his thigh working between Dorian’s legs. Without a second thought, Dorian spread his legs, rolling his hips forward against Adaar’s thigh and let out a low, needy moan at the friction, which caused Adaar to grunt in approval. His hands then slid up to bracket Adaar’s face before Dorian’s curious fingers trailed over to his curled horns, stroking their base and Dorian received an encouraging groan against his mouth. Then Dorian shifted to deepen the kiss and the unmistakable scent of Bull’s cologne on Adaar’s skin filled Dorian’s nostrils.

The smell of sandalwood grounded him, reminded Dorian why kissing and groping Adaar, despite feeling so good and right, was a terrible idea. He was trampling upon something precious, violating Iron Bull’s trust, and defiling Adaar’s otherwise untarnished honor, bringing him down low.

Jerking his hands away from Adaar, Dorian laid his palms upon wide shoulders and pushed as he tore his mouth away from Adaar’s tempting lips. It took a few seconds of Adaar to react, but he stumbled back once he realized that Dorian was shoving him away. In the dim light spilling in from the still open front door, Dorian could see the shock on Adaar’s face, like waking suddenly from a dream. Dorian knew he had to leave before that shock turned to regret.

Dorian could hardly recall running out of the house, the faintness of his name tumbling out of Adaar’s mouth, and the sound of his car door slamming as he turned the key in the engine and drove off. It took Dorian a couple minutes to realize that he wasn’t even driving in the direction of his townhouse. He just drove, passing by rows of houses lit up and filled with families settling in for the evening, finishing up dinner and relaxing in their living rooms with their loved ones. He passed by all of that, driving until the residential areas fell away into downtown Skyhold, where people were milling about on a Friday evening, out for dinner or a drink, lined up in front of venues to see a show, and ducking in and out of the stores that were still open.

He was surprised to find that he was driving towards Skyhold University, just on the north side of the city, though he was less shocked as he found himself parking on the service road behind of the Mathematics building. The small brick building was dark and abandoned for the evening, with just a few windows spilling out fluorescent light from the hallways. Dorian slumped against the car door, his cheek pressed up on cool glass, and his eyes staring up at the building, wondering if the row of windows in the center of the third floor still led into cramped and stuffy teaching assistant offices.

“Oh amatus,” Dorian’s voice cracked, “you would be so ashamed of me right now.”

He took off his glasses to press the heels of hands against his eyes and he clenched his jaw to stop his chin from wobbling, but it did nothing to prevent the hot tears that slid down his cheeks or his muffled, wretched sobs.

Anything that he suffered was of his own making and there was no shifting the guilt about what had happened. Even if Adaar was the one who initiated the kiss, Dorian knew that he shouldered
much of the blame. Since making Adaar’s acquaintance in the beginning of the summer, Dorian had been dangerously attracted to him and he long knew that he had trouble resisting temptation. But Dorian didn’t heed any of the glaring warning signs and he allowed his vanity to be flattered by the couple’s attentions, hanging around them while knowing that he was a threat to their relationship. Now he acted on that attraction and potentially damaged a perfectly happy relationship.

“I know how much you hated it when I slept with married men before I was yours, amatus,” Dorian said aloud with no one to hear him. “I always justified it by saying that the men I slept with knew what they were getting into, that they were unhappy men who were only married because their parents wanted them to like mine did. But Adaar and Bull aren’t like that, they didn’t deserve this. There is no excuse for what I did, it was only selfishness.”

Taking out his pocket square, Dorian ruined it by wiping away at the tears and the running eyeliner streaked down his face and tried to settle down.

His nerves received a nasty jolt as he startled at the shrill ring of his cell phone as it cut through his chorus of hiccupped breathing and pathetic sniffles. Fishing the device out of his pocket, his chest clenched at the Iron Bull’s name flashing on the screen along with a selfie of him and Dorian in their football jerseys, Bull grinning widely with his arm around Dorian and pulling him in close as Dorian rolled his eyes at the camera. It was taken as they waited for the next playoff game to start during their second such outing to the Hanged Man and as they friendship was landing on even ground. The photo made them look ridiculously like a couple, making anger spike up in Dorian and he cursed at his stupidity.

The rings continued on with Dorian staring at the phone in his hand until it finally quieted, directing the caller to voicemail and a few moments later, a chipper chime told Dorian that he had a message waiting for him. He deleted it right away without listening to a single word Bull had to say, not wanting to hear Bull’s fury much in the same way he didn’t want to see Adaar’s regret. Then with shaking fingers, he blocked Adaar and Bull’s numbers from his phone before deleting them from his contacts.

Once his tears subsided and his breathing evened out, Dorian drove back to his dark and silent townhouse. He walked into its vast and hollow space, not bothering to flip on the lights, and made his way up to stairs to the emptiness of his bedroom.

The desire to drink was strong, but Dorian knew how he was when he was drunk, needy, pitiful, and impulsive. Just because he removed Adaar and Bull’s numbers from his phone didn’t mean that he didn’t have other ways of contacting them and unthinkingly causing pain. Dorian wasn’t sure what he might do if he woke up in the morning and found that he had written something hurtful through social media or in an email. He at least had that bit of maturity within him to be thankful about.

His fancy clothes ended up in a careless pile on the floor and the keys and cellphone in his pants pocket landed onto the hardwood flooring with a dull thud, receiving little notice from him. Dorian opened the bottom drawer of the dresser, pulling out a pair of flannel pajama pants too large for him and a slightly oversized and well-loved Skyhold University Department of Mathematics t-shirt. Slipping on the clothes, Dorian crawled into bed and curled towards the empty space next to him, clutching a pillow to his torso.

“Amatus, I used to be a good man, right? I was when we were together, but I …” Whatever excuses or pleas he had were choked up in his renewed round of tears. Dorian just buried his face into the pillow to smother them out.
It was the misery of his shame that hounded Dorian, knowing that he acted less than honorably and it crushed him knowing that his actions had consequences for good people. The knowledge of how disappointed and ashamed of him Felix would have been also cut especially deep. When he squeezed his eyes shut, Dorian could easily see the worrying frown that Felix would get, the crinkle between his eyebrows, and his soft disapproving sigh.

It was to that image stuck in his brain did a fitful sleep finally overcome Dorian. He didn’t wake up until the midmorning sun came streaming in through the window and pierced through his eyelids and consciousness. Blinking moisture back into his overly gritty eyes, Dorian found a full glass of water waiting for him on the nightstand. Next to the glass of water was an old wooden duck on wheels, coated in a long faded yellow paint with shiny blue marble blue eyes and a little frayed string attached to the base. The duck gave Dorian pause.

“Cole?” his voice was scratchy and dry from sleep. “Cole, if you’re here, then go away. If you’re not here, then, uh, good.”

There was no response and only the faint echo of his voice upon the tall ceilings of the room answered him. He found the silence less comforting than he anticipated. It was some time since Cole paid him such a visit, though he often revealed himself to Dorian, spouting off old and new hurts, trying to tear something loose to soften the grief.

Sitting up in bed with the blankets pooled around his waist, Dorian grabbed the duck from the nightstand and balanced the toy in his hand, rolling it carefully on its little wheels.

He vividly remembered the wooden duck sitting proudly on a shelf at a stand of an artisan toymaker at the Summerday festival in Qarinus. Its bright yellow paint and gleaming blue eyes caught his attention and he wanted it in a way he had never wanted a toy before, his neck twisted to get a better look at it and he tugged unconsciously at his father’s hand. But even at six years old, Dorian knew it was not the sort of toy his parents would approve of him having, something as plain and mundane as a wooden duck on wheels. It was not something a boy of his station should have. His father noticed though and gently squeezed Dorian’s little hand before buying the toy.

“Don’t tell your mother. This will be our little secret,” his father had said, his smile gentle and affectionate, a look that he often gave Dorian in those days.

Dorian had clutched the small wooden duck to his chest and solemnly swore to keep it a secret. The six year old Dorian had felt a swell of importance at the fact that he and his father had a secret together and he knew that he would treasure the toy for the rest of his life.

Dorian swallowed down the lump in his throat and his eyes drifted to the glowing red digits of his alarm clock, telling him it was half past nine in the morning. Putting the duck back on the nightstand, he took a few drinks from the glass of water, and peeled his achy body out of bed. Dorian started going through the motions of getting ready for the day, though only made it part way through before he gave up.

Showered and dressed back in the clothes he slept in, Dorian stared at the reflection in the bathroom mirror. A tired looking man in rumpled clothes frowned back at him. Dark circles sat under his eyes and were only partially obscured by the thick frames of his glasses, small wrinkles of worry creased his face, and the whites of his eyes were pink from a poor night of sleep.

“I’ve had quite enough of my own melodramatics, how about you, amatus? I’ve been through much worse with far less fuss,” Dorian chided. “The damage is done and it’s not like I slept with Adaar, I’m sure Bull will forgive him this one slip in judgement.”
He really hoped that Bull forgave Adaar.

Wandering downstairs, Dorian stood in the kitchen and contemplated breakfast. He pulled open the refrigerator, looking at its contents blankly as the chilled air pricked his skin and his stomach did a singular turn, protesting the thought of food. Slamming the refrigerator shut, Dorian turned to the island in the middle of the kitchen and caught sight of a loaf of bread that hadn’t been there the day before and a box of royal elfroot tea that was usually in the pantry.

“Ok, toast and tea it is, Cole,” Dorian consented with a little sigh and a small twitch of a smirk. “You can come out if you want.”

“Varric said not to bother you at home unless you invited me.”

Even though he was expecting it, Dorian nearly jumped at the sound of Cole’s voice. He turned to find Cole sitting on the kitchen counter, his fingers gripping the granite surface and his pale eyes peeking out from under the wide brim of his hat to stare at Dorian.

“That hasn’t stopped you before,” Dorian replied lightly.

“You needed it before,” Cole protested. “You’re hurting now, but not like before. It doesn’t consume you, suffocating you until you can no longer draw breath, pain so clear that it’s the only thing that’s left. It’s not like that. You don’t want to go to him this time.”

Dorian flinched, his heart racing in his chest for a few seconds before he managed to steady himself. “This is very different,” he agreed, “I made a stupid mistake.”

Cole tilted his head to the side, revealing his curious features. “They don’t think of it like that. They don’t think of it as a mistake.”

“Will you stop it?! I know that I fucked up,” Dorian snapped, lashing out with the self-directed anger coiled up in his belly. He sighed and shook his head, feeling immediately drained and embarrassed by his outburst. “I apologize, Cole. This is … this is different than before, this is completely the result of my own shameful behavior.”

“Why do you think of it that way? Like you’re the bad guy? They don’t.” Cole managed to sound surprised, as if he didn’t know that what Dorian had done was wrong. Blue eyes were fixed upon Dorian as Cole added softly, “He’s not ashamed of you, Dorian.”

His throat completely closed off, choking off Dorian’s reply.

Cole turned his head towards the hallway leading towards the entrance and simply said, “You should answer the door.”

A series of loud knocks upon the front door rattled Dorian’s ears and made his heart leap into his throat. When he looked back to Cole, the young man was already gone. Dorian walked carefully towards the front door, avoiding the floorboards he knew would squeak under his weight, but the knocks still paused as he approached. The frosted half circle window above the door revealed the an outline of a horn against the incoming light and a barrage of fear, shame, and dread made Dorian freeze a few feet away from the entrance.

“Dorian, it’s Bull.” The voice was muffled by the barrier.

Dorian didn’t move, rooted in place, though he very desperately wanted to retreat upstairs and hide in bed for the rest of the day.
Bull’s next words were a little louder, but were both calm and concerned, and confused Dorian. “I just want to talk to you, I promise, you don’t even have to let me in, I only want to make sure you’re ok.”

A surprised laugh of disbelief escaped from Dorian at the statement and without thinking it through, he unlocked the door and swung it open to give Bull his most incredulous stare.

“Hey there, big guy,” Bull greeted cautiously, his voice a tick softer than usual. “Are you ok?”

The composure and worry that Bull displayed made Dorian suspicious. He couldn’t believe that Bull came out to his home just to see if Dorian was ok, as if kissing Adaar had harmed him physically. But he moved aside, giving room Bull to come inside, and knowing that whatever was to come, Dorian preferred that it happened in private instead of in the open where all could see.

He was aware of the danger he was putting himself in. Dorian didn’t expect Bull to hit him or otherwise try to harm him, but if he did, Dorian was unsure if he would stop him. There was a cold acceptance growing in Dorian that the destructive and self-punishing part of Dorian would let Bull beat him bloody if it helped Bull move on with Adaar.

“Are you ok?” Bull repeated, taking a step inside of the townhouse and closing the door behind of him.

They stood there in the cramped space of the entrance to the townhouse, an intersection of the stairs leading up to the second floor, a tiny coat closet, and the hallway leading back to the kitchen and living room. It was a tight fit with Dorian’s back was pressed against the closet door as Bull lingered on the opposite side, trying not to bump into the decorative table with a Tevinter vase filled with freshly cut Crystal Grace and the overloaded shoe rack. The space was small, but it didn’t foster any intimacy, only distance.

“Dorian?”

“Uh, yes, I’m fine.”

The creak of floorboards above made Bull jerk and his head tilted up towards the stairs. “Do you have company? I can come back.”

“It’s no one, not really. My house is just kind of haunted sometimes,” Dorian replied, only partially joking. “Honestly, it’s a little hard to explain.”

After a moment of hesitation and with an uneasiness that seemed uncharacteristic to Bull, he asked, “A spirit?”

“Sort of, I guess. Have you ever met Varric’s friend, Cole?” Dorian asked and received a slow nod of Bull’s head. “It’s him, he’s just … Look, it’s complicated, have Varric explain it to you. But I will warn you that if you want to punch me in the face, he will likely react poorly to it, even if I do deserve it.”

“What? Fuck, no! Why would you say that? It’s never ok for anyone to hit you. Shit, I don’t want to hurt you, Dorian, I just wanted to make sure that you’re ok.” Bull took a half step towards Dorian before stopping midway and withdrawing as much as the small entrance would allow.

Dorian let out a sharp and startled, “Ha!”

“It’s true. Look, Adaar is worried that he hurt you last night, he was drunk and sometimes he doesn’t know his own strength. If he hurt you, we wanted you to know that it wasn’t intentional,
but we understand if don’t want to see us anymore, say the word and neither of us will bother you.”

Wrapping his arms around his torso, Dorian closed his eyes and sighed at the thought of sweet and kind Adaar wringing his hands, worried that he had lost control of himself and harmed Dorian. Guilt bubbled up in Dorian over how Adaar must have felt standing there in the darkness the night before, drunk and barely aware of what was going on as Dorian fled the house, and drawing the conclusion that he must have done something wrong to cause Dorian to leave.

“No, no, Adaar didn’t hurt me,” the statement was breathy and almost on the verge of laughter about the ridiculousness of it all. “I’m fine, Bull, I’m fine.”

“So, you’re not upset with Adaar?”

“No, of course not,” Dorian let out a quiet huff. “He did nothing wrong.”

“Good, that’s good. He’ll be happy to hear that.”

“But you must know that I can’t be around you or Adaar anymore.”

“Ok, that’s ok if you need that,” Bull said carefully, “but are you saying that because Adaar crossed a serious line by kissing you? Or because you think I’m mad that you two kissed?”

Dorian’s eyes flew open and his arms tightened around his body protectively. “Isn’t it obvious?”

“I’m not mad, Dorian,” Bull took a step forward, his bulk closing in on Dorian and boxing him in, making Dorian well aware that there was nowhere to go.

“I kissed your boyfriend and you’re not mad?” Something akin to hysteria washed over Dorian, leaving him both taut and shaky, teetering on the edge of crying and laughing. Gathering his wits together, Dorian added in a firmer voice, “You’ll have to excuse me if I do not believe you.”

Bull’s hands enclosed over Dorian’s shoulders in a gentle hold. “I’m not mad, I’m actually more jealous that Adaar got to kiss you.”

All Dorian could do was snort in response.

“Since we met you, Adaar and I have talked about you a lot. It’s no secret that we’ve enjoyed getting to know you and we wouldn’t mind something … more.”

Realization hit Dorian hard, he could feel the air being knocked from his lungs as a mixture of flattery and outrage filled him. “You’re propositioning me for a threesome, a quick tryst to spice up the relationship.”

“Something more than that, if you want it,” Bull corrected swiftly. “Look, we can start this out casual if that makes you more comfortable and see where it goes.”

“And if I’m not interested at all?” Dorian asked promptly.

However, Dorian’s entire body thrummed with desperate want from just being such close proximity to the Iron Bull. The suggestion Bull brought forth stirred more than interest in him as his desires that had seemed so thoroughly denied not long ago were unexpectedly renewed. That unmistakably selfish part of Dorian more than entertained the Iron Bull’s proposal, it provided detailed images, and stoked the flames within him that he had so urgently tried to smother.

“That’s ok too. If you want to go on being friends, we can do that. If you want to never see us
again, then we’ll respect that. But I think we could all be good for each other.”

Dry, cool lips brushed tenderly upon Dorian’s brow, it was a fleeting touch and gone almost before Dorian could even realize it had ever been there. It was a clear contrast to the passionate kiss that Dorian shared with Adaar the night before, but the chaste kiss did nothing to ease the growing want in Dorian.

Bull cupped Dorian’s chin in his hand, his rough palm scraping against the light stubble on Dorian’s face as he tipped Dorian’s head up to look at him, and with complete sincerity, said, “It’s something to think about. If you ever want to explore that, our door is always open.”
Actions

Chapter Summary

Dorian finds that he needs to take action. Sera is also both mocking and wise.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Everything you’ve said is complete bonkers.”

Dorian could only groan and let his head fall forward into his hands, hiding his face.

“I mean, how does that even work? You’re not a small one, but they’re huge! How does it all fit? No, no, don’t want to think about it.” Sera scrunched up her nose, but her face slowly relaxed into curiosity. “You tell me how that all works out for you. No pictures needed, just the gist of it, yeah?”

“I don’t know if there will be anything to tell,” was Dorian’s muffled reply from behind his hands.

“Why not?”

Peeling his hands away from his face, Dorian lifted an eyebrow. “You just said that it was complete bonkers.”

“Yeah, it is, but it’ll make you happy, right?”

“Not if this all blows up in my face.”

That was apparently the wrong thing to say as Sera’s face twisted up into laughter. Her high pitched giggles pierced through the ambient noise of the restaurant, bouncing off the wooden beamed ceiling, and several people craned their necks to see what the commotion was about. Dorian slouched further down the cushioned bench of their corner booth, hoping to disappear into it.

Dorian supposed that was what he got for asking Sera to meet him at the Herald’s Rest for dinner after he got off work that Thursday night and before her shift at the Hanged Man. But for most of the week he was sequestering himself in his home when he wasn’t at work with only his troubled thoughts for company and he was frankly on the verge of crawling up the walls. He also desperately needed someone to talk to.

“Perhaps I should have worded that better.”

Sera snorted loudly. “Sounds like either way there’s going to be a whole lot of something blown in your face. Look, you try it once and see if it’s all good. If not, you tell them no.”

“And potentially ruin my friendship with Adaar and Bull?”

“From over here, it looks like you already tanked it by lusting after them to begin with.”
The statement hurt, Sera’s blunt observation was like solid punch in Dorian’s gut because he knew she was right.

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Sera backtracked quickly, but then stopped herself. “Wait, yes I did. Just saying that you probably can’t go back to being friends with all the unrequited feelings shit you’ve got going on. They mucked it up too, so there’s blame going around everywhere. But cheer up, what you can do is get banged by a couple of Qunari if that’s your thing and considering smarty britches’ nerdy Tevinter look, I really wasn’t expecting this to be your thing.”

“I’m as surprised as you are,” Dorian deadpanned and took a sip from his beer. “But you’re starting to make a surprising amount of sense.”

“I know, scary, right?”

“It’s refreshing and exactly what I needed.”

“If you wanted sense right off the bat, why aren’t you talking to Lavellan about all of this? She’s good at making lots of sense.”

Dorian took another drink and let out a quiet sigh. “I can hardly see her approving of any of this and the last thing I want is her confronting Adaar and Bull about it.”

“She’s judgy, that one. There’s no stopping her once she’s on her high horse and no one gets her up on her high horse quite like you.”

That was unfortunately true, Dorian thought miserably.

“It’s not always a bad thing. I still remember that stupid look on your dad’s face when she told him off at the hospital, best thing to come out of a shitty situation,” Sera snorted out another giggle. “Oh! Oh, you know what would get your dad’s panties up in a real knot? A picture of you in the middle of a Qunari sandwich!”

Laughter rumbled through Dorian’s body at the mere thought of it, the mental image tugged at Dorian’s sharp sense of humor and at something deeper below the surface. Something that was telling him to laugh before he started crying.

“He couldn’t stand me marrying Felix, who was an Altus from a respectable family. He might just drop dead from hearing that I’ve had a threesome with two male Qunari.”

“Then you’ve got to do it,” Sera slapped her palm on the table, rattling their pint glasses and utensils. “Besides, when was the last time you got properly banged?”

He remembered it clearly. It was the last time he and Felix made love, only weeks before Felix was transferred to the finest hospice facility Skyhold had to offer. Felix, growing too weak to be an active participant in bed, had lied under Dorian, his breath coming out in ragged gasps in Dorian’s ear as their bodies slid slowly together. Dorian had pressed his face into the crook of Felix’s neck, his eyes damp and watery, and his hands clutched at his husband, not wanting to ever let go.

My beautiful amatus, he remembered Felix whispering, before he body tiredly shuddered through completion.

“I can hardly remember, too long by far,” Dorian lied.

“Then you’ve got to do this,” Sera said with an air of decisiveness.
“It’s certainly something to consider,” Dorian allowed, feeling less conflicted than he did all week.

Maybe that was why he reached out to Sera, because while she always spoke her mind, Dorian knew she would be more accepting of the situation than Lavellan and Cullen. Lavellan would not have looked upon the proposition with such ease and humor, rather she would have taken it as an affront to Dorian and would think of it as Bull and Adaar using him. There was good sense to that way of thinking, Dorian knew it, but also knowing that he most likely couldn’t carry on a friendship with the couple, he was not so wholly opposed to being used.

He wasn’t lying to Sera when he said it was far too long since he last had sex.

“You’re really considering it,” Sera’s grin consumed her face, her teeth flashing in her wicked expression. “When you do, tell me all about it. Not the squishy details though.”

“No squishy details,” Dorian nodded solemnly.

“Good, got that all settled. Now, food?” Sera twisted her body around to flag down the nearest server.

Once their food arrived, Dorian watched in his usual fascinated horror as Sera tucked away most of the greasy fare in front of them. Fries, burgers, fried cheese, and little sugar and chocolate coated donuts for dessert did not stand a chance against Sera. Dorian made it halfway through his own burger and picked at a few fries before pushing the meal her way. She shoved the little donuts in Dorian’s direction in response and smiled approvingly when he ate a couple.

“Good snack before work,” she declared after they paid the check and headed outside. She grabbed Dorian’s arm before he could start the walk to the light rail stop to head home, her thin hand gripping through the layers of Dorian’s coat and sweater, fingers digging sharply into his bicep.

“Hey, you know I like those two, pretty good guys, yeah?”

Dorian stopped and looked at his friend, not knowing where she was going with it. “Yes, I know.”

“Just …” Sera paused and shifted from foot to foot. “If it all works out, then good on you and them. If not and they’re jerks about it, I don’t like them enough not to shove arrows up their butts.”

A thin, wobbly smile spread on Dorian’s lips. “Your expression of friendship is as eloquent as Orlesian love poetry.”

“Yeah, whatever, don’t need you mocking me.” Sera let go of his arm to punch him in the shoulder, hard enough to make him rock back on the heels of his feet. “I’ll see tomorrow night at my place for movies, right?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

His conversation with Sera helped to untangle some of the knots of confusion and anxiety that were growing since he spoke to Bull the previous weekend. But Dorian found that he still couldn’t act, he couldn’t give them an answer one way or the other.

Instead, Dorian tried to fall back into the comfortable rhythm of his life for the next few days, the steady beat of work, friends, and quiet downtime at home to find his center. He worked late on Friday, staring at the blurry lines of a budget spreadsheet before going directly to Sera and Dagna’s house for movie night. The dull roar of the movie and Sera’s persistent prattling throughout the whole thing filled the space in Dorian’s brain and slices of pizza helped to subdue any restlessness that had settled into his bones.
Saturday morning was spent at the farmers’ market with Lavellan and Cullen, strolling through rows of stands filled with a bounty of produce and nibbling on a breakfast procured from one of the several food trucks parked around the market. In the afternoon, Dorian went with Cullen to play pool and rallied his spirits as Cullen introduced him to his friend, Rylen.

The newly promoted Knight-Commander from Starkhaven smiled widely at Dorian upon meeting him, Rylen was older and his face weathered from years of service, but Dorian found that he liked it anyway. He was fully diverted by Rylen’s dry wit, confident poise, and felt a flutter of flattery in his stomach at Rylen’s appreciating stare. Dorian slipped into the natural ease of flirting, feeling more comfortable with Rylen than any other of Cullen’s Templar friends. Dorian’s charm brightened his features and he felt lighthearted in a way he hadn’t felt all week.

Dorian carried that high as he waited at the bar to get another round of beers, until a man stood next to him, quietly clearing his throat before saying, “Nice to see you, Dorian.”

Dorian snapped out of his daydreaming and saw Cremisius Aclassi leaning against the bar, a small smile curling up one corner of his mouth.

“Oh, Krem! Sorry I didn’t notice you right away, I was apparently busy woolgathering. It’s nice to see you again, how have you been?” He kept his voice friendly and even. A quick and panicked glance over the top of Krem’s head revealed to Dorian an odd group around a pool table, an assortment of elves, a dwarf, and couple humans, but thankfully no Qunari in the mix. However, the group was busy sneaking darting glances in their direction before finding something more interesting to look at.

“I’ve been good, can’t complain. And yourself?”

Dorian drew in a long and silent breath. “Also can’t complain.”

Krem’s gaze wandered over to the pool table where Cullen and Rylen were waiting for Dorian, leaning against table and absorbed with catching up. “You’re here with friends?”

“Yeah, my friend, Cullen, used to be a part of the Templar Order and his friend recently got a promotion, so we’re celebrating.”

“A Templar friends with a mage? Odd combination.”

“One might say the same thing about a vint and two Qunari.”

Krem smirked with a shrug and replied, “Yeah, I see what you mean.” He let out a small laugh and scratched at the back of his neck. “But Bull and Adaar are the best.”

“Yes, they are,” Dorian agreed quietly. “They’re a wonderful couple.”

“And they have really big hearts. They have a lot of love to give,” Krem added quickly, his dark eyes met Dorian’s.

Dorian shifted his eyes away, focusing on the line of beer taps in front of him. “Yes, they do.”

He was relieved to finally catch the attention of the bartender and occupied himself with ordering drinks for his group. After he got his pints and slid the money to the bartender, Dorian nodded politely to Krem. “It was good to run into you, I’m sure I’ll see you around soon.”

“Yeah,” Krem nodded back with a tentative smile. “I’ll see you around.”
Returning to his friends, Dorian let himself get lost in beer and competition, but the little flutter he received from Rylen’s earlier attentions faded away.

The last day of the weekend was a little harder to keep himself occupied. Grand plans to spend the day working on a research article on early practices of necromancy flew out the window as he lay down on the couch, the book he was supposed to be reading was splayed out on his chest, and he stared up at a small, dark smudge on the ceiling. The windows creaked against the howling winds of an early season storm, the refrigerator hummed endlessly, and somewhere in the basement the furnace rumbled to life, filling the townhouse with heat, but the only sound that filled Dorian’s ears was his own shallow breaths, rasping in and out of his lungs.

“It’s a silly idea, isn’t it, amatus?” Dorian whispered into the hollowness.

A tree branch falling onto the back deck was his only answer.

On Monday, Dorian finally decided to act. As he ate lunch in the breakroom of his library and watched the rain splatter against the glass panes of the window, Dorian took a breath and sent a text to Adaar.

Meat me for coffee after work at that Antivan place, Merchant House, near SU? I’d like to talk.

It took only a minute for Adaar to reply.

Yes! I finish class at 4, then have a meeting with a student. I can meet you at 5.

I’ll be there.

Dorian’s heart thudded in his chest at the knowledge that he would be seeing Adaar soon. Though they were texting again, he hadn’t seen Adaar since the reception over a week ago and he could hardly imagine his own feelings upon seeing the Qunari again. Idly skimming through his most recent texts with Adaar, trying to decipher any hidden meanings in their communications, Dorian paused at the one Adaar sent after Dorian unblocked their numbers not long after his talk with the Iron Bull.

I’m so happy you don’t hate me.

With shame, Dorian thought about how he should have written that to Adaar, not the other way around. But somehow Adaar managed to take the blame, made it his own, agonized over Dorian’s reaction, and was thankful for Dorian’s lack of anger. That thankfulness did little to comfort Dorian.

The rest of the day was spent with Dorian’s eyes drifting over to the little oak clock with Dalish carvings sitting on his desk, its silver second hand twinkling in the low light of the office and ticked away at a painfully slow pace. After an eternity of reports, emails demanding his attention, and deeds of gifts to review, the hands of the little clock finally closed in on four thirty in the afternoon. Dorian sprung up from his seat, gathered up his things and mumbled to his staff that he was leaving early as he ran out of the library. Despite his early departure from work and arriving at the coffee house nearly fifteen minutes before he was set to meet Adaar, he saw that the Qunari had beaten him there.

It was jarring to see Adaar, not because of what transpired between them, but because of the uncontrolled fidgeting and shifting Adaar did in his seat, his eyes darting uncomfortably around the coffeehouse. Adaar looked ridiculously large sitting at the little table in the back of the establishment, his fingers were busy shredding a napkin and he teetered incessantly on his chair, which had one short leg. All that movement came to an end when he spotted Dorian, his green eyes
widen and his smile was stiff, but it relaxed into a full blown grin when Dorian immediately returned the smile and promptly sat down at the table.

“It’s good to see you,” Adaar said as Dorian settled into his chair.

“It’s good to see you too,” Dorian replied honestly, his eyes drifting down to the poor tattered remains of the napkin lying in a heap on the tiled table top.

“I, uh, I didn’t know if you’d come,” Adaar admitted sheepishly as he quickly swept up the napkin remains into his hand and froze as he realized he didn’t know what to do with them. He then shoved them into his coat pocket, shrugging self-consciously when Dorian gave him a look.

“I was the one who invited you out.”

“Yeah, but when people say that they want to talk …”

“It’s hardly ever good news, is it?”

Adaar nodded. “So, is this good news or bad news?”

“I … I honestly don’t know. I guess this is kind of a fact finding mission.”

“Facts? Facts I can do.”

“Yes, well, you know everything that Bull said to me? Everything that he offered, correct?” Dorian asked, folding his hands on the tabletop.

“Yes, of course.”

“And you’re ok with all of it? Of trying something … beyond friendship?”

“Yes,” Adaar answered without a second thought.

Dorian let out a laugh, disbelieving and under his breath. “I guess then my question would be, why?”

“Because we like you,” Adaar replied easily as if it was the most natural thing in the world. “We want to get know you better and maybe see if it can be something more.”

“That doesn’t really explain things for me.”

“Look, Bull and I are Qunari,” Adaar started, beginning to fidget again. “Well, Tal-Vashoth and Vashoth as Bull reminds me, he’s picky about it. But we were both raised, more or less, in Qunari culture, Bull more than me of course. Qunari have relationships, it’s not like how it was before, but they’re not like relationships in the south where you marry and commit to only one person. Relationships among the Qunari are more fluid and they’re not always limited to two people. It’s really kind of hard to explain without a whole bunch of Qunlat words.” Adaar shook his head at his last statement and scrunched up his face. “Ugh, I hate it when Bull says that and now I’ve said it to you, sorry.”

“So, Qunari have open relationships?” Dorian tried to clarify.

“No, not in the way that you’re thinking of.” Adaar’s fingers reached out and carefully stroked Dorian’s knuckles, sending a small chill down Dorian’s spine. “It’s more like having another boyfriend or girlfriend in the mix.”
"I think I understand."

That made a little more sense to Dorian. Back in Tevinter, before he and Felix got together, he had been in the situation where he was essentially a married man’s secret, or open secret, boyfriend. It took a small shifting in his understanding to get what Adaar was talking about. Only in this case he wouldn’t be a secret to at least the other party, and he would be sleeping with both of them. But Dorian was well aware of the pitfalls of such arrangements, he knew the consequences, and could walk into it with open eyes.

“Have you done this before?” Dorian asked.

“Once, when we were living in Val Royeaux. We tried it with a woman who was also attending grad school at the University of Orlais. It’s not something we did lightly, we cared about her deeply.”

“And it didn’t work out?”

Adaar leaned forward, a faint frown souring his handsome face. “We ended up wanting different things. I think she was looking for something more casual before returning to Ostwick, while Bull and I had deeper feelings. We split amicably and we hear from her now and again.”

“I see and you think this could work out with me?”

“We would like to try with you.” Adaar’s hands covered Dorian’s, heat radiating from his palms. “I want you to know that I don’t regret kissing you, Dorian.” Then Adaar paused with a self-deprecating chuckle, “Well, I regret the part where I was drunk, made you upset, and scared Bull when he got home.”

“You scared Bull? That’s hard to imagine.”

Adaar’s face colored. “Somehow I managed to, but I was drunk and completely convinced that I had hurt you.”

“Well, you didn’t and I wasn’t that upset once everything was cleared up. I was more afraid of hurting your relationship with Bull,” Dorian corrected, his heart speeding up at the warm drag of Adaar’s fingers so deliberately on him. “I, uh, let me think about this some more.”

His hands flexed, squeezing Dorian’s with a smile. “Whatever you need.”

They parted ways not long afterwards, but Dorian found himself sitting in his car for several minutes, breathing in the stale air and staring out at the drops of rain gathered on the windshield. The coldness of the leather seat seeped through his slacks, but his mind was too occupied to fully register it, too lightheaded from the possibilities stretched out before him.

“Maker, amatus, this is the trouble I get into without you around.”

Then he grabbed his phone.

Let’s try this.

The townhouse received a deep scrubbing that it was hardly used to. Every room was dusted, vacuumed, swept, and mopped, windows were washed, counters were sanitized, and every surface was sparkling. The unused guestrooms received a fresh change of linens, every towel not in the
closet was thrown into the washer, he cleared off the table in the small dining room for the first
time in over two years, and even the office on the third floor that no one other than Dorian entered
was tidied and cleaned. A fake lemon smell from store bought cleaners permeated most of the
townhouse, mixed with the autumn breeze coming from the open windows, the freshness of
laundry straight out of the dryer, and dinner cooking on the stovetop.

Dorian turned away from his happily simmering bolognese sauce and surveyed the results of his
earlier cleaning frenzy. It wasn’t bad, but he wondered if he made the townhouse look too sterile
and less lived in. All the piles of books, magazines, and handwritten research notes were tucked
away, heaps of unopened mail had been shredded, and items of clothing that were carelessly left on
the furniture were neatly hung up in the appropriate closets.

The idea of recreating some of that mess popped into Dorian’s mind. Just a few books here and
there around the living room, a coat hung over the back of a chair, and a couple of dirty dishes
waiting in the sink to make the place look more welcoming.

“No, no, stop that,” Dorian chastised quickly. “Everything’s fine the way it is.”

He checked his phone and was relieved to see that he still had some time to compose himself
before Adaar and Bull arrived. Knowing that everything was ready to go was no small relief and
reminding himself of that helped the jittery energy in Dorian. Dinner was on the stove and filled
the kitchen with the scent of cooked tomato, spices, and savory druffalo. Beer that both Adaar and
Bull liked was chilling in the refrigerator. There was a bottle of port wine for after dinner and a box
of cupcakes sitting on the kitchen island. And there was brand new box of condoms lying in the
drawer of Dorian’s nightstand alongside a full bottle of lube.

He thought ruefully on the inordinate amount of time choosing his outfit. Every drawer in his
dresser was opened, he hunted through the closest at least three times, and he tried on no less than
six outfits. It took far too long for him to finally settle on a jewel toned dress shirt that flattered his
complexion and a tight pair of dark jeans that showed off his ass perfectly. Under those jeans, he
wore a pair of black, silky underwear for the occasion.

Once he was finally dressed and satisfied, Dorian had looked down at the silverite ring on his
hand, twisting it on his middle finger, and left it there.

There were still a few details that needed attending to. He couldn’t decide what kind of mood to
cast the room in for a Saturday night date, if candles or music were appropriate. He kept going
back and forth on whether to serve dinner in the seldom used and formal dining room or at the
small breakfast table situated between the kitchen and living room. He didn’t know if he should
have a couple movies picked out to watch after the meal or if it would even be unnecessary.

“I’m overthinking this. This is just sex. And for some reason dinner.” A high pitched giggle shook
Dorian and he clenched his hands as he resisted the nervous urge to run his hand through his
carefully styled hair.

Picking up the wooden spoon again, Dorian stirred the pot of his bubbling pasta sauce, keeping
one hand occupied while the other clutched onto the handle of the oven door. Holding onto
something kept his hands still, kept the tiny tremors under control, though Dorian still managed to
feel winded and his heart pumped noticeably in his body. He had to force a steady breath through
his lungs, deep, calming, and grounding.

“This is just dinner and sex, nothing to be nervous about. Easy. It’s just sex, which I haven’t had in
over two years, and with two giant Qunari.” Another breathy, high pitched laugh took over. “Sera
called this bonkers and I believe she might be right.”
The ring of the doorbell echoing through the townhouse almost made Dorian drop the spoon into the pot and he quickly put it aside as he ran to answer the door. It was two weeks since he last saw Adaar and Bull together, a long time considering how he spent the summer in their company, and soon the small entryway into the townhouse was crowded with the pair of them. Adaar came in bearing a bottle of wine and a bouquet of vibrant yellow and white Fereldan wildflowers wrapped in tissue paper, while Bull brought up the rear with a bowl of mixed salad greens and a loaf of bread tucked under his arm.

They were both casually dressed as if they were coming over for any other dinner. Adaar was in one of his neat, button up shirts that gave him his usual academic look and a comfortable pair of jeans. And Dorian was unreasonably relieved to see that the Iron Bull wearing a shirt. He didn’t think he could have made it through dinner without the large t-shirt covering Bull’s broad chest, though from the way the fabric stretched across Bull’s torso, it left little to the imagination.

“Dorian! Thank you for having us over. Here, these are for you,” Adaar thrust the bouquet of flowers into Dorian’s hands, his cheeks were pink against grey skin, and without a moment of hesitation, he ducked his head down to brush his lips upon the corner of Dorian’s mouth and slightly ruffled his mustache.

“Oh!” Dorian startled at both the gift and the kiss, but calmed down quickly. “Thank you, these are lovely.”

“Thought you could use something summery before fall fully descends upon us,” Bull explained as he stepped forward, closing the door behind of him, and kissed Dorian squarely on the cheek, his rough lips firm on Dorian’s freshly shaven face.

Blood rushed into those cheeks and Dorian turned his face away as he ran back down the hall, urging his guests to come in and declaring that he needed to check on dinner. Once the sauce was needlessly stirred again, Dorian searched for an empty vase as Adaar and Bull settled in.

“It smells wonderful in here, Dorian! Is there anything we can help you with?” Adaar asked.

“All I need is for you to open the wine and to start pouring, you know where the glasses are,” Dorian answered as he filled a vase up with water for the flowers and placed it on the kitchen island. “There’s also beer and juice in the refrigerator if you prefer.”

“This looks great,” Bull peeked at the box of cupcakes and then moved to hover over the pot of sauce. “I’m surprised to see you making something so southern.”

Dorian chuckled as the tension was beginning to bleed out of his limbs. “That’s because Cullen was the one who taught me how to cook. Felix and I never had to cook for ourselves until we moved to Ferelden and Cullen got tired of watching us eat takeout all the time, so he took it upon himself to teach us. Apparently he thought we weren’t eating enough vegetables.”

Tension seized Dorian again as he mentioned Felix. Talking his dead husband during a date was probably not the best topic for casual conversation even though both of them well aware of that aspect of Dorian’s emotional baggage. Then Dorian considered the sheer amount of photographs of Felix on display in the living room and kitchen alone, and began to question whether his place was the best location for his rendezvous with Adaar and Bull. But Bull merely laughed, shaking his head with a gentle smile.

“I can imagine you two found the best Tevinter restaurant in town and only ate from there to protect your poor northern palates,” Adaar teased and pressed a glass of wine into Dorian’s hand.
“You wouldn’t be wrong.”

Adaar eyed the pot of water sitting on the stovetop. “Did you want me to start the pasta?”

“Don’t worry, I’ve got it.” Dorian turned back to the stove, flipped on the burner, and waved his hand over the pot of water as he threw in a dash of salt. The water immediately bubbled to life in a full rolling boil and Dorian dumped the pasta into the water.

Next to him, Bull stiffened briefly and his one eye went wide before he settled into a relaxed posture again. “Neat trick,” he said cautiously.

“It would be a better trick if I could maintain the boil and multitask, but experience has taught me that I can’t,” Dorian sighed loudly.

“Does magic make the food cook faster?”

Adaar rolled his eyes at his boyfriend and bumped his hip against Bull’s. “Bull! Stop lurking around the food and make yourself useful and help me set the table.”

“Yes, boss.”

Adaar gathered the plates and utensils for dinner and Dorian instructed him to set the breakfast table. The table was too small to hold all of the food, but Dorian arranged the spread the serving dishes on the island and everyone served themselves before sitting down for dinner.

“Didn’t expect a vint to cook such good Fereldan food and to serve Fereldan microbrews,” Bull said after the first bit of sauce and pasta and a sip of his beer. “You’re practically a native, big guy, and soon you’ll develop a taste for dog decor and will be cheering for Redcliffe next football season.”

“I certainly hope not!” Dorian wrinkled his nose. “No matter how long I live here, I shall never consider myself Fereldan.”

Bull grinned, “As I always say to Krem, you can take the vint out of Tevinter, but not Tevinter out of the vint.”

“You’re one to talk, Mr. Seheron-makes-the-best-everything. Maker, you northerners and your so called superior culture,” Adaar sighed dramatically, but the corners of his mouth curled upward. “You two will never know the simple pleasures of Free Marcher life.”

“You mean boredom, inferior alcohol, and dismal football teams?” Dorian asked as Bull raised his hand for a high-five that Dorian happily obliged him with and even Adaar had to laugh.

The anxious coil that was sitting in the pit of Dorian’s stomach slowly unwound with a glass of wine and good company. Their chatter and teasing fell back into its friendly routine, as if nothing had happened between the three of them, as if Adaar and Bull never propositioned Dorian. The pleasure of being in their company again silenced any second thoughts and stilled Dorian’s lingering nerves.

After their meal and once the leftovers were packed away into containers, Bull gathered up the dishes, opened up the dishwasher, and started rinsing the plates.

“Leave the dishes,” Dorian exercised the futility of trying to shoo Bull away as he always tried to whenever they had a homemade dinner together. “I’ll take care of them later.”
Adaar grasped Dorian’s elbow, tugging on it. “Let Bull clean up and come sit with me.”

Dorian opened his mouth to protest, but Bull cut him off. “Go keep the boss company, but I get an extra cupcake for cleaning up.”

“You better say yes, Dorian, you know I can physically move you.”

Sniffing indignantly, Dorian huffed, “Fine, fine, have it your way.”

Dorian let Adaar drag him over to the living room and onto the black leather couch. Dorian wasn’t sure what he was expecting when he sat down next to Adaar. Beyond the brief kisses he received in greeting, the entire night was mind boggling normal, so he wasn’t expecting Adaar to jump right in.

Soft lips covered Dorian’s mouth, the contact was too prolonged to be considered chaste, but Adaar made no move to deepen it. The initial surprise quickly faded away and Dorian fell into the kiss, moving in closer, his hands bracing on Adaar’s muscular chest and Adaar cupped the back of his head in response. Parting his lips and carefully swiped his tongue against Adaar’s mouth, Dorian hoped to be bold when Adaar was acting more conservatively. However, Adaar slowly retreated, though his face remained close and the tip of his nose was just a hairbreadth away.

“Is this ok?” Adaar’s breath puffed warmly on Dorian’s cheek.

“You stopped kissing me to ask me that?”

Adaar laughed quietly, his cheeks flushing and his chest vibrating under Dorian’s palms as he leaned back in to capture Dorian in a kiss again.

The kisses they share just two weeks before were passionate, heated with a keen edge of desperation with the taste of forbidden fruit heavy on Dorian’s tongue. This time around there was none of that desperation and the air of scandal was dispersed. Adaar was more subdued as he kissed Dorian, taking his sweet time to explore Dorian’s mouth while his fingers all but combed out the gel from Dorian’s hair and traced down the line of his throat.

Dorian clutched onto the front of Adaar’s shirt for a minute before letting his hands wander across wide shoulders and sliding down to his firm waist. He might have gone further down, but the couch shifted, the cushions sank in on the other side of Dorian and he was well aware of Bull’s bulk tilting towards him.

The expression on Adaar’s face as he pulled away from Dorian for a second time was one of fond exasperation. He stretched over Dorian’s head, nearly smothering Dorian with his torso in the process, and met Bull part way, giving his boyfriend a brief kiss before settling back down.

“Dishes are done,” Bull announced gleefully, his arm draping around Dorian’s shoulders as he grinned at Adaar. “I think it’s my turn.”

“Ok, ok, I’ll go get dessert ready.” Adaar grinned back and pressed a kiss on Dorian’s temple before getting up and moving towards the kitchen. “Do you have decaf coffee, Dorian?”

“Of course not!” Offense was evident in Dorian’s voice. “But I do have herbal tea is you want something hot to drink.”

“I’ll figure something out.”

“Let me come help—Fasta vass! What are you doing!?”
Bull seized Dorian by the waist and hauled him up onto his lap so that Dorian was facing Bull and he was kneeling on the couch, his knees on either side of Bull’s thighs. Large hands rested on Dorian’s hips, keeping him still, and long fingers dug into the seat of Dorian’s jeans, making Dorian swallow down any protests he had.

“Been wanting to do this for a while,” Bull admitted and then closed the gap between their lips.

Dorian quickly found that being kissed by the Iron Bull something akin to being devoured. It was similar to Dorian’s first kiss with Adaar, but more intense and there was no dance of tongues sliding together, just Bull’s overwhelming dominance that demanded Dorian’s submission, which he readily gave. The grip on Dorian’s hips tightened as Dorian grasped Bull’s horns, moaning wantonly as he was swept away by the force of Bull’s tongue, lips, and teeth.

The slow simmer of arousal that had built up at Adaar kissed him hit him in full force and he could hardly think of a time, that wasn’t with Felix, when he was so turned on by just kissing. Though at the moment, Dorian could hardly think at all.

Another set of hands encircled Dorian’s waist and the heat of Adaar’s body was at his back, causing him to nearly jump in Bull’s lap. A low chuckle tickled Dorian’s ear and Adaar whispered, “It’s just me.” Teeth nibbled daintily at the delicate shell before Adaar’s mouth traveled downward, licking and biting at curve of Dorian’s neck, light enough not to leave a lasting mark, but firm enough to be more than a ticklish tease.

Withering in Bull’s lap and gasping into his mouth at Adaar’s touches, Dorian felt lightheaded. It was a double edged sword of too much sensation and yet not enough. It wasn’t enough to get him off and to feel that satisfaction of completion from the desire that was building up in him. But Dorian was also overwhelmed, the plunge from friendship to intimacy was steeper than Dorian remembered and he was lost, trapped between two Qunari.

While Dorian whimpered as Adaar stepped away, there was a small sense of relief. Soon afterwards, Bull released Dorian from the kiss, allowing him to come up for a gulp of air and to compose himself. It was like stepping off of a rollercoaster with his adrenaline pumping, excitement coursing through his veins, and a deep thankfulness for being back on solid ground.

“Dessert’s ready?” Bull asked cheerfully as Dorian slumped forward onto him, his head cradled on Bull’s shoulder and Bull rubbed soothing circles along his back.

“Looks like you were already having it,” Adaar smirked.

“Ha-ha,” Dorian mumbled drily into Bull’s thick neck before sliding off of his lap and onto the cushion next to Bull, straightening out his clothes and cleaning his smudged glasses. He shifted as his pants were feeling considerably tighter, but he was also glad for the break.

The mood switched gears again. The heavy make out session gave way to cupcakes, hot tea, and glasses of port that Adaar managed to setup on the coffee table in front of the couch without Dorian ever noticing.

Like dinner, dessert felt like any other time he hung out with the couple, talking about their week at work, gossip about mutual friends, and making plans for the weeks to come. The exception being was that Dorian was far too aware of the way Bull happily licked frosting off of his lips and the bob of Adaar’s throat when he sipped on his tea as Dorian sat between the two. The potent mixture of a rush of anxiety and the tingle of anticipation left Dorian less than hungry, but he managed to drink the heavy sweetness of the port wine and Bull eagerly consumed the remains of his partly eaten cupcake without question.
“Thanks for having us over,” Bull said as Adaar busied himself with the last of the dishes, his hand resting on Dorian’s thigh, tracing the inseam of Dorian’s jeans. “We’re both glad that you’re willing to try this with us.”

Dorian swallowed and nodded his head, his fingers touching the roughness of Bull’s knuckles. “It’s been nice, not quite what I was expecting, though I can’t really say I had any idea what tonight might be like. But this was good, almost normal.” Swallowing again, Dorian saw his opening and in his home he held the power to extend the night into something else, to push it further. But instead, he added, “So, uh, I’ll see you tomorrow afternoon for a movie while Adaar grades papers?”

Bull’s mouth twitched and his pale blue eye was soft with acceptance. “Yeah, but Adaar wants to see you afterward if you have time.”

“I don’t have anything else planned for the day.”

“Good, that’ll make him happy.”

Bull cupped Dorian’s face and tilted it up, bending down for another kiss. This one was slow, thoughtful, and deliberate, meant more to convey a certain feeling rather than arouse. They pulled away just as Adaar sat down on the other side of Dorian, his green eyed gaze flickering over to Bull. There was the slightest of shakes to Bull’s head and Adaar blinked in acknowledgment, his hand touching the back of Dorian’s neck and brushed his lips at the corner of Dorian’s kiss swollen mouth, much in the same way he did when he first came in, a bookend for the evening.

“So, will I get to see you tomorrow after your movie with Bull?” Adaar asked, his hand remaining on Dorian.

“Yes, I’ll be free.”

“Great, I’ll try to think of what I’ll want to do after hours of grading.” Adaar gave Dorian a lopsided smile and gave the back of his neck a gentle squeeze.

“I’m sure there’ll be plenty you’ll want to do when I arrive.”

Adaar beamed at Dorian’s coy response. “Yeah, I’m sure there will.”

Soon the pair was rising to leave, citing the lateness of the hour, and Dorian hesitated. He was twisted up in his wants and desires, the knowledge that he could have them both at that moment was present in his mind, but he felt little confidence and surety within himself.

Adaar paused, displaying his own hesitation about leaving, but Bull stepped in, drawing Dorian in a solid, warm hug. “We’ll see you tomorrow, big guy,” Bull said with finality and understanding that Dorian was grateful for.

The townhouse fell silent after Dorian shut the door behind Adaar and Bull as they took their noise and vibrancy with them. But Dorian’s body was still wound up, the edge of arousal was just barely diminishing with their departure and the electricity in his nerves had yet to dissipate. There was no cleaning to do due to Adaar and Bull’s diligence in picking up after themselves and while he felt far from tired, Dorian went up to his room, stripped down to his silky underwear and slid between the sheets. It wasn’t long before he was palming his half hard cock through the slick fabric and he drew in a long, shuddered breath of air.

In the short course of his friendship with Bull and Adaar, Dorian did his best not to think of them in a sexual manner and fended off the advances of his wandering mind with more loving memories.
But lying in the darkness of his room and with the discomfort of an unheeded erection which was the complete fault of Adaar and Bull, Dorian decided that there was no more honor in denying himself.

With more than enough experience the feed his imagination, Dorian closed his eyes and gave in. His first thoughts were of a beloved Tevinter face, long fingers and warm lips that knew all of Dorian’s sensitive spots, and the revered whisper of, Amatus. But that fell away to large, grey hands groping him through flimsy silk and slipping under the waistband, another set of hands in his hair, inquisitive lips exploring his body, and the tangle of too many limbs. Already wound up from the evening and on edge for so long, Dorian was soon spilling into his briefs, the silk sticking to heated and sensitive skin.

Taking a moment to still his racing heart, Dorian turned his head towards the empty side of the bed and let out a stilted, breathy laugh.

“I made out with two Qunari tonight, amatus. Maker’s breath, Felix, you must be beside yourself right now.”

Chapter End Notes

I promised that there would one day be Iron Bull/Dorian/Adaar and I have ... sort of delivered. Thank you for all of your kind comments as this story spirals out of control in terms of length.
“Dorian?” A thick Nevarran accent called over the clicking of a keyboard and the low, ambient hum of the computer fan.

Dorian looked up from his computer screen, his eyes darting first to Lavellan, who was idly playing with her phone as she waited for Dorian to finish so they could go to lunch, then to the newcomer. Standing in the open doorway to his office was Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast, looking as severe and striking as she always did in her crisp, navy blue, Seeker uniform and high polished boots.

“Oh, Lavellan!” Cassandra took notice of Lavellan sitting in the office, her voice fluctuating in surprise and self-consciousness. “If I’m intruding on a meeting, I will gladly come back after the lunch hour.”

“No, no, Lavellan is just waiting for me to finish up here for lunch,” Dorian waved Cassandra in.

He paused as cold dread gathered in his stomach and Lavellan tensed at Cassandra’s unannounced presence, her hands balling up into fists in her lap. Cassandra was someone Dorian knew both socially and professionally, and she would not go out of her way to his office for a social call.

“Did you need to speak to me in private?” he asked.

“I can step out and wait for you outside the library,” Lavellan offered, but she did not move an inch out of her seat.

Cassandra stepped forward into the small room, closing the door partway behind of her. “No, privacy is not necessary unless you desire it, Dorian. I merely wanted to check in with you, it’s been awhile since we’ve spoken on a professional capacity and I happened to be on campus this morning to speak to a class.”

The dread instantly dissipated and Lavellan relaxed in her seat. Dorian casually leaned back in his chair, the metal springs under him squeaking in effort as he replied, “I believe it’s been over six months since we’ve had an official appointment, Seeker, but I am pleased to say that for once I have nothing to complain about. Other than Felix’s mother and Maevaris, no one from Tevinter has tried to contact me recently.”

“I’m glad to hear that there has been no trouble.” Cassandra hesitated for a brief moment, her face scrunching up careful consideration before asking, “You have not heard from Magister Alexius at all?”

Dorian shook his head. “I wouldn’t worry about it, Cassandra, as Livia will not let him turn me out of House Alexius like he has threatened to. Truly, it doesn’t even matter now that my Fereldan
citizenship is long finalized and my parents no longer have any recourse even in the Imperium to meddle in my affairs.”

“That was not what I was … Well …” she trailed off, her lips pursed. Comfort and subtly were not Cassandra’s strong points, but Dorian did not want to acknowledge her fumbled attempt to inquire about his nonexistent relationship with his former father-in-law and mentor.

“Was there anything else you wanted from me?” Dorian moved the topic along cheerfully. “Perhaps your visit was your own cry for help. You know that I can certainly help improve your wardrobe and am more than happy to avail my services. First, I suggest accessorizing with a scarf to flutter in the wind as you stand and look heroic.”

“Why would I be wearing a scarf just for it to flutter in the wind?” Cassandra’s voice rose incredulously as Lavellan snorted out a laugh. The Seeker took a second to compose herself, her features relaxing from annoyed to coolness as she said, “I know we see sometimes each other during social occasions, Dorian, but I know it can be easier for people to speak to me about their problems if I approach them as Seeker.”

“Always looking after your chargers, aren’t you, Seeker Pentaghast? While I actually prefer the romance swept Cassandra to Seeker Pentaghast,” that statement earned Dorian a roll of her dark eyes and a glare, “you know if I have any complaints that I am more than willing to swallow my pride and come crying to you.”

Cassandra let out a low and quiet laugh, softening the harshness of her usual scowling expression. “That is true. You are certainly not one to keep quiet about your grievances.”

“You’re welcome to join us for lunch, Cassandra, especially since Dorian has nothing to moan about to you the entire hour,” Lavellan offered.

“I do not moan, not in that context at least,” Dorian pointed out. “I have very specific and pointed criticisms.”

“Thank you, but I do have plans for lunch today, perhaps another time.” Then a small smirk curled on Cassandra’s lips, a little hint of mischief that was so rare on her face. “I had heard rumor that Knight-Captain Rylen was quite taken with you when he met you, Dorian.”

Heat crept up Dorian’s cheeks even as he replied loftily, “Of course he was and honestly, who wouldn’t be?”

“I believe he even asked Cullen for your number.”

“He may have,” Dorian could feel his flush deepening, thinking about the careful brush off he gave the handsome Knight-Commander just the other week, “but I saw the Knight-Commander some weeks ago and it’s terribly hard to keep track of all of my admirers.”

“I only wished to express my hope for your happiness, it is much deserved,” her teasing smirk eased into something more sincere and kindly. “I will not keep you two from your lunch, we will catch up later.”

“You know that Varric is hosting another game of Wicked Grace next week Tuesday,” Lavellan suggested, her smile was sly and her eyes flashed knowingly. “The last time I saw him he mentioned working on that sequel to Swords & Shields.”

“I think I have seen your husband lose his dignity far too many times while playing that game.” Cassandra wrinkled her nose in an effort to look disinterested, but eventually relented, “But we will
see, I believe I should be free next week.”

Cassandra took her leave and Lavellan frowned in her wake, little creases marred her smooth forehead and the crinkles between her eyebrows did nothing for her features. She fell silent in contemplation, not moving from her chair to insist on leaving for lunch.

“Cassandra would not have hesitated to say something if there was anything wrong,” Dorian attempted to comfort Lavellan, trying to guess at what she was so suddenly upset about. “And I wasn’t lying to her when I said I haven’t heard from my family or anyone else from Tevinter.”

“Oh, I know,” she answered sullenly, “but I just feel bad that Cullen and I pushed you too hard about dating. Rylen probably would’ve been good for you.”

Dorian raised a skeptical eyebrow at her.

“He really would’ve,” Lavellan asserted, “he’s mature, smart, and surprisingly gentle, but we burned you out on too many idiots. What was Cullen thinking when he introduced you to Delrin?”

Guilt nearly swallowed Dorian whole from the look of wretchedness on Lavellan’s face. “It’s no one’s fault, I just need a break from it for a bit. Before you know it, you and Cullen will be back throwing as many Templars and professors in my direction as you can.”

“But I should have known better.” Her shoulders were hunched up, making Lavellan look smaller than her lithe elven frame really was. “I know you, I know your heart, and I should have remembered that you never really dated, not like this. I know that you and Felix skipped the whole courtship thing and pretty much went from platonic friends living in the same house to running off to another country to get married.”

“That’s a rather simplified summary of my complex and inspiring love story with Felix.” Dorian chose that as his bone to pick, but Lavellan did not rise to the bait and did not reply with her usual wit. “Lavellan, I’m far from upset.”

“I know, you actually seem happier now.” That simple statement was riddled with such sorrow, slicing cleanly through Dorian. “Were we really making you that miserable?”

Dorian’s chest tightened and the taste of omitted truths was bitter in his mouth. But Dorian schooled his features perfectly, his mother’s training did not go to waste, as he stood from his desk to stand in front of Lavellan, taking her hands and squeezing them in his own.

“How could I be miserable when I have such excellent friends who care enough to look out for me, such as yourself and Cullen?”

Lavellan looked at Dorian for a moment, her stare was stuck on his face, examining him before the apprehension melted from her and she managed a small grin. “You are the biggest sap I know, Dorian Pavus.”

“Do keep that to yourself, I have a reputation to maintain if I am to get any respect around here. Now, I am famished and this melodrama has done nothing to help diminish my appetite.”

“Well, I can’t have you fainting in my arms in public,” Lavellan’s grin widened. “Think of the scandal and rumors it would cause.”

“Don’t even mention it, you know that I live for scandal.”

Lavellan’s smile slipped and her eyes were dark and thoughtful as she stood up to leave. Then her
hand grasped Dorian’s as he began to pull away, her slender fingers digging into the meat of his palm in her cool grip, and her large brown eyes fixed upon his silver ones.

“You know you can tell me anything, right, Dorian?”

There was such an honest earnestness to Lavellan’s words and an underlying concern of not being believed. A rush of blood and the thudding of his heart overwhelmed Dorian’s ears and for a second he thought he might just faint from the misery of it.

“I know, Ellana.”

As they went to lunch and sat through the midday meal, the guilt of not telling Lavellan the truth weighed heavily on Dorian. He was no stranger to keeping secrets, of letting what lied in his heart remain hidden, but with Lavellan he had always experienced a level of openness that he only ever shared with precious few people. Keeping things from her felt unnatural to Dorian and it made his skin crawl.

Her declaration that he could tell her anything didn’t help matters.

It was still nagging at him hours later when he returned home and started going through the motions of making dinner. The lingering guilt about keeping the information from Lavellan was sour in his gut and left him with little hunger, but the habit of making dinner when he got home was ingrained into him. Dorian could still remember Felix’s grumpy frown when he tried to shirk off eating dinner in favor of studying and lectures he’d receive about taking better care of himself, about letting Felix take care of him.

At some point, dinner stopped being a meal that Dorian ate so Felix wouldn’t get mad, but a process that they shared together. Making dinner became a moment to unwind after classes and work with a beer or glass of wine while they worked together to make a meal that was actually edible, something that they could be proud of as they gained a little more independence from their privileged lives.

Dorian found the motion of chopping oddly meditative as he enjoyed the steady, crisp sound of his knife sliding through vegetables and found a simple happiness in the sight of the colorful little piles they made on his cutting board. The warm smell of simmering broth for soup on the stovetop and bread toasting in the oven brought a comforting, homey feel to the kitchen, easing some of the stiffness Dorian carried. But while preparing dinner did nothing to strengthen his appetite, it made Dorian crave better times.

Without really thinking about it, his hand drifted over to where his phone was lying on the counter and soon he was calling Adaar. The ringing on the line accumulated as it occurred to Dorian that he wasn’t sure why he was calling Adaar in the first place. A halfhearted panic flared up within him as the ringing stopped and Adaar’s voice rang out in greeting.

“Dorian,” delight and fondness was evident in Adaar’s strong Free Marcher accent, “I was just thinking of you!”

“Oh?” Dorian was instantly pleased. “And what prompted such pleasurable thoughts?”

“I was just at my university’s Rare Book Library this afternoon to look at a text on the Fade.”

Dorian could not contain his derisive snort, nor did he want to. “Pray tell, how does a subpar collection remind you of me?”

“I know, I know, you run the best library in all of Thedas,” Adaar’s exasperated laugh rumbled
over the phone, “but the smell of old books just makes me think of you. It reminds me of that excited look you got when you were showing off your library to me and that confident smile you get when you’re proud. I like the way you look when you get all nerdy on me.”

Dorian’s throat tightened and he couldn’t find his voice.

“I was hoping to talk to you actually,” Adaar prattled on. “I wanted to know if you wanted to go to the Science and Magic Museum with me this weekend. There’s a new exhibit that simulates Fade rifts, visually at least, that I want to see.”

“Oh,” Dorian croaked and struggled to clear his throat, “yes, that sounds like fun. I don’t believe I’ve been since I first moved to Skyhold.”

“What?”

The word came out so shrill and offended that Dorian had to jerk his head away from the phone.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you go deaf,” Adaar apologized with a sheepish chuckle. “I go whenever they change out the special exhibits and I help Bull chaperon his second graders when he takes them for a field trip.” There was a pause and muffled speech with the scratch of shuffling over the phone, then Adaar said, “Bull said I’ve been talking your ear off and haven’t let you get a word in and you’re the one who called me! What did you want to talk to me about?”

“I, uh, I just ...” Dorian faltered. “Tell me about your day.”

“Maker, Dorian, you would not believe the accident my graduate assistant nearly caused in the lab today!” Adaar told him without missing a beat. “I’m lucky to still have my eyebrows and both eyes. Can you imagine? Bull and I would have matching eyepatches.”

The outrage and humor in Adaar’s story kept Dorian entertained as he finished making dinner and he felt better enough to swallow down half a bowl of soup as he sat at small breakfast table with the speaker phone turned on.

“I’ve taken up enough your time,” Adaar said reluctantly. “Bull wanted me to remind you that he’s coming by your library tomorrow after work to talk about doing a field trip there with his class and I’ll see you this weekend.”

“I look forward to it.”

“Me too,” Adaar said with real enthusiasm. “Good night, Dorian.”

“Good night, Adaar.”

The prospect of going out with Adaar over the weekend was a cheery spot for Dorian to focus on as his day settled down, though there was still a healthy amount of apprehension that plagued him. Behind closed doors, his interactions with Adaar and Bull were affectionate, peppered with kisses and curious touches. Out in public it was like nothing had changed between all of them.

Just two weeks into his liaison with the pair and Dorian had yet to breathe a word of it to anyone, not even to Sera. The unorthodoxy of the arrangement and not knowing how long it might last kept Dorian’s mouth shut on the topic. The only person who could possibly know was Cole, though the young man had yet to make another unannounced appearance at Dorian’s house since he first kissed Adaar. However, not infrequently, Dorian lied in bed, wrapped in blankets and hugging pillows, and unloaded his heart to the silence in his bedroom.
“There’s really nothing to tell, amatus, what would I even say to Lavellan about it?” Dorian explained himself that night, curled up on his side in bed and looking to the empty pillow beside him.

Despite the weariness in his bones after a long day, Dorian was left wide awake as he talked, the red numbers of the alarm clock glaring angrily the lateness of the hour. But he was left unsettled after seeing Cassandra in her sleek and prim Seeker uniform, stirring up memories of more troubled times, and he continued to be heartsick about keeping things from Lavellan. The combination allowed sleep to elude him that night.

“You know, it’s already been a couple of weeks and we haven’t even had sex yet,” Dorian continued, the sound of his own voice felt overly loud in the stillness. “We’ve only just done an obscene amount of kissing and cuddling. I admit that I enjoy it, but they must be tired of it by now, this can’t have been what they wanted when they started this. Only you ever enjoyed my clinginess.”

There was a cruel twist of his heart at that thought, though he knew he was being unfair as Adaar and the Iron Bull had shown him nothing but kindness and warmth. Experience taught Dorian to read the disinterest in a partner, to spot the wasting away of patience, and to disengage himself as necessary. He couldn’t read any of that in either Adaar or Bull, he could only see their eagerness in spending time with him and their enthusiasm with each physical encounter, no matter how relatively chaste it was.

“What would I even tell Lavellan? That I spend my time cuddling two Qunari because I’m tired of being lonely? That all her and Cullen’s attempts to find me someone to date this summer were dismal failures?”

The remorse that overcame Lavellan in his office early floated to the forefront of Dorian’s mind and he groaned at the gloom she was in.

“It’s better if she doesn’t know, I’m saving her the worry and hassle it will certainly cause her,” Dorian said aloud to convince himself of the truthfulness of his statement. “This thing with Adaar and Bull cannot last that long, right, amatus? We’ll have sex, it’ll be fun until they eventually tire of the novelty of it, and then I’ll just ...”

Dorian trailed off and rolled onto his back when he thought he heard the floorboards creak. There was no one there.

In general, Dorian enjoyed visiting museums. He loved to gaze upon old relics, to learn about other cultures and time periods, he enjoyed the quiet contemplation of artwork, and the respectful nature of the visitors. The Skyhold Science and Magic Museum was less in line with any of those ideals that Dorian relished so much and it abruptly reminded Dorian why he never returned after he and Felix first strolled through its halls not long after they arrived in Skyhold.

Interactive exhibits blared out noisy imitations of spells being cast, the roar of a rocket, and obnoxious droning of narrators on the various TV screens. Lights flashed as children curiously pressed buttons on displays and squealed with amusement at the results. The architecture of the historic building allowed all of the noise to echo through high vaulted ceilings and left Dorian with a headache building behind his eyes.

But Adaar seemed to take pleasure in it all, his became engrossed in all of the exhibits, even the ones he’d seen several times before. He smiled at the screaming children as they ran by and
laughed kindly at their antics. And like a giant child, Adaar gleefully pushed every button he could, his face beaming at every hokey display and sound. His reactions and joy helped to make Dorian’s headache a little more tolerable, though not by much.

“I can hardly believe that Bull didn’t want to come along with us,” Dorian said dryly as a little girl ran in front of them, screeching as her harried father chased after her.

Adaar chuckled at Dorian. “Bull says he has to save his enthusiasm for when he takes his class. Besides, he’s busy baking those Qunari cinnamon rolls for when we get back.”

“Well, at least he is being productive.”

“Come on,” Adaar grabbed Dorian’s elbow and tugged him in the direction of another room, “let’s go see that new exhibit on the Fade, I think you’ll like it.”

“I suppose you’re the expert, on both the Fade and this museum apparently.”

Dorian did have to admit that the special exhibit on the Fade was better than he expected, there were less gimmicky lights and sounds, and more artifacts and well thought out displays. Then there was the added bonus that the crowded space gave Dorian ample excuse to stand close to Adaar as curious onlookers closed in on the glass cases and panels. Their arms and the back of their hands brushed, and at one point Adaar ran his thumb over Dorian’s knuckles. Then finally, standing close together around a display case of a Fade touched sword, Adaar fingers slid in between Dorian’s, their hands clasped loosely together and hidden by the bulk of Adaar’s body.

“Is this ok?” Adaar murmured into Dorian’s ear as he dipped his head down as if to take a closer look at the exhibit label.

Dorian swallowed the sudden lump in his throat and nodded, making Adaar’s smile widen and he tightened his grip on Dorian’s hand. He didn’t let go of Dorian even as they made their way to other glass cases and eventually left the special exhibit area. Out in the wide and well-lit corridors of the museum, it was painfully obvious for to see that a towering male Qunari was holding the hand of a distinctly Tevinter man. No one gave them a second look.

The hand holding did give Dorian pause though. Old feelings of panic over discovery turned in him, the thought that someone he or Adaar might know would see them set him on edge and elated him at the same time. He couldn’t bear the thought of someone seeing them and assuming that Dorian was having an affair with Adaar behind Bull’s back. But the small contact also helped to validate that whatever what he was doing with Adaar and Bull, that it was more than just physical pleasure.

It reminded Dorian vividly of the double edged feelings he experienced as Felix took his hand and dragged him towards the dining room of the Alexius family manor where Gereon and Livia were waiting for them for dinner, at the time unknowing of Felix and Dorian’s new relationship and their intentions. There was the same flutter in his stomach, an over awareness of the thud of his heart within his chest, and the sharp spike of fear twisted with excitement.

*It’ll be ok, Dorian, just keep holding my hand.*

Adaar pulled him aside towards an unoccupied wall, standing so that their joined hands were obscured from sight. A small, concerned frown tugged down the corners of Adaar’s mouth and his wide green eyes closely examined Dorian’s face.

“Dorian?”
“I’m fine,” Dorian said quickly and slightly out of breath.

Adaar’s frown only deepened.

“I’m fine,” he repeated, though the sentence came out just as rushed.

The frown eased off of Adaar’s face, but the concern in his eyes didn’t leave. “Let’s go the cafe,” he suggested, “I’m ready to sit down for a bit and have a bite to eat.”

“Yes, that sounds good,” Dorian agreed, knowing that the hour before noon meant that the cafe would have significantly less people.

Dorian felt a strange relief when Adaar kept holding his hand as they walked towards the museum cafe, an overpriced little restaurant with a half decent selection of food and drink. Dorian sat at one of the tables near a large window as Adaar ordered them a light lunch, gazing out at the lovely courtyard on the other side of the glass. His mind was trying to come up with ways to explain to Adaar about his odd reaction, how to say it in a way that would not make it sound like that Dorian was ashamed of being out in public with him.

But the more he explored his own feelings, Dorian realized that he did feel a pinprick of shame towards himself. It originated from his own insecurities, the ones that he kept tightly under a veneer of sarcasm, wit, and vanity. Under his arrogance and preening was a little voice inside of Dorian that whispered about how he was being used, that he was too desperate to care, and how disappointed Lavellan would be in him for engaging in such an affair. It was the same little voice that told him that he was taking a step back, lurking back into the shadow of secrets instead of living openly as he did since he and Felix moved to Skyhold.

Adaar came back to the table, sitting down a plastic tray laden with a large sandwich to share, a cheese, fruit, and bread plate, two glasses of sweetened iced teas, and a couple of brownies smothered in a caramel sauce. He sat perpendicular to Dorian so that their legs could brush discreetly together under the cover of the table.

“This is your idea of a light lunch?” Dorian complained even as he popped a grape into his mouth.

“Have you seen how much food Bull eats? This would hardly be considered a snack,” Adaar retorted, his smile was weak and he fiddled with one of the plastic forks, nearly bending it in his large hands. “I’m sorry for pushing you too far.”

“No, Adaar—”

“Dorian,” he cut Dorian off with just the soft huff of his voice. “I know this is a lot to adjust to, especially being out in public together like that, and I knew I was pushing those boundaries of intimacy when I took your hand. I should’ve let you set the pace instead of doing what I wanted, I was being selfish. I’ll do better next time, I promise.”

A laugh built up in Dorian’s chest, shaking him slightly as he let it out in a quiet rumble and he turned his head towards the window, staring blankly out at the museum’s white courtyard. “If you knew half of my sexual history, you would hardly regard this as pushing my boundaries.”

A noise of protest rose up in Adaar, so Dorian pushed on.

“I, of course, am well versed in the difference between intimacy in a private space and public displays of affection. I was in my mid-twenties when I first held another man’s hand in that way and it was never something we could ever do out in public in Tevinter without scandal or worse.”
Dorian knew it could get a lot worse than scandal and whispered rumors.

“Imagine my amazement when I came out to Ferelden and saw so many couples like Felix and I living openly, without fear from their families or anyone else. I nearly died in shock when Sera and Dagna made out in front of me for the first time, and a hundred other people, at a concert. But after living here for over a decade, being married to Felix, and accepted by his family and our friends, you would think I could take a little hand holding.”

“It’s more than just hand holding, I know, Dorian,” Adaar said gently, his hand rested on Dorian’s thigh just above the knee under the table. “My parents were Tal-Vashoth and raised me in a lot of Qunari ways, the good parts at least. But I am, as you would say, a southern barbarian. I understand that this relationship may not be so readily accepted by others.”

Dorian shook his head and turned his face back towards Adaar, meeting his eyes. “I spent years living in secrecy and scandal back in Tevinter, trying to hide my affairs from my parents until they tried to force me to marry. I thought that was all over when I came south, but …”

The hand on Dorian’s thigh squeezed at the muscle. “It’s ok to take this slow, Dorian, we’ve been together for less than a month and what we’re doing right now is perfectly fine, it’s wonderful in fact. Not telling anyone right now and not being overly open about it, that’s not being secretive, it’s just privacy. When things progress further, we’ll talk about the best way to tell people.”

“ ‘I am all for that, but I am hoping that we don’t take everything slow. A man does have needs.” Dorian flashed a brief and hungry grin, making Adaar’s grey cheek turn pink and he happily grinned in return.

“Well, we can’t allow your needs to go unfulfilled.” The hand pressed a little further up Dorian’s leg. “Let’s finish our lunch, take a look at another exhibit or two, and then head home.”

“A solid plan,” Dorian agreed.

Of course, one or two exhibits turned into the rest of the museum. Not that Dorian minded terribly since he had more opportunities to stand in Adaar’s space and he encouraged small touches when they could be hidden. A brief holding of hands, the brush of a touch to the small of his back, a grasp of the arm, and one bold kiss in a blind corner. There was a warm familiarity in the ritual. The secretive touches and stolen moments of affection felt much like the beginning of his courtship with Felix, before they left for Ferelden and before they even told Gereon and Livia.

As much as Dorian loathed how he and Felix were forced into secrecy back in Tevinter, he felt a real nostalgia for those early days together with Felix. Those little moments with Adaar were a small taste of what Dorian once had, but with the keen difference of paramours and the security that Skyhold provided. While someone might disapprove of his arrangement with Adaar and Bull, Dorian was reassured that he was safe from real bodily harm.

By the end of the trip, Dorian was physically weary. While walking around all day hardly winded him, the constant buzz of people and noise wore on him and his creeping headache finally took its toll. But he carried it well as Adaar seemed none the wiser as he drove them about to his house where Bull was waiting for them.

The little cottage house was perfumed with the scent of cinnamon and the sweetness of sugar when they entered. The promised cinnamon rolls were sitting out in the kitchen, still warm to the touch and liberally frosted with a pot of tea ready for them. Bull, dressed in his frilly pink apron over his bare chest and horrid green striped pants, eyed Dorian sharply when they came in, but made no comment as he served tea and an afternoon snack.
“I hope you don’t mind terribly if I go on the computer and answer some emails from my students. My Introduction to the Fade class has a paper due on Monday and I think some of them are freaking out,” Adaar said apologetically after the dishes were cleared away and he checked his email on his phone.

“Go ahead, kadan,” Bull urged. “I’ll entertain Dorian.”

“We’ll amuse ourselves in your absence, but do hurry along,” Dorian replied, allowing an edge of suggestiveness color his words.

Adaar brightened. “I’ll try not to take too long.”

Dorian followed Bull into the living room as Adaar went upstairs to his office and let out an outraged squawk at the flickering images of a Fereldan football game on mute on the TV. Bull for his part did not look the least bit sorry.

“This is of the highest treason, Bull!” Betrayal flashed through Dorian as he recalled their bonding over real football during the summer.

“Hey, it’s nothing to proper football and it is annoying when they stop all the time, but they do bash into each other and several of my students love it, I need to keep up with them.”

“I will not hear your excuses,” Dorian declared as he pressed his hands to Bull’s chest as if to shove him away. “I will just have to distract you so you cannot watch this garbage.”

Dorian was still unused to having to stand on his toes to kiss someone, but he liked the feline stretch of his body, needing to lean in close and the way Bull ducked his head to meet his lips. He parted his mouth and swiped at Bull’s lips with his tongue, but anxiety peaked within Dorian when Bull didn’t respond. Instead, Bull’s hands enclosed over Dorian’s hips and steered Dorian towards the couch.

“Come sit with me.”

“I can think of better things to do than just sitting,” Dorian insisted, but Bull wasn’t deterred.

Bull sat down on the couch, swinging his legs up onto the wide cushions, stretching out and leaning back on the armrest. He reached over with his long arms and seized Dorian by the waist, manhandling him until Dorian was nestled between his legs and his back was reclined against Bull’s chest. Then Bull snatched the fuzzy throw blanket off of the back of the couch and draped it over Dorian.

“This is not conducive to kissing,” Dorian complained even as the tension in his muscles began to unwind and he let out a groan when Bull took off his glasses and his thick fingers slid into Dorian’s hair, massaging his scalp.

“Close your eyes and relax, sweetheart. Let me give you what you need.”

The lingering headache began to ease away under Bull’s ministrations and Dorian’s eyelids were soon fluttering shut. “I’ll just rest my eyes for a couple minutes,” Dorian mumbled.

Lips pressed into his hair, a puff of breath ticked his skin, and there were whispered words of affection that Dorian didn’t quite hear as he nodded off. When Dorian opened his eyes again an hour later they were full of grit, his body was stiff and his mouth was stale with sleep. Behind of him Bull was still watching TV, his fingers rubbing gentle circles along Dorian’s temple.
“Have a good nap?”

Dorian lazily nuzzled the skin under his cheek. “I was just resting my eyes.”

“You snore when you rest your eyes,” Bull teased.

Whining in response, Dorian let his eyes close again, this time truly just to rest his eyes. He was stuck in that contented space between sleep and wakefulness, warm and secure in Bull’s arms. It freed Dorian’s mind from worries and stress that kept him awake earlier that week, and emphasized Bull’s genuine partiality for Dorian. It let Dorian believe that everything would be ok and let him enjoy the moment.

“Adaar told me about what you two talked about at the museum,” Bull murmured into his hair, his rough fingertips still stroking Dorian’s face. “We can take all the time you need, Dorian, neither of us are in a rush. But I think you should tell someone you trust about this.”

That wasn’t what Dorian was expecting Bull to say, making him blink the sleep from his eyes and crane his neck up to look at other man. “Why do you say that?”

“Look, Adaar and I talk about you all the time. Only good things,” Bull added when Dorian narrowed his eyes at him. “It can’t be good for you to keep it completely hidden, having no outlet to talk about what’s going on or someone to bitch to if Adaar and I do something that makes you upset. Plus, I think it’d be good for someone to look out for you and to tell you if they think we’re being assholes to you.”

“It’s rather hard to imagine either of you being assholes.”

“That’s because you only see my good side and you’ve never had to wake up Adaar before nine in the morning,” Bull joked. “I imagine that even back in Tevinter you had someone you confided in about all your relationships.”

“Felix,” Dorian answered readily.

Bull smiled down at Dorian. “I bet it drove him mad with jealousy.”

“Maker, you have no idea.”

“Just think about it, ok?” Bull looked satisfied as Dorian nodded his head and slumped back down against Bull. “You can nap for a little longer, sweetheart, Adaar just ordered delivery from that Rivaini place and it won’t be here for about another hour.”

“Are you still watching Fereldan football?”

“Yep.”

“Then wake me up for dinner.” Dorian pulled the blanket back up to his shoulders and shifted to get in a more comfortable position. He let his head roll to one side, his ear close to Bull’s chest and he listened to the strong thrum of Bull’s heart, letting it to lull him back into an easy sleep.

Sitting out on the back deck of the townhouse, Dorian sat cross legged on one of the lawn chairs with a glass of wine in hand and flipped through an old sketchbook in his lap with a couple others sitting on the table next to him. It was a warm afternoon and Dorian took full advantage of the last rays of sun after a long day at work, despite being bundled up in a Skyhold University sweatshirt
with the hood pulled up, long pants and a thick pair of socks.

The sketchbook was a portal of half-forgotten memories, faint and hesitant pencil lines were faded with time, and the bolder, darker lines were partly smudged and blurred. Between the pages were scenes and people taken primarily from Tevinter. A slice of the gardens at the Alexius estate in Tevinter was captured on one page, another page had a half completed sketch of long, feminine fingers with a large ring adorned with the Alexius family crest, and the page after that was a rather embarrassing and aborted attempt to capture Dorian’s clean shaven, adolescent face.

“Aw, fuck.” Sera drew out the sentence as she stepped out onto the deck, plopping down on the opposite chair and let her long, skinny limbs flail about. “Is this a pity party? Because I totally just came here to steal some dinner since Widdle is working late, but I can do pity party if we need to, just need better booze.”

Dorian blinked at her. “Does this look like a pity party to you?”

“You got smarty britches’ sweatshirt on, you got his doodle books out, and you’re drinking,” Sera ticked off each point on her long fingers. “Well, you’re always drinking, but combine it with the first two and you’ve got a pity party.”

“Fair point,” Dorian admitted, “but I am not having a pity party. I’m looking for a portrait of Gereon that Felix drew several years ago, Livia called and she wanted to know if she could have it. She wants to have it framed for his birthday.”

Sera stuck out her tongue at the mention of Gereon. “Tell her she can have it when that arsewipe apologizes to you.”

“I’m doing this for Livia.” Dorian smiled weakly as he thumbed to a leaf of the book where Felix tried to capture his mother’s likeness with mix results. The nose was not quite right, the lips were far too thin, and her chin was too pointed, but her eyes with little crinkled lines around them from a lifetime of smiling and laughing were spot on.

Sera plucked one of the more recent sketchbooks from the table and opened it up. “Smarty britches was a real shite artist.”

Dorian’s smile strengthened. “Yes, he was.”

“Can I have that picture he drew of Widdle?”

“The one that makes her look a bit like a nug? If we can find it, it’s yours.”

She flipped through a few sheets, the rustle of paper scraped quietly against the backdrop of Sera’s humming of an old Chantry song, one she often sang under her breath and generously added dirty words to. Her fingertips traced the pencil lines as she took in the drawings, observing the faces and scenery from Skyhold she was acquainted with until she hit a series of sketches of Dorian. Those drawings were a little better than the rest, the hand holding the pencil was more familiar with the shape of Dorian’s face, the line of his nose, the fullness of his lips, and the details of his eyes.

“He drew your fancy arse a lot,” she observed, turning to another page and her mouth creased itself into a frown. “Fuck, he loved you so much.” Sera rubbed at her eyes with her sleeve and let out an undignified sniffle. “Now I’m getting all depressed thinking about it.”

Dorian’s chest suddenly constricted at her admission, his previously lightened spirits sank at Sera’s admission. But instead of permitting himself to wallow, Dorian concentrated what kept him smiling as of late and decided to share it with his friend. “I have something to tell you that might
cheer you up, but you must promise to be discreet about it.”

“What do you mean I have to be—” Her eyes then went comically wide with understanding and surprise. “You banged them!”

A grin twitched on Dorian’s lips. “Not as such, but it’s a beginning.”

Leaning forward, Sera planted her hands on her knees and her eyes gleamed with mischief in the fading sunlight. “Tell me all about it.”

He did.

Chapter End Notes

I do try to update this fairly regularly, but due to some upcoming events and travel, I probably won't get another chapter up until the end of the month :( I might try to get a little half-chapter out by the end of the week, but I can make no promises. In the meantime, I hope you are all still enjoying the super slow build!

Update: I was going to try to put out another chapter before leaving town, but could not do it justice in the short amount of time, sorry :( On the plus side, there are lots of great fics coming out of the Adoribull Minibang!
Dorian spends the night.

Come over after your dinner with your friends, we’ll have a quiet night in and watch a movie. If you want, you can stay the night, we’ll have a sleepover ;) Bull promises to make pancakes in the morning. But no pressure if you don’t want to stay!

Adaar’s casual text nagged Dorian throughout Josephine Montilyet’s birthday dinner as his mind swirled with possibilities for the night. Beyond the one time Dorian accidentally fell asleep at Bull and Adaar’s house, he had never spent the night with them and he was quick to confirm with Adaar that he was interested in staying over. He only had to get through dinner, which was scheduled mercifully early in the evening.

The birthday dinner for Herald University’s Public Relations Director was a fanciful affair with various professors and administrators from the university and other notables from Skyhold sitting in a private dining room of a high end Antivan restaurant. The scent of Antivan spices perfumed the air as people chattered away and laughed quietly behind hands and napkins. Dorian was sure that the food was exquisite, but it all tasted like an indistinguishable blend of saffron and turmeric upon his tongue and he only noted the acid of the wine as he was driven to distraction. At least years of his mother’s training in etiquette helped Dorian to maintain small talk with his friends, flashing delighted smiles, and giving Josephine his well wishes.

Being seated next to Lavellan also helped and on the other side of Dorian was a handsome, gentile Orlesian man with fine blond hair and hazel eyes named Michel, whom he vaguely recognized. Dorian was sure that Michel was a fine young man, but the man would not stop trying to talk to Dorian. It came as no surprise to him that Michel was newly single and was conveniently seated next to him. Dorian could readily admit that the man was easy on the eyes, but his attempts at flirting grated on Dorian’s overeager nerves. His careful deflections were met with Michel’s oblivious determination and Lavellan’s exasperated grins.

A refreshing moment of respite came as Josephine made her rounds to chat with her friend with her husband, Thom Rainier, dutifully at her side.

“Can I not convince you to come to the opera after dinner, Dorian? I am sure that the show is not sold out,” Josephine pressed.

“My dear Lady Montilyet, I am afraid that not even the celebration of your birthday can tempt me to attend an Orlesian opera,” Dorian gently brushed her off, even as he dramatically shuddered at the thought of the Orlesian opera company traveling through Skyhold.

“A pity, for once your outraged rants might have made something bearable,” Thom muttered under his breath. The gruff man was standing stiffly in his starched blue and grey suit, his dark hair was washed and combed back, and he could almost be called dashing if not for the glower expression...
lurking under his thick beard.

Josephine rolled her eyes and playfully smacked at her husband, and for a moment Dorian had to admit that Thom looked brilliant as he smiled at his wife.

“Do you have plans for the rest of the night?” Lavellan asked as Josephine and Thom moved onto speak to Cullen, who was on the other side of Lavellan.

He turned to his friend with a careful smile. “Adaar invited me over to watch a movie.”

“Then I guess there really is no convincing you to come to the opera,” Lavellan attempted to tease, but her words fell flat and her grin was weaker than normal.

Her lackluster reply left Dorian confused and concerned, making him wonder if maybe he was neglecting Lavellan and Cullen in favor of Adaar and Bull. But as he ran down the times he socialized with Lavellan, Dorian was sure that he wasn’t spending any less time with her. Worried, Dorian grasped at something to say and to ease the tension in Lavellan. But the right words escaped him, leaving him unable to reassure her from her unknown troubles. Lamely, Dorian just said, “I’ve seen only one Orlesian opera and it was more than enough for a lifetime.”

Lavellan’s halfhearted chuckle brought no comfort to Dorian, but they both let the topic drop.

“I cannot believe you dislike Orlesian operas, Dorian! I insist that you give them another try,” Michel chimed in unwelcomely. “I will be happy to explain the subtle intricacies of Orlesian music to you.”

On the upside, the pure annoyance that bubbled over in Dorian and spilled across his features made Lavellan chuckle with amusement.

Dinner wound down and the attendees went on their way to the opera or, in Dorian’s case, headed home. Dorian almost felt guilty as relief flooded him as he climbed into his car, ready to make the drive home. His arrangement with Adaar and Bull rarely drove him to such distraction to be an inattentive friend, but the expectations building in him for the rest of the night were too much to overcome.

Once at home, Dorian showered and dressed with great care, choosing a flattering black silk shirt that he didn’t mind having ruined and his most form fitting pair of pants with silky underwear trimmed with a hint of lace underneath. A thin line of kohl outlined his eyes and smudged for a smoky effect, a fine gold dust powered his cheekbones, and a hint of gloss brought a shine to his lips. He took the time to trim and buff his nails and dabbed on his favorite jasmine scented oil on the curve of his neck.

In a small overnight bag, Dorian packed an extra set of clothes, a toothbrush, and several condoms and packets of lube. He also grabbed a set of pajamas to wear to bed, but paused as found himself holding oversized flannel pants and a worn Skyhold University Department of Mathematics t-shirt. Dorian promptly shoved them both into the dresser drawer where they resided.

He was mature enough to realize that taking it slow with Adaar and the Iron Bull was the smart thing to do, but a month of kissing and teasing touches was driving Dorian mad with frustration. Dorian’s mind ran wild with fantasies about what those many hands, lips, and bodies could do, and it became mental fodder for long nights alone in his bed. Over two years of celibacy was long enough for Dorian, causing that carnal longing that plagued him as a young man to return in force, and he was more than ready to move his relationship with the two Qunari forward.
It could also dash their budding affection for Dorian against the rocks and make them realize that there was not enough room for Dorian in their bed or their lives.

“Yours was the only bed I was welcome to stay in, amatus, but we cannot compare Adaar and Bull to those men you affectionately called heartless bastards. And if we can, then I’ll tell Sera and she’ll attack them with arrows,” Dorian said as he slid on a gold bracelet and fished out a couple of rings from his jewelry box. He flexed his fingers, taking comfort in the feel of the silverite ring on his left hand dig in.

Once he was satisfied with his appearance, Dorian picked up his overnight bag and headed out of the townhouse, hoping not to return until the next day. The drive along the rain slicked road littered with leaves to Adaar and Bull’s house seemed longer than usual as the flutter of anticipation in his stomach twisted into impatience. The stretch of dark road and the yellow haze of streetlights finally ended as Dorian spotted the cheerful and comforting glow of Bull and Adaar’s cottage styled house.

Parking on the street, Dorian checked his face in the rearview mirror one last time and took off his glasses to better flatter the silver of his eyes, hoping that he wouldn’t need them for the rest of the night. He finally made his way up to the house, his bag in hand and his head held up high.

Knocking briskly on the door, still refusing to use the dragon door knocker, he waited for someone to answer.

The door swung open and Adaar, dressed in soft flannel pants, brightly patterned socks, and a loose t-shirt, was on the other side. Whatever greeting he had for Dorian apparently dried up on his tongue as his eyes moved up and down the length of Dorian’s body and his jaw went slack. A sense of triumph rose in Dorian at the reaction. He always felt like he was fumbling around with his arrangement with Adaar and Bull, but seduction was one thing that he had full confidence in.

Adaar sucked in a long breath. “I appear to be underdressed for the evening.”

“I would say you’re overdressed,” Dorian countered, stepping inside the house and deliberately brushing against Adaar. “But we’ll fix that soon enough.”

“Maker’s breath, Dorian, you’re gorgeous. I mean, you always are, but …” Adaar trailed off the moment as Dorian turned around to put down his overnight bag and take off his shoes, purposefully bending over with a little smirk as he undid the laces. “Now you’re just showing off.”

Dorian straightened out, but his smirk only widened. “Are you complaining?”

“Not at all.” Adaar’s hands grasped at Dorian’s hips, his thumbs slid under the silk of the shirt and rubbed at the skin he found there. “Did you paint these pants on? Do they even come off?”

“Would you like to find out?” Stretching onto the balls of his feet, Dorian reached up to press his lips upon Adaar’s.

The hands on Dorian’s hips squeezed tight enough in response that Dorian could imagine handprints on his skin and making him shiver in delight. He cupped Adaar’s face as he deepened the kiss, his fingers slid across freshly shaven skin and he leaned upon a solid wall of muscle that seeped warmth into Dorian’s bones. He wasn’t sure how long they stood there, chest to chest, kissing softly in the entryway, but it was long enough to cause Bull to emerge from the living room to come looking for them.

Bull’s deceptively light steps barely gave them warning as his groan of appreciation announced his presence. “Fuck, that’s a pretty sight.”
Dorian managed to pry his lips away from Adaar and he twisted in Adaar’s hold to throw Bull a lazy smile, just barely able to bite back his outrage at the white and pink sweatpants Bull wore with little nugs on them and his usual lack of a shirt.

“You know you’re allowed to do more than just look,” Dorian purred instead of complaining.

“I didn’t know this was what Adaar meant when he said quiet night in.” Bull gave the two of them a hungry grin.

“I was hoping there would be more noise tonight, but I can be accommodating. I do look lovely with a piece of silk in my mouth,” Dorian offered, the heat in his belly building and his confidence strengthened under the dual lustful gazes.

“I bet you do.” Bull stepped behind Dorian, his hands resting over Adaar’s as he dropped a kiss into Dorian’s hair. “He’s a mouthy one, isn’t he, kadan?”

“You like it.” Adaar laced his fingers together with Bull’s. “Maybe we should take this up to the bedroom?”

“Lead the way, boss.”

For all the time that Dorian spent at Bull and Adaar’s house, he had never seen their bedroom before, only in passing when the door was jarred open during the rare times Dorian was upstairs. For such a large room, it managed to be cozy. A rusty red brick fireplace stodd prominent along one wall with an armchair in front of it, lace curtains hung from the windows letting in the glow from the streetlight outside, and a large dresser with intricate Qunari carvings sat across from the bed with a wide mirror hanging over it. And there was the largest bed Dorian had ever seen in the middle of the room. The bed was designed specifically with Qunari in mind with a scratch resistant headboard, thin blankets for bodies that ran hot and firm pillows to help prop up heads with large horns.

Dorian dragged his eyes away from the bed and with a slow and easy smile, said, “Well, there goes my worry that your bed won’t fit all three of us.”

His fingers tangled into the hem of Adaar’s shirt and he started to pull it up, but Bull grasped at Dorian’s shoulders, turning Dorian away from Adaar as he insisted, “Let’s talk about this first and establish some ground rules before we jump in.”

Dorian gave Adaar a sideways glance and let out a long and frustrated sigh, “Is he always this chatty before sex?”

Adaar grinned understandingly. “Only the first time.”

“If it was just two of us, I’d jump right in,” Bull admitted, sitting on the edge of the bed and letting Dorian crawl up on him, “but with three people we need to set up some clear lines of communication right away.”

Balancing on his knees, Dorian straddled Bull’s lap and grabbed Bull’s thick biceps to steady himself. Catching Bull’s earlobe in between sharp teeth, Dorian murmured, “So when I say more, you do more of what you’re doing. If I don’t like something, then I’ll set you on fire. Sounds good?”

“Do you have a watchword?”

Dorian leaned away from Bull, resting on the heels of his feet to regard the man in front of him.
wasn’t unfamiliar with the concept in the slightest bit, but Dorian learned to be cautious when the
topic arose. It was usually a pitfall when someone asked Dorian about a watchword and a sign that
Dorian should leave.

Felix, Dorian’s confidant for many years before they ever became a couple, possessed a unique
understanding of Dorian’s limits and desires. There was little they did in bed together that Dorian
disliked and Felix immediately backed off if he sensed Dorian wasn’t enjoying himself. But Dorian
supposed that was a level of trust and understanding that he wasn’t going to find anytime soon, if
ever.

“I cannot say that I do.”

Adaar sat down next to Bull and his hand slid under Dorian’s shirt to stroke the small of his back.
“We say katoh if we’ve reached a limit and need things to end. It’s the Qunlat word for stop.”

“And stop in Common isn’t enough?” Dorian asked as he arched prettily into the touch.

“If you say stop, we’ll stop, ask what’s wrong, and see what we can do to make it better for you,”
Bull explained. “If you say katoh, we’ll stop with no questions asked unless you want to talk it
through. Besides, there might be a time when you’ll want to say no or stop in bed and we don’t
want to get our signals mixed.”

“So it’s going to be that kind of night?” Dorian was testing out the vibe he was getting from Bull,
wanting to make sure he wasn’t going to be caught off guard by the pair.

“Something for later,” Adaar reassured him, “but only if that’s what you want.”

“Well then, I guess I’ll have something to look forward to in the future. For now though, I suppose
it’s best to stick to the basics,” Dorian relaxed back into an easy and coy smile, rolling his hips
forward and leaning over to press his mouth against Bull’s. Thankfully, Bull didn’t pull away and
allowed Dorian to silence him.

Hands tugged at Dorian’s clothes, a protective layer that he was happy to get up to shed and wiggle
out of to allow his body to be readily admired. Down to his underwear with most of his form
exposed, Dorian preened as he stood before Adaar and the Iron Bull. Generations of breeding in
the Pavus family had paid off in Dorian’s flawless bronze skin, tall stature, and high cheekbones,
and he was well trained in how to hold himself, he knew the best angle to tilt his head, and how to
stand with perfect posture. He was not disappointed by Adaar’s sharp and audible intake of air and
Bull’s impressed whistle.

“Damn, big guy,” Bull breathed, his fingers immediately starting to trace the lacing lining of
Dorian’s underwear.

Adaar pressed his face into the curve of Dorian’s neck, inhaling the perfume dabbed upon his skin.
“Just stunning.”

I’ve never seen anyone more stunning than you, Dorian. My beautiful amatus.

“Now you are both dreadfully overdressed for the occasion,” Dorian said quickly, his heart
suddenly thumping rapidly in his chest. His eyes flickered down to Bull’s nug print sweatpants and
sniffed, “You had better take those off before I burn them off.”

“Such a critic,” Bull rolled his eye, but hooked his thumbs into the elastic waistband and pulled
them down, revealing that not only did he not bother to wear a shirt, but he forewent underwear as
well. Heat pooled in Dorian’s cheeks from seeing Bull already half hard and wondering how often
the Iron Bull decided to go without underwear.

Dorian was used to seeing the Iron Bull parade around without a shirt, but Adaar always carried a more civilized air about him in the way he dressed and held himself. So it was almost jarring to see Adaar naked and hard, it nearly knocked the breath from Dorian’s lungs.

For two bulking Qunari, Dorian found the pair to be strikingly different. Bull stood a few inches taller and was broader across the shoulders, horns, and chest, his skin was lighter with numerous old scars decorating it, and he possessed larger muscles and a soft belly. Adaar was by no means small, but he was leaner, his body well-toned and had little fat, and his darker grey skin was smooth and unblemished beyond the sweet smattering of faint freckles that ran the expanse of his shoulders, similar to the ones on his face. Dorian was also delighted, and even a little wary, that their cocks were well proportioned to their forms.

Dorian didn’t have long to stare before Adaar was dragging Dorian back to the bed. Straddling Adaar’s lap on the soft mattress, Dorian claimed the Qunari’s mouth and let out a terribly needy noise as his naked flesh finally came into contact with Adaar’s. Somewhere to the side of them, Bull fussed with a nightstand drawer and out of the corner of his eye, Dorian could see several condoms and a bottle lube being set out in easy reach.

Then Bull was behind of Dorian, sucking kisses into Dorian’s neck as his curious hands explored the planes of Dorian’s chest, tweaking his sensitive nipples, and lightly touching him through the silken and dampening fabric of his underwear. Dorian always felt dazed whenever they did this, when he was between them as they both touched and kissed him, bringing him close to the edge. Now it was a hundred times more intense, the slide of naked bodies, breathy moans hot in his ear, and the embolden touches searching to find his every weak spot.

“What do you want from us, Dorian?” Bull asked, slipping his hand under the silken briefs to palm Dorian’s ass.

Just barely managing to gather his thoughts and tearing his mouth away from Adaar’s, Dorian tried to articulate his desires, but everything was derailed as Bull’s thumb swiped over his hole. The only thing Dorian could voice was the strangled cry that involuntarily sprung out from him.

“You’re not playing fair,” Adaar chastised Bull, sounding both exasperated and amused. He nuzzled Dorian’s neck soothingly and murmured, “Just let us make you feel good, beautiful.” His fingers pushed down Dorian’s briefs and lightly stroked the underside of Dorian’s leaking erection.

“Can I touch you?”

“Please.” The word came out as a high pitch whine that might have embarrassed Dorian if he was in a less frenzied state of mind.

“You better give the man what he wants, kadan, he did ask nicely.” There was laughter in Bull’s voice as he reached over for the bottle of lube and handed it to Adaar.

Adaar’s clear green eyes were hooded and eager as he slicked up his large hand, then grasped Dorian’s hardness and his own, slicking them with the lube as he began to stroke both of them.

Behind of him, Bull tugged down Dorian’s underwear even further and pushed a lubed finger in, slowly teasing him open and leaving Dorian wanting more. It took a little time for Dorian to build up a comfortable rhythm of thrusting his ass backwards onto the fingers impaling him and arching forward into the hand pumping his erection, his legs straining with the effort. By the time Bull worked in a third finger and the tips were pressing on Dorian’s prostate, Dorian was lightheaded with the realization that Bull’s fingers were larger than many men he had bedded in the past. Only
Adaar’s tongue in his mouth prevented Dorian from laughing at the ridiculousness of it all.

Dorian knew that he wasn’t going to last long, he was well aware that too much time had passed since he last had someone else’s touch and someone inside of him, that it left his stamina wanting. But from the ragged draw of Adaar’s breath and as the steady strokes became hurried and needy, Dorian knew that he wasn’t the only one on the brink. As if sensing their desperation, Bull’s digits kept up with Adaar’s pace, thrusting quickly in and out of Dorian.

“Dorian, oh, Dorian, I’m going to …” Adaar sucked in a deep breath of air, squeezing them both right as Bull reached around to fondle Dorian’s balls, still trapped by his tangled silken briefs.

It was enough to bring Dorian tumbling over the edge. His whole being tensed and shuddered delightfully in release, and he tightened around Bull’s fingers as he spilled onto Adaar’s with a whimper. Dorian didn’t even notice Adaar’s own cry as he orgasmed after Dorian, he was only aware that they were slumped against each other, their skin sticking together with sweat and cum as they caught their breath.

Bull’s fingers slipped out of him and the other man was quick with a wad of tissues, using the soft paper tissue to wipe away the worst of the mess. Once Bull was done, Adaar reclined back on the bed and pulled Dorian down on top of him.

“Ready for another round?” Bull asked, sliding off the silky underwear and bending over Dorian, his erection pressing against the curve of Dorian’s ass.

Dorian let out a groan and muttered, “Kaffas.” But he spread his sore legs over Adaar’s and tilted his hips upward as Bull rolled a condom on and coated it in layer of lube. Under him, Adaar spread his own legs, giving the Iron Bull enough room to maneuver.

Despite his promiscuity in his youth, for over a decade Dorian’s body only knew Felix. He was long accustomed to the gentle stroke of Felix’s soft hands, the scrape of his slight stubble, and the familiar way Felix’s cock filled him. That decade did nothing to prepare Dorian for the Iron Bull. Bitting into Adaar’s shoulder, Dorian smothered the loud groan threatening to tear from him as Bull carefully sank into him, managing to stretch Dorian’s slacken hole even further than his thick fingers did.

Bull leaned forward, his chest covering Dorian’s back and his hands bracing on either side of Adaar’s head as he kneeled on the bed. Adaar’s lips kissed Dorian’s brow and his mumbled words of praise were lost to Dorian as his world narrowed down to the cock inside of him and the bodies wrapped around him. It felt as though every inch of his skin was covered and every nerve in Dorian seemed to be on fire and over sensitized, making him wither under Bull’s slow and deliberate thrusts. There was no way that Dorian would orgasm again so soon, but he burned with arousal as the embers were stoked.

“Kadan,” Adaar purred sleepily from under Dorian. Fingers started to comb through Dorian’s hair as Adaar’s head strained upward and soon the sound of kissing was close to Dorian’s ear.

For a brief moment, the absurd sense that he was intruding on an intimate moment filled Dorian, despite his current position. Pushing away that sensation, Dorian shut his eyes against the grey skin that took up his sight, dug his nails into Adaar’s arms and just concentrated on the leisurely slide of Bull’s hardness.

A shift in Bull’s hips changed his angle and he began hitting Dorian’s prostate head on, battering the sensitive nerves there. To make things even worse, or better, Adaar unexpectedly bent his knees up, causing Dorian’s legs to spread even further and forcing him open. Trapped under Bull’s
weight and enveloped in Adaar’s embrace, Dorian had no room to brace himself for leverage and all he could do was take it. Dorian nearly wailed out his pleasure at that thought, just managing to hold it back by biting deeper into Adaar’s shoulder. The taste of salt on his tongue and the scent of Adaar’s soap and musk in his nostrils helped to ground Dorian and kept him from shaking apart into pieces.

Despite his efforts, Dorian’s whimpers and moans became more audible as he began to feel overwhelmed and overdrawn. He was aroused, but had no outlet for the building fire in his belly as he clamped around Bull’s cock. The word that Bull and Adaar gave him floated up in Dorian’s mind and he thought about its strong and harsh syllables, but he couldn’t bring himself to say it. He didn’t want this to end, he wanted Bull inside of him and Adaar’s soothing touches, and Dorian was exactly where he wanted to be.

From underneath of him, Adaar’s hands stroked at his hair and face, his cock was miraculously half hard and pressing upon Dorian’s thigh. Adaar cooed something that escaped Dorian’s notice, before dragging out a hushed and heavy whisper, “Bull.”

“Yeah,” was all Bull said, his voice coming from somewhere close to Dorian’s head. Then his lips found the shell of Dorian’s ear, “I’m so close, sweetheart. You’re amazing and you look so beautiful with my kadan, so fucking beautiful, I could watch you wrapped around him for hours.”

Bull’s babbling became hurried as he picked up the pace and the movement of his hips started to become more frantic. Then large hands grasped at Dorian’s waist, squeezing him tightly as Bull finally stilled, his cock twitching inside of Dorian, pulsing into the condom, and a low, satisfied groan filled the room.

By the time Bull pulled out, Dorian barely felt conscious as his eyes could hardly stay open, his whole being was wrung out and his limbs were reduced to jelly. He was boneless as Adaar maneuvered him around on the bed and he hardly twitched as Bull’s fingers carefully massaged the ache out of Dorian’s legs and his mouth curled in a permanent, smug grin.

“Did we live up to your expectations, sweetheart?”

Dorian found the energy to smile. “I suppose you two will do.”

Dorian woke up in the darkness and was briefly startled by the strange shadows and shapes cast upon the walls, until the ache in his limbs and ass reminded him of where he was. That reminder did little to lure sleep back to him.

Despite being nestled between two large Qunari, Dorian was shivering under the thin blankets and sheets. Heat rolled off of both Adaar and Bull, but he didn’t dare to cuddle up to one of them, too afraid that he might wake them up. It also didn’t help that Adaar’s nearly continuous shifting in his sleep rustled the blankets and moved the pillow top mattress, and the unfamiliar sound of snores and deep breathing suffocated the silence Dorian had grown accustomed to.

This was what he wanted, Dorian reminded himself even as any hope of returning to sleep vanished.

Lying flat on his back, Dorian stared up at the ceiling, his eyes tracing the unknown patterns of the textured surface in the hazy light radiating through the lace curtained window. He then moved on to memorizing the shadows that lurked in the room, he gazed at the eerie dark reflection in the
large mirror on the opposite wall, and counted the seconds between Bull’s earth shattering snores. Finally Dorian closed his eyes again, tried to stop dwelling, and willed sleep to come, but his discomfort was too much to overcome.

Before the quiet of his bedroom was too much, it kept Dorian awake for hours as he struggled to sleep in the emptiness of his bed. Now, in a bed that was not his, Dorian couldn’t find sleep as that silence was shattered. He wondered how long it would take him to get used to it, if they would even keep him around long enough to ever get used to it.

The thought of leaving flitted through Dorian’s mind, of leaving a note in his wake to escape home or sneaking into the guestroom to try to claim a few more hours of sleep. But Dorian shortly discovered that he wasn’t the only one who was having trouble sleeping. The snoring that he was convinced was deafening him suddenly tapered off and soon calloused fingers reached out to stroke his cheek.

“Can’t sleep?” Bull asked, his voice hushed in the darkness.

Dorian rolled onto his side, his eyes had adjusted enough to the lack of light to be able to make out Bull’s face, his one open eye, and the edge of scarring from his missing eye that his eyepatch usually covered up.

“Sorry to wake you,” Dorian whispered. “I can go sleep in the guestroom or go home.”

“Why would you do that?” Bull snorted. “Come here, let me help you.”

Before Dorian could say anything, Bull reached out from under the covers and grabbed him. He hauled Dorian to his side and cushioned Dorian’s head against his broad shoulder with his hand resting on the sharp angle of Dorian’s hip. The instant heat of Bull’s body sank into Dorian, killing the goosebumps that had formed on his arms and brought much needed relief from the cold.

“No wonder you can’t sleep, you’re freezing.” Bull rubbed Dorian’s arms and held him closely to his deliciously hot skin. “So, what helps you get back to sleep? I can fuck you again, talk to you, count sheep, whatever you need.”

“I think sex is off the table at the moment, you and Adaar thoroughly wore me out this evening,” Dorian admitted, parts of him still felt rather sensitive. After a brief pause, Dorian added, “Felix used to tell me stories about his past and childhood whenever I was restless. They were usually so boring that they put me right to sleep.”

Bull’s torso vibrated with a small chuckle, shaking Dorian gently. “Probably because you heard all of them.”

“There is that.”

“I don’t know if I have any boring stories, but I can definitely try to indulge you, sweetheart. What do you want to hear about?”

“We won’t wake up Adaar?”

“We could fuck while lying on top of him and he wouldn’t wake up, or at least he hasn’t in the past.”

“You’ve already heard that one before and it’s certainly not boring.”

“I know,” Dorian laid his head back down on Bull’s shoulder and threw his arm over Bull’s chest, “but I like it.”

Bull hummed in agreement and started, “I was running a security company in Seheron with Krem when we were hired by the University of Orlais to protect a professor and her students on an expedition to find artifacts and other magical crap. The professor and most of her students were alright, typical academic sort, but then I met Karaas Adaar, a senior, who was the most beautiful and obnoxiously bossy Vashoth mage I ever encountered.”

The tale was one that Dorian knew, the sequence of Bull and Adaar’s whirlwind courtship in Seheron leading to a long distance relationship that ended up with Bull finally following Adaar to Orlais and pursuing his degree in education. The familiarity of the story meant that Dorian didn’t have to listen carefully as his mind was already providing the next twist in the tale before Bull got to it, and he could instead focus on the cadence of Bull’s voice, the way Bull’s words rumbled through his chest, and let his eyelids grow heavy.

Dorian finally fell back asleep after Bull finished telling how Adaar freaked out over seeing a giant spider and just before their first kiss.

When Dorian woke up in the soft light of the morning, he was being cuddled by a different Qunari. At some point, Bull managed to slip out from under Dorian to start his day without Dorian ever stirring from his slumber and then Dorian obviously migrated over to Adaar’s side of the bed. While Bull held Dorian in a loose, but secure, embrace through the last hours of the night, Dorian was being squeezed like a favorite stuffed toy by Adaar. Both of his long arms were wrapped snuggly around Dorian’s waist, pinning Dorian’s form on top of Adaar in a way that was not entirely comfortable.

With some effort, he peeled himself off of Adaar without waking the other man up, only earning himself a few annoyed snorts and mumbles from the Qunari. As he got up, Dorian cringed in disgust at the stale taste in his mouth, the sticky feel of skin dried sweat on his skin and the reek of sex clinging onto him. Eyeing the attached bathroom of the master suite, Dorian immediately decided to take liberties and went to freshen up.

The first thing that Dorian noticed as he stepped inside was that the bathroom, like the bed, was specifically designed for Qunari. There was a separate shower stall enclosed in glass that was wider than normal and the showerhead was up higher than Dorian could almost reach. And Dorian thought that he might be able to do laps in the bathtub, it was wide, deep and long enough to accommodate Bull, tempting Dorian to fill it up with hot water and submerge his aching body into it.

Sitting on the long, double sink counter was a set of fluffy pink towels neatly folded and thoughtfully waiting for him, along with a toothbrush still in its packaging and his overnight bag. That was more than enough invitation for Dorian to take a shower. The stream of hot water refreshed him and washed away the lingering traces of sleep, the last bits of makeup still on his face, and cleared the fog of contentment from his head.

Stepping out of the shower with a cloud of steam following him, Dorian caught his reflection in the mirror. The heat from the water brightened the marks on his bronze skin, vibrant patterns where teeth worried sensitive spots and hands dug in to grip Dorian securely. Touching a handprint on his waist, Dorian shivered happily as he remembered how Bull had grabbed him as he finished inside of Dorian.
Once he was dried off, Dorian opened his bag and saw only his change of clothes, toothbrush and his glasses, realizing that he left behind his comb, hair gel, and makeup. Letting out a soft sigh, Dorian dressed and fiddled with his hair to the best of his abilities.

Looking back at his reflection, Dorian wrinkled his nose at how ruffled he looked. His wet hair was beginning to curl and wave, he thought that his glasses appeared overly large on his face, and he was sure that he looked rather plain in the long sleeved shirt and jeans he packed, especially after how gorgeous he was the night before. A small huff of breath pushed through his lips, acknowledging that there wasn’t much that he could do about it at that moment.

As he reentered the bedroom, Adaar was just sitting up in bed, blinking owlishly at Dorian and wiping away the tiny bits of crust around his eyes. Despite his size and toned muscles, Adaar looked adorable as he sat in bed with the blankets pooled around his hips and his sleepy, fond gaze fixed upon Dorian. He also looked as debauched as Dorian felt with the evidence of their activities still imprinted on his grey skin and the deep and bruised bite mark on his wide shoulder stood out particularly.

Dorian froze as nervousness began to fill him. The self-assured attitude that he built in the evening dropped away at his feet as he found himself at the part where he had little experience. Only Felix had ever wanted Dorian to stay in his bed and in his life. Instantly Dorian’s brain told him that Adaar and Bull were different, that they were like Felix, warm and genuine, but old and almost forgotten hurts reminded Dorian of how it used to be.

But Adaar’s smile was kind and wanting, holding his arms out as if he expected Dorian to crawl back into bed with him. And this, as Dorian soon found out, was exactly what he wanted.

“Come lie down with me for a while, beautiful. Bull will call us when breakfast is ready.”

Without hesitation, Dorian crossed the room and climbed into bed, delving under the covers and settling at Adaar’s side, wondering if he had been hasty to put on his clothes and if Adaar was interested in another round of sex. He received his answer quickly as Adaar’s arms draped around him, pulling him close and resting slightly chapped lips against his brow. Burrowing into Adaar’s embrace, Dorian let his icy doubts melt away and relaxed against Adaar’s comfortable bulk.

Fingers ran happily through Dorian’s damp locks as Adaar seemed to deflate with a contented sigh and his voice was a warm mumble tickling Dorian’s scalp.

“I’ve wanted this since the moment I saw you.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for how long it took to get this chapter out! And it’s not my best work. But the next one will hopefully come out sooner and better!
Parents

Chapter Summary

Adaar eagerly wants Dorian to meet his parents. Dorian is considerably less eager.

“Maker’s breath, Dorian, what did you order?”

Dorian blinked, unsure of what Adaar was talking about as they got out of his car, coming back home from the movie theater while Bull spent the Saturday afternoon at a teachers workshop. Then Dorian caught sight of the large box sitting on the doorstep of his townhouse with a dusting of snow on the top. Climbing up the steps, Dorian knew right away who sent the box and the Tevinter return address on the label confirmed it.

“It’s from Livia, Felix’s mother. She likes to send me boxes for the holidays,” Dorian explained as he opened up the front door.

For a moment, with his holiday box from Livia in front of him and a light snow falling around them, Dorian couldn’t believe that Satinalia was closing in. The knowledge that the holiday was rapidly approaching forced Dorian think about the length of his relationship with Adaar and the Iron Bull. It almost made Dorian dizzy to realize that he had already spent two months of discrete dates and secreted nights between the sheets with the two Qunari.

“Does she send you the entire dinner?” Adaar was nearly incredulous as Dorian pulled out the various packaged food items and decorations that Livia sent.

“I wouldn’t be surprised if she did, she takes the holidays very seriously.”

Adaar placed the box down on the little breakfast table and watched as Dorian grabbed a pair of scissors to slice through the tape. Opening up the cardboard box, the smell of Tevinter spices hit them both, permeating from the layers of tissue paper and bubble wrap. The scent was always accompanied by a large wave of nostalgia that never failed to stir up the homesickness within Dorian that was usually just a faint whisper.

“Did she pack a grocery store in there?” Adaar was nearly incredulous as Dorian pulled out the various packaged food items and decorations that Livia sent.

“Not this time, but if you want some extra Satinalia decorations, you’re welcome to them.” Dorian held up a delicate blown glass pumpkin the size of a baseball from the box and placed it Adaar’s hands.

“I can keep this?”

“Please do.”

“But your mother-in-law gave this to you,” Adaar objected, even as he stared at the brightly colored glasswork with wonder.

“Felix and I have given Lavellan and Cullen a whole pumpkin patch worth of these things. One
must not be sentimental when Livia starts giving out holiday decorations or else you could open a shop with what she sends.”

“Then I’ll give it a good home.” Adaar placed the glass pumpkin gently down on the table and continued to watch with wide eyes as Dorian unpacked tins of cookies and sweets, a bottle of port, packages of tea, cocoa, and coffee, spices, dried goods, and various Satinalia and harvest themed decorations.

Near the bottom of the box, Dorian found a thick envelope and opened it to find a tasteful Satinalia card made of heavy paper along with a stack of old photographs, long developed from a reel of film.

My Dear Dorian,

I hope this card and box find you well. Life goes on over here as ever, Gereon is publishing another book next month and I have several engagements to speak about my own research in the coming months, I hope to be coming your way soon.

I tried to pack all of the foods you like so you don’t miss home too keenly, I do miss having you here for the holidays, and I hope that these decorations will make your home a little more festive for Satinalia.

The maid, Ami, found these photographs as we were cleaning out some closets in the house and we thought you might like to have them. Maker’s breath, I feel so old looking at them, but what happy times those were!

Miss you and love you! Give my love to Ellana, Cullen, Sera, and Dagna!

Your Loving Mother,

Livia

Seeing her flowing script tugged on Dorian’s heart and the nostalgia he felt from the food was nothing to what he felt from just thinking about Livia and Gereon. Holidays at the Alexius estate were events filled with warmth, laughter, and family. Livia would go overboard with the decorations and she always tried to help the cook with making a feast, with varying results. After a holiday dinner, Gereon always summoned everyone into the library to read aloud Tevinter classics or to the home theater to watch holiday movies. And Felix was filled with childlike excitement, whether they were receiving gifts for Wintersend or dancing during Summerday. It was like nothing Dorian had ever experienced before he became Gereon’s apprentice.

Adaar eagerly took out the stack of photographs from the envelope while Dorian was lost in his memories and Adaar immediately burst into helpless laughter at the first picture he saw. “Is that you, Dorian?! You look like a baby without your mustache! Andraste help me, look at your hair!”

A real laugh escaped from Dorian at the sight of the photo in question. The photo was slightly out of focus and the flash was so bright it nearly obscured their faces, but the picture was undeniably of him and Felix as teenagers. They were sitting at the long formal dining table at the Alexius estate during the first Satinalia Dorian spent with the family. His youthful face was clean shaven, his hair was in longish, wavy locks, and he was beaming next to a young and painfully awkward Felix, who shyly wrapped his arm around Dorian’s shoulders.

“How old were you two?”

“I was sixteen, Felix was seventeen. This was taken just a few months after Gereon took me in as
his apprentice and I moved into his home. Felix and I got along almost instantly.”

“It was love at first sight.”

“I wouldn’t say that, lust perhaps. I’ve always had a thing for smart men.” Dorian affectionately shoved his shoulder into Adaar’s arm.

Adaar ducked his head to kiss Dorian’s hair. “You two were adorable.”

The whole stack of photographs was from that first Satinalia dinner in the homey comfort of the Alexius estate. The wide spread of food on the table, the servants taking their fill with the grace of their generous employers, Gereon laughing at the head of the table, Livia at his side and looking both elegant and motherly, and picture after picture of Felix and Dorian.

Even after only knowing each other for a few months at that point, the photos clearly showed Dorian and Felix’s fondness for each other. Felix and Dorian grinned widely at each other in every snapshot, leaned into each other’s space, and there was hardly a photograph where they were not touching one another. A hand on the arm, sitting shoulder to shoulder, roughhousing at the table, and there was one where it looked like they were just sitting side by side, but Dorian remembered the way his knee knocked against Felix’s.

“You and Felix look rather cozy in all of these pictures. It’s a wonder that it took the two of you so long to get together,” Adaar’s mouth twitched up into a tender smile.

“Gereon said the same thing after we told him and Livia,” Dorian murmured under his breath, his eyes fixed on Felix’s teenage face, a boy too mature and smart for his seventeen years and too kind by far. It was no wonder Dorian fell so hard and fast.

“Why aren’t you on speaking terms with Felix’s father?”

Dorian snapped his head up, startled by the unexpectedness of the question and Adaar visibly colored, his grey cheeks turning pink. Despite their physical intimacy and all the time they spent together, Dorian was keenly aware of the invisible barrier that prevented them from asking deeper questions. He never asked Bull about how he became Tal-Vashoth or asked Adaar about the woman he and Bull had a relationship with in Orlais. In turn, Adaar and Bull didn’t ask about Dorian’s parents and up until that very moment, about Gereon.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have—”

“He blames me,” Dorian cut in swiftly, the statement still tearing at him to say it out loud years after Felix’s death. His lungs constricted, almost cutting off his air as he recalled the rift between him and Gereon, a man he once compared all others to.

Adaar’s face fell in devastation. “Oh, Dorian,” a whisper of sorrow escaped from him.

“I didn’t convince Felix to go back to Tevinter to receive experimental treatments. You see, Felix might have lived another year, maybe even two, time that Gereon hoped that they could work on a cure or another treatment for the Blight. But the experimental treatments are difficult and they don’t improve the quality of one’s life.”

Warm hands cupped Dorian’s face and Adaar’s thumb gently swiped under the lens of Dorian’s glasses, wiping away at the moisture gathering there. “You didn’t want him to suffer,” Adaar easily came to the conclusion.

Dorian automatically leaned into the touch, the tightness wound up in his chest loosening. “Felix
didn’t want to go through with them, though he told me that he would if I asked him to, but I saw what the Blight was doing to him and how much pain he was in. I couldn’t ask him to do it, not when he was at peace with the inevitable. Livia was disappointed, but she understood, and Gereon has never forgiven me since.”

Adaar’s embrace was solid and comforting and Dorian sank right into it. “Thank you for telling me.”

The softness of Adaar’s smart cashmere sweater was warm on Dorian’s cheek and the tang of citrus from his cologne helped to ease the stiffness in Dorian’s body. Dorian closed his eyes and just let Adaar hold him close as he wrapped his arms around Adaar’s waist.

“Well now,” Dorian finally took a step away from Adaar and his bones were chilled instantly, “it won’t do for us to stand around all weepy. Bull will be coming over with dinner soon and I certainly don’t want to add tears to my curry.”

“Let’s go upstairs and lay down in bed, I’m not done cuddling with you.”

Dorian knew that if Bull made that suggestion, he could expect to be ravished, but Adaar was perfectly serious about cuddling. It took Dorian a few times to understand that when Adaar said cuddle, that was exactly what he meant. Not that Dorian was complaining, as much as he loved sex, he enjoyed being held almost as much.

Up in Dorian’s bedroom, they stripped off their clothes and got under the covers. Even though they didn’t often spend time in Dorian’s bed, as it was far too small for all three of them, there was a firm Qunari style pillow for Adaar’s comfort. Their naked bodies fit well together with Dorian tucked against Adaar’s side, his chin resting on Adaar’s shoulder, and wrapped securely in his muscular arm.

The agony from old and half healed wounds faded in Adaar’s embrace and gentle stroke of his hands on Dorian’s body, easily fending off memories that would have otherwise driven Dorian to the liquor cabinet.

“What are you doing for Satinalia?” Adaar asked suddenly with forced casualness, his eyes fixed up at the ceiling.

“Hm?” Dorian hummed sleepily and stretched his limbs with a loud yawn. Just the heat rolling off of Adaar was enough to keep Dorian warm and made his eyelids heavy. “Oh, I will fend off Lavellan and Cullen’s offer go with them to visit the Rutherford clan, you only make that mistake once, and go get drunk at the party that Sera and Dagna have every year,” Dorian replied. “You and Bull would be more than welcome to join me at Sera and Dagna’s house.”

“I can imagine that a party at Sera’s would be memorable, but Bull and I usually do a dinner at our house with our friends and my parents.” Adaar paused, swallowing audibly. Licking his lips, Adaar added, “I was actually hoping that you’d come over and meet my parents.”

The sleepiness that had draped so comfortably over Dorian was instantly shaken off and he found himself wide awake. He opened his mouth to reply, but nothing came out and his jaw closed with a sharp click.

“You don’t have to,” Adaar rushed through the sentence and revealing just how desperately he wanted the meeting. “I know it’s soon, right? I don’t want to rush anything, but my parents are flying in from the Free Marches and they’d love to meet you. But it’s not a big deal. I mean, if you don’t want to. If you’re not ready.”
Adaar tried to backtrack, to reassure Dorian that none of it was big deal, but Dorian was still stuck on that Adaar wanted to introduce him to his parents. It was a shift away from the fun they were having, the dates and fantastic sex, which were kept quiet from everyone in Dorian’s life except for Sera, and Dagna by default. Meeting Adaar’s parents implied something more serious.

In truth, Dorian wanted commitment, he wanted to let his heart run wild with abandon and to let himself become lost in the warmth and intimacy that Adaar and Bull offered. But that was a much more dangerous game to play and Dorian was all too aware of the consequences at the end. He knew that walking away later might be harder.

He also couldn’t imagine how Adaar would even introduce Dorian, as his and Bull’s new boyfriend, as a friend, or as a new acquaintance. It left Dorian wondering where he stood with the pair. He knew that he would be hurt to hear Adaar call him just a friend, even though Dorian was the one who insisted upon secrecy. His tongue sat heavily in his dry mouth and it refused to form the words to ask.

“Bull told me to let him ask you, he knew I’d make it awkward. Maker, I’m really messing it up today.” Adaar rubbed at his face pitifully and his entire expression was apologetic as he took Dorian’s hand, lacing their fingers together. He let out a little sigh and his face softened with a sheepish smile as he clarified, “I just wanted to say that I’d be happy for you to meet my parents next week, but I completely understand if you’re not ready for that.”

“It’s, uh,” a nervous chuckle bubbled up in Dorian. “It’s different. I guess I can honestly say that I’ve never really had to meet parents before. It was all very different before.” Swallowing, he forced a small smile, “I’ll think about it.”

The pure hope in Adaar’s bright green eyes was like a punch in the gut.

“I can’t convince you to come with me to see Cullen’s family, can I? I’ll buy you any bottle of wine you want, within reason, and I promise you won’t have to share it with anyone.”

“Lavellan, there are not enough bottles of wine in Thedas to persuade me to come with you,” Dorian declared over his plate filled with a cheesy omelet and potatoes as he and Lavellan indulged in an early Satinalia breakfast at their favorite cafe in Dorian’s neighborhood.

“They’re not that bad, Dorian.”

“The Rutherfords are a lovely family, who try to shove as much food down your throat as possible and play Fereldan football in the snow. I think I still have bruises from Cullen’s younger brother tackling me.”

Lavellan huffed defensively, her fork hovering over her eggs benedict. “That was over five years ago and Felix threw a barrier over you to protect your delicate ass, well, at least he tried to.” She stabbed at her eggs and creamy yellow yolk spilled out over fried ham and toasted Fereldan style muffins. “You’re going over to Sera and Dagna’s tonight, right?”

“It is tradition, yes.” Or at least it became tradition over the last few years.

“Maybe you should see what Adaar and Bull are doing. I think I heard them mentioning a party when we were over at Hawke’s house for Wicked Grace.”

Dorian was stunned by the suggestion, though he carefully hid that surprise from his face as Lavellan’s large brown eyes fell to her breakfast.
“It might be better to start new traditions,” Lavellan said, her voice deceptively neutral, “with people who don’t constantly remind you of what you’ve lost.”

Something squeezed at Dorian’s heart, tight and painful, and a sudden fear shot through him over Lavellan’s tone. He was paralyzed at the thought that she might know about his arrangement with Adaar, and Bull.

“Maker’s breath, Lavellan, what are you going on about?”

Her face steeled up and her next words were firm, though not angry. “I know how much you miss him during the holidays, no one loved celebrating them more than Felix, and I know that all you do at Sera’s is drink to forget. She’s terrible at telling you no.”

A full flush bloomed across Dorian’s face, but he couldn’t deny her accusation.

“Maybe you should try doing something different this year. It’s not a bad thing to make new memories.”

“This is my third Satinalia without him since he died. I had spent almost every holiday with him since I was sixteen,” Dorian indulged in a moment of pity and grief, letting it bleed a little.

“Remember our first Satinalia together? When we were still in grad school and Felix set the marshmallows and sweet potatoes on fire because he was convinced he could toast them with magic? Mythal have mercy, I have never seen a mage so bad at magic.” Her grin was infectious and Dorian was soon smiling at the memory of burnt sugar, panic, and a distraught Cullen.

“I think Cullen actually cried because we had no more marshmallows.”

“I distinctly remember him weeping in a corner.” Lavellan’s slender hand reached across the table and her hand touched Dorian’s, her smile turning both sad and hopeful. “Just … Think about what I said, spending time at Adaar and Bull’s might do you some good. At least don’t drink as much if you go to Sera’s.”

“You ask so much of me,” Dorian replied lightly.

But Lavellan’s words stuck to him, they dug in and made him reconsidering Adaar’s offer from the previous week. The thought of meeting Adaar’s parents was daunting, it spoke of deeper attachments that Dorian wasn’t sure he was ready to confront, but there was a truth of Lavellan’s concerns. Dorian no longer celebrated holidays, he endured them and drank to speed up the day, as if alcohol was key element to time travel as opposed to Gereon’s masterful theories.

He still went over to Sera and Dagna’s house that afternoon, driving through the light and fluttering snow. In the passenger seat sat a tin of cookies from Livia, a treat that he thought Bull might enjoy if he made it over to their house. Dorian brought the tin because he thought it might persuade him to actually go if he had a present prepared, but his mind continuously flip flopped on the subject.

Dorian parked in the driveway of Sera’s home, long before any other guests would arrive, and sent an unpromising text to Adaar while sitting in the car.

I’ll try to make it for dessert.

I hope you can come! Bull makes the best pumpkin pie! Adaar replied almost right away.

He could easily picture Adaar’s face with his green eyes filled with optimism, and ready to burst at the seams with anticipation as he was all week, obviously waiting for Dorian to make a
commitment to meet his parents. But both Adaar and Bull remained silent on the matter, not wanting to put pressure on Dorian and at the same time managing to amplify the guilt churning in Dorian’s stomach.

Sighing at Adaar’s text, Dorian shoved his phone into his pocket and walked up to the house, the ice and snow crunching unsatisfyingly under his shoes.

“What? What’s wrong?” Sera demanded right away as she swung open the front door before Dorian could even ring the doorbell. “You’re mopey, more than you usually are on Satinalia. Did your boyfriends break your tool or something?”

“Happy Satinalia to you too, Sera.”

Dorian shuddered at the way she said the word tool and shrugged off his coat, hanging it up in the coat closet. His dower mood was unexpectedly broken at the sight of Sera’s new collection of gold halla statuettes stuffed haphazardly into the closet. He could only imagine where she obtained those.

The house was small and cluttered, filled with odds and ends, though it was thankfully tidied for the party. Bookshelves were crammed packed with books on magic and old artifacts that Dagna collected, along an odd assortment of knickknacks that Sera amassed. Shiny pebbles and jewels lined shelves, alongside painted boxes, antique toys, bits of silk, and a jeweled goblet that Dorian had no idea where Sera could have stolen it from. And in the living room over the fireplace and proudly encased in a gold frame was the portrait of Dagna that Felix drew which made her look like a nug, though Dagna insisted she looked more like a snoufleur.

“Adaar wants me to meet his parents tonight,” Dorian answered as he wandered towards the kitchen, knowing that Dagna would be there.

“Wait. What? The guys banging you on the side want you to meet the in-laws?” Sera cocked her head to the side, then wrinkled her nose, “Hope they’re not asking to meet your family.”

“That’s great!” Dagna chimed cheerfully, looking up from a pot of gravy as they stepped into the kitchen, her round face ruddy from the heat radiating from the stove. “It is, isn’t it? Meeting the parents means they’re serious about you.”

“Knew all three of you couldn’t keep your squishy emotions out of it,” Sera huffed, sitting up on the laminate counter and swinging her legs, letting the heels of her feet bang obnoxiously against the wooden cupboards. “Thought this was just a bit of fun, yeah?”

“It seems to be more than that now,” Dorian sighed, slumping against the refrigerator.

“You’re angling to get hurt,” Sera frowned, her sudden disapproval evident and her casualness about the affair evaporated at once. “It’s all good and fine if you all wanna bang and have fun, but fucking with your feelings is different.”

A defensive feeling rose up in Dorian, fueled by a firm knowledge that Adaar and Bull were not out to hurt him. “I think they’re sincere about trying to make this into something more,” Dorian shot back, though his argument sounded weak even to his own ears.

“Yeah and how long does that work out with all three of you before it all gives?” Sera’s heels hit the cupboards in emphasis. Each loud thump was like a strike in the chest.

Sera’s statement sliced through Dorian like a hot knife through butter and the instant regret that twisted on Sera’s face told Dorian that he hadn’t been able to conceal his emotions. It hurt because
he knew she was right.

“Aw, shite, Dorian—”

“It’s fine.”

“I don’t mean—”

“It’s fine.”

“I think you’re right, Dorian, they’ve got to be serious about making into something more,” Dagna asserted hurriedly, trying to smooth out the edges of Sera’s harsh, but truthful, remark.

Dorian let the comments pass over him, knowing full well that his anxieties were all of his own making. He should have asked Adaar immediately about how he viewed Dorian’s presence to his parents, but too afraid of the answers, Dorian ignored the questions buzzing in his brain. He ignored his own hesitation over getting in too deep.

“Let me help with dinner, Dagna,” Dorian offered and was relieved that Dagna assigned him the job of chopping vegetables, giving Dorian the ability to lose himself in the steady and monotonous task.

Sensing that Dorian was done with the subject, Dagna cheerfully filled the silence by talking about her latest research project at work as they finished the final touches on dinner while Sera sulked in another room. Sera slunk back into the kitchen an hour later to help bring out the food when Dagna called for her. Her eyes suspiciously bright and red, but she relaxed as Dorian kissed her forehead in forgiveness despite the lingering doubts in his heart and then tried to give her a wedgie, causing her to burst into giggles as she smacked him away.

The spread of roasted meats, braised vegetables, savory and sweet potatoes, baked goods, and loads of carbs, was placed in the dining room as a buffet for the throng of people gathering in Sera and Dagna’s house. It was easy to get lost in the flow of it, being swept away in the gentle stream of acquaintances, friends, and good food. The idle chatter and a glass of wine kept Dorian’s mind occupied, kept his brain from straying to what was and what could be.

Almost as soon as Dorian finished his wine, Sera pressed a large glass of something offensively blue and sharp smelling into his hand. The strength of the alcohol burned Dorian’s nostrils and the first sip of it was cloyingly sweet. The second gulp was a little better. By the time he was contemplating just Downing the rest of the vile concoction, his phone chimed with a new text message and he placed the stupidly blue drink on the fireplace mantel to dig out his phone from his pocket.

The text was a picture presented without commentary of Cullen in the snow, fiercely clutching a brown leather Fereldan football under his arm, his face reddened by cold and laughter as his younger brother and sister were piled on top of him in a tackle.

A small smile crept up on Dorian’s face and a small weight was lifted from his heart by his amusement of Cullen being crushed against the cold powder. Tucking the phone back into his pocket, Dorian went to grab some dinner and left behind his drink on the mantel.

Finding an empty chair to eat his meal, Dorian balanced his plate on his knees and started picking at his dinner. Within a minute, Dagna sat down next to Dorian with a big pile of sweet potatoes with toasted marshmallows and thick slice of pecan pie on her paper plate and little else.

“Thanks for helping me make dinner,” she said around a mouthful of sugared pecans.
“It was the least I could do, I know how unhelpful Sera is in the kitchen,” Dorian snorted.

“She’s the best taste tester in the world,” Dagna said proudly. “So, are you going to go meet Adaar’s parents tonight?”

Dorian looked down at his paper plate and lazily ran his fork through his mashed potatoes and gravy. “I’m not sure.”

“I think you should go,” Dagna gave her opinion quite clearly, though she was good enough to keep her voice down. “Meeting Adaar’s parents is a big step, but it’s a good one, right? It means things are moving in the right direction.”

“Sera is right though, I am setting myself to get hurt if I let this go any further,” Dorian lamented.

“But that’s just being in a relationship,” Dagna shrugged her small shoulders. “You’re always putting yourself at risk to be hurt, but then you get lucky and it works out. Like me and Sera or you and Felix. I bet you didn’t think you’d marry Felix when you two first got together, you were probably afraid of being hurt, like anyone would.”

In those early days, he had been absolutely terrified that Felix would realize he’d made a mistake and would leave Dorian. Felix never did, not of his own volition at least. “Fair point.”

“So, what’s stopping you now?”

A long silence hung off the end of the question as Dorian scrambled for an excuse, something to justify his insecurities and to cleanse his guilt over his hesitation. But all he could think about was Adaar with his woefully hopeful eyes. “I suppose meeting Adaar’s parents would not be the end of the world.”

“Great!” Dagna brightened. “Hey, are you going to eat those sweet potatoes?”

He held his plate out to Dagna and let her poach his potatoes. Leaving his dinner only half eaten, Dorian gave Dagna a hug and made his way to gather his coat and to leave before the small spark of courage ignited by Dagna faded. But Sera was not ready to let him leave before she had the last word. She stood in front of the door and willfully blocked the exit with her slender frame, and Dorian knew that there was no moving her.

“Sorry I was an ass, I just don’t wanna see you hurt now that you all mucked it up with feelings. Forgive me?”

“Of course,” Dorian answered swiftly and with complete sincerity. “Maker, what would I do without you?”

“Let’s never find out,” she slugged his arm hard enough to nearly hurt. “I hope your new in-laws don’t suck like your last ones.”

“Only half of my former in-laws suck,” Dorian’s voice shook just the slightest bit.

Sera threw her thin arms around Dorian, her nose sniffling loudly in his ear. “They’re going to love you because you’re a big, sappy, fop.”

Finally escaping to the car, Dorian shivered against the freezing leather seat and cursed in Tevene as he cranked up the heater. Despite the early hour of the sun setting, Skyhold was lit up with the light spilling from cozy homes and streetlights reflecting upon the layer of snow on the ground and back up to the thick layer of clouds hovering over the city. It was striking to see the quiet hush of
the landscape uniformly covered in snow, though Dorian loathed to admit something so cold could be so beautiful.

The drive was shorter than Dorian anticipated and he found himself arriving at his destination sooner than he was ready for. Parking along the street, Dorian sat in the vehicle, his knuckles nearly white from his grip on the steering wheel and his nails left little crescent moon shaped imprints upon the faux leather.

Just across the street was Bull and Adaar’s house, light pouring out of the windows and porchlight, illuminating the cheery holiday decorations and making the cottage look more inviting than usual. Dorian could easily picture in the inside, the savory smell of roasted meats and the sweetness of pies filling the rooms, their friends and family enjoying each other’s company, and a toasty fire crackling happily in the fireplace.

It was such a simple thing. All Dorian had to do was get out of the car and cross the street, he was sure Adaar was waiting eagerly to welcome him inside. Adaar, who wanted to introduce Dorian to his parents, to make their relationship even more complicated, and to further Dorian’s entanglement in their lives.

Dorian had to remind himself that that was a good thing.

The shrill ring of his phone startled Dorian, causing him to jump in his seat. Withdrawing his phone, an unfamiliar number greeted him with an area code that Dorian readily recognized as being from Tevinter. A Qarine area code.

Jerking at the sight of the number, Dorian immediately flung the phone away from him. It hit the passenger side door with a smack and bounced down onto the car seat next to the tin of cookies, clanging loudly against each other in his ears. The phone finally went silent and Dorian slumped back in the driver’s seat, taking off his glasses so he could press the heels of his hands to his burning eyes.

Outrage and panic flared up in his chest, hot and tight with anger building as he silently questioned why anyone from Qarine would want to call him. He flinched as the chime for the voicemail sliced through his eardrums and his irritation only increased at his pitiful reaction.

Any courage and confidence that Dorian managed to build from Dagna’s pep talk was instantly shattered. Just the simple ring of the phone, not even speaking to anyone or listening to the voicemail, was able to devastate him. Felix had a hard enough time maneuvering Dorian’s family life, how he could expect Adaar and Bull to even attempt it?

Just another bag to add to his collection of baggage, Dorian acknowledged with shame tearing at his frayed edges. If it wasn’t one thing, it was another. Dorian would bring it in with him once he entered the house, forced to make small talk and forced to lie that he was only Adaar and Bull’s friend. It was all too much.

It was all more than Dorian thought he could handle; the sudden phone call, meeting Adaar’s parents, the widening gap between him and the Alexius family, and going through another holiday without his husband.

“I can’t do this, amatus.”

It took several minutes for Dorian to compose himself, to still the tremble in his fingers and clear the burning tears from his eyes. Once he was steady enough, Dorian buckled his seatbelt and grasped the key still in the ignition to turn it.
“He’s waiting. Glancing out the window, Tama calls his name in the noise, but he can’t see past the darkness as anticipation twists up in the nerves. Bull’s hand, heavy on his shoulder, anchoring him to keep him from floating away. ‘A watched pot doesn’t boil, kadan.’ ‘But maybe he’s outside, and then he’ll see me waiting and feel welcomed.’”

Dorian’s hand fell away from the key and his eyes glanced up at the rearview mirror. A wide brimmed hat took up most of the reflection. “It’s a little more complicated than that, Cole.”

“He wants you to go because he knows it’ll make you happy. He knows it’ll make Adaar and the Iron Bull happy too.”

For several seconds, Dorian forgot to breathe.

“Can I have a cookie?” Cole asked brightly, his pale blue eyes fixed on the silver tin on the passenger seat. Wordlessly, Dorian passed the container to Cole.

Squeezing his eyes shut, Dorian took a deep, calming breath and opened his eyes again. There was nothing in the rearview mirror when he looked up, but the tin of cookies sat in the backseat along with a sprinkling of crumbs.

Yanking the key from the ignition, unbuckling the seatbelt, and snatching up his phone, Dorian put his glasses back on and got out of the car, grabbing the tin of cookies from the backseat. He walked hurriedly across the street, forcing all other thoughts from his mind and knocked briskly on the front door. He barely finished knocking when the door swung open from under his knuckles and on the other side was Adaar, beaming so happily that the lingering jitters from Dorian’s meltdown were swept away.

“You’re just in time for dessert,” Adaar announced, wrapping his arms around Dorian before even letting him inside. “I’m so happy you came,” his voice was a grateful whisper. His embrace was as strong and warm as it always was, reassuring Dorian that he belonged right there in Adaar’s arms.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world,” though the wobble in Dorian’s words belied his nervousness.

“You should probably let him inside, kadan, before Dorian freezes.” Bull’s head appeared from over Adaar’s shoulder, relief and happiness relaxing his features.

Adaar swiftly stepped aside. “Oh! Sorry! Come in.” Once Dorian was inside, Adaar remembered his manners and took Dorian’s coat and the offering of cookies.

Inside the house was just as Dorian imagined it with the din of friends and family catching up with one another, holding bottles of beer and glasses of wine, and standing next to the popping fire, waiting for pie and cake to be served. Dorian recognized many of the guests gathered in the living room as Adaar and Bull’s main group of friends, but the pair of elderly Qunari standing in the kitchen caught Dorian’s eye and drew his attention.

The Qunari gentleman was of stocky build, standing several inches shorter than his female companion with a smiling face. His head was covered with soft fuzzy hair and his horns hooked backwards, but their original length was unknown as they appeared to be long broken off with bronze caps securing the jagged edges. The lady was tall and lean, with a bald head and sweeping horns that curled backwards much like Adaar’s. Her skin was a dark grey, making her vibrant green eyes stand out strikingly in her face and it highlighted the pale, faded needlepoint scars surrounding her smiling mouth.

Dorian knew that the Qun had come a long way from its barbaric treatment of mages, but he had
also heard that archaic techniques were still used to punish dissenters. He had hoped, rather than believed, that what he learned was just trite propaganda.

Those less than pleasant thoughts were dashed from Dorian’s head as Adaar stood proudly with his the elderly couple, exuding eagerness to make his introductions. “Dorian, these are my parents. My dad, Tallis, and my tama, Kos.”

Adaar then turned to his parents, speaking to them in rapid fire Qunlat, leaving Dorian with no idea how Adaar introduced him with the only word that Dorian recognized was his own name. A small bubble of borderline hysteria rose up in Dorian, unknowing of how one of his great concerns played out. But Bull’s hand on the nape of his neck, with fingers rubbing along his hairline, helped to soothe the sharp spike of anxiety and distracted him from the tension tightening his body.

“Tama and Dad don’t speak Common very well, it’s hard for native Qunlat speakers to learn Common later in life,” Bull explained softly, standing closer to him than Dorian thought appropriate for the company. “I’ll help translate.”

“Call me Tama,” Adaar’s mother insisted, the words falling clumsily out of her scarred mouth. “Dad,” Tallis insisted, thumping his chest with a grin.

“It is a pleasure to meet you both.” Dorian held out his hand, but he was quickly enveloped in Kos’s arms and smashed against her strong body as cheerful Qunlat tumbled out of her that Dorian could not hope to understand. Once she released him, Tallis embraced Dorian with just as much enthusiasm and his own excited words were lost to Dorian.

“They’re very happy to meet you,” Bull filled in.

“Doren pretty,” Kos announced, butchering Dorian’s name and kissed his cheek.

“Oh, uh, thank you,” Dorian stumbled over the compliment, but couldn’t help his flush of pleasure at her instant approval.

She then took his hand and tugged him along to the living room, making Dorian sit down next to her on the empty end of the long couch and Tallis sat on the over the side of him. Adaar sat close by, his face equal parts anxious and excited, and virtually ignored the other occupants of the room.

Even though Dorian couldn’t understand a word she said, Kos seemed content to talk to him. Her Qunlat was a rocky torrent of hard syllables, but her tone was quiet, considerate, and warm. Dorian could listen to her all day. She didn’t let go of his hand until Bull came by with plates of thick wedges of pumpkin pie with a hearty dollop of whipped cream on top and cups of coffee.

“Tama says she’s so happy to finally meet you and that you were able to come,” Adaar translated was quickly as he could, his words competing with Kos’s gentle voice and Tallis’s soft grunts of agreement. “She knows that you’re busy and have other friends in town, so she and Dad are honored that you came. She thinks you work at the nicest university in Fereldan.” Adaar blinked. “Hey, Tama! What about my university?!”

As they ate dessert and sipped on coffee, Kos commented on the lovely shade of silver of Dorian’s eyes, asked what his favorite foods were, wanted to know what movies and books he liked, what his strengths in magic were, what he did for his undergraduate and graduate studies, and inquired about his work. She seemed conscious not to ask about Dorian’s family or too much about his past that might be painful, making Dorian wonder how much Adaar told his parents. Tallis nodded along merrily, listening eagerly as Adaar translated Dorian’s answers for them.
Dorian had never seen Adaar looked so pleased before and Bull, tending to their guests, always seemed to be glancing over at them. His lips curled into a knowing smile and approval was evident in his single blue eye. Even Krem seemed to be in on whatever unknown test that Dorian was apparently passing, his lips pursed into an unvoiced laugh.

The whole exercise left Dorian confused and a bit dazed, but he had to admit that he enjoyed the Adaar family. Kos’s curiosity and friendliness warmed Dorian’s opinion of her, reminding him wistfully of Livia in her comforting motherly touches and elegant demeanor. And he was amused by the way Tallis allowed her chatter to wash over him, content to listen and easily diverted with deep, hearty chuckles at only half entertaining anecdotes.

The only hiccup was when Tallis frowned disappointingly at his coffee as it cooled to a less than appetizing temperature. Without thinking, Dorian’s fingertips made contact with the ceramic mug and channeled heat back into the liquid. Both Tallis and Kos nearly jerked as steam rose from the mug, and Bull, who had taken over translating duties for a few minutes, noticeably stiffened.

Dread instantly overcame Dorian at their expressions and weighed down his heart as he bitterly reminded himself that while he was in the company of a mage, that Qunari culture viewed magic in a very different light. But then Tallis recovered, speaking in excited Qunlat and Kos’s scarred mouth soon spread out into a smile, adding soft and thoughtful words. Bull grinned warily at Dorian and translated, “Dad likes your trick, he wants to know if you can make him an iced coffee and Tama admires your control.”

The rest of the evening passed in a comfortable fashion as the guests trickled out of the house until it was only Krem and his friendly girlfriend, Lace Harding, who came over to say their goodbyes to Dorian, Kos and Tallis. Adaar and Bull had since disappeared into the kitchen, packing up leftover food to force upon their guests.

“I’m taking those cookies home with me,” Krem informed Dorian after he and Lace received fierce hugs from Kos and Tallis.

Dorian stood from the couch, his legs nearly aching from sitting for so long. “I have three more tins back at home and a five pound package of Tevinter cocoa. The real stuff, not the kind they sell here.”

“Well, I guess that makes you my new best friend,” Krem held out his hand to Dorian, an approving grin breaking out on his handsome face.

“I’ll have you two over sometime soon,” Dorian offered as his hand was firmly squeezed in Krem’s strong grip, “it’ll be nice to share my holiday haul with someone who has a proper palette.”

“That would be lovely!” Lace beamed.

“I’m holding you to that, Altus.” He let go of Dorian’s hand and a little smirk lit up his features. “They really like you.”

That made Dorian pause. “Oh, you mean Kos and Tallis,” he glanced at the pair of Qunari sitting on the couch, seemingly content to be pleased about everything.

“I mean all of them.”

He didn’t get to ask what that meant as Adaar came back into the living room carrying bags filled with containers and a whole pie to give to Krem and Lace. Soon even Krem and Lace were departing, the last guests exiting the house and the holiday wound down to an end. It reminded
Dorian that he was a guest as well and he was suddenly aware of his presumption to linger for so long into the night.

“Doren stay?” Tallis asked unexpectedly before Dorian could say his own goodbyes.

“Too late, Doren stay with Kaaras and Ashkaari,” Kos said resolutely, using Bull’s Qunari name, and Tallis nodded solemnly in agreement. She spoke quickly to Adaar in Qunlat, her voice carried an air of finality that Dorian was sure was conveyed in her words.

“What’s going on?” Dorian asked once Kos finished speaking.

“Tama thinks it’s too late for you to be driving home and that you should stay the night,” Adaar explained.

“I’m ok to drive, it’s only eleven and it’s been hours since I had any alcohol.”

Bull slung his arm around Dorian, preventing him from leaving and drawing him close to Bull’s side. “Can’t argue with Tama, sweetheart, she’s a wise woman.”

“I make big breakfast,” Tama told Dorian, cupping his face in her massive hands and kissing his forehead. “Doren too small.”

Dorian reeled back at the surprising criticism. “I may be small compared to a hulking Qunari, but take my word, madam, that I am perfectly proportion,” he protested automatically, taking real offense at the suggestion that he was physically anything less than perfect.

Kos actually rolled her eyes when Adaar translated. “Doren too small, I make better,” she promised, pinching at the distinct and purposeful lack of fat around Dorian’s middle and cut off any objections on the tip of Dorian’s tongue by quickly bidding goodnight to everyone. She and Tallis went up the stairs, talking quietly to each other in their native language, their eyes sliding towards Dorian until they were out of sight.

“Well, I’m also ready for bed,” Adaar admitted.

“I’m beat,” Bull agreed.

Dorian wondered if he should retire to one of the guestrooms, but Bull’s hand on the back of his neck steered Dorian to the master bedroom. Adaar slipped into the bathroom to take a shower while Dorian and Bull got ready for bed. Knowing that Adaar’s parents were under the same roof, Dorian couldn’t bring himself to strip naked to sleep, unlike Bull, who had little reservations about his own nudity. Down to his briefs, Dorian stole a worn, faded blue shirt with the words The Chargers - Ultimate Frisbee Champions from one of Adaar’s dresser drawers and found Bull leerling at him from the bed as he slipped it over his head.

“I know you’re putting that on to be modest, but now all I can think about is fucking you while you’re wearing Adaar’s clothes.” Bull shameless palmed at his groin, his smile hungry and wanting. “Can you put on one of his nice shirts for me? Or maybe just one of his ties?”

“Keep your hands to yourself for one night,” Dorian groused, though he silently admitted that the idea had merit. Climbing into his spot in the middle of the mattress, Dorian found his own things were waiting for him there, a much softer pillow and a thicker blanket to help keep him extra warm in the chilly room.

“You make it hard, sweetheart,” Bull’s fingers traced over where the wide neck of the shirt exposed Dorian’s collarbone and his lips soon followed. “You make it very hard,” he bit down into
Dorian’s skin.

“Kaffas! You’re insufferable!” Dorian gasped as he withered under Bull’s mouth and didn’t protest when Bull hauled him up onto his lap. He hummed contentedly as Bull’s hands wandered, slipping under the shirt and stroking bare skin. Nuzzling Bull’s throat, Dorian asked in a self-conscious murmur, “Is it ok that I’m staying here with you two? It’s not going to cause a problem?”

Bull’s hands stilled and squeezed Dorian’s waist reassuringly. His smile gentled as Dorian peeked up at him through his lashes and saw that Bull’s expression was softened by understanding, as he answered, “Tama and Dad understand who you are to us.”
Fears

Chapter Summary

Dorian learns about fear and also finds out that Kos is worse than Sera.

Familiar hands stroking over the expanse of his bare skin roused Dorian from his slumber, though he refused to open his eyes and just smiled teasingly into his pillow as he rolled onto his side, away from the touch. But the action did little to deter the wandering hands that Dorian knew so well and in turn, they knew every intimate spot on Dorian’s body. Fingertips walked over the sharp lines of Dorian’s hip, pinched lightly at his nipples, and traced the bow of his sleep dried lips.

Then a warm body pressed alongside Dorian, spooning him, enveloping him into an embrace that Dorian never wanted to leave. A well-toned arm encircled his waist, pulling him backwards into the solid torso behind him as sharp teeth nipped along the delicate shell of his ear and hips rolled forward to grind a hard and warm cock against his ass.

“I know you’re awake, amatus,” a voice murmured sleepily behind of him.

Dorian automatically rolled onto his other side, his arm draping over wide shoulders and lips immediately meeting a soft mouth that felt like home. He rutted his hips, chasing a bit of friction against his aching erection as he began to vocalize his pleasure through soft, throaty moans.

“Make love to me, amatus,” Dorian urged breathlessly, his eyes squeezed shut as hands grasped his ass, pressing Dorian even closer.

But the man holding Dorian did feel the way he expected. The man ran hotter, was larger, and his skin was rougher. Dorian’s heart seized with sudden clarity, choking him with unbridled grief at remembering what was. But his grief dissipated into confusion with the knowledge that he wasn’t alone.

As Dorian opened his eyes, his vision was consumed with grey.

Opening his eyes and jolted awake by the vividness of his dream, Dorian’s face flushed in both embarrassment and arousal from grinding his hardness on Adaar’s hip as the Qunari slept through the early morning. To his horror, Dorian found his erection was hard and leaking, sticky fluid was causing the silky fabric of his boxers to adhere to his cock. He was thankful though that the fabric absorbed most of the mess and only a smear of dampness was visible on Adaar.

Heart thumping heavily in his chest and light sweat cooling his skin, Dorian stilled his hips and took long, silent breaths to calm down without waking up Adaar. Holding as motionless as he could, Dorian listened to the quiet of the room, noting the lack of Bull’s rumbling snores and deep breathing, and was relieved that Bull wasn’t there to see him in such a state.

“What’d you stop?” Adaar mumbled groggily, his eyelids fluttering open and squinting at the slowly brightness of the sunlight streaming into the room. He then lazily rolled over, lounging on his side and half hooded sleepy eyes fixed on Dorian as a fond smile spread on his face.

Adaar’s large hand slipped under Dorian’s underwear and his thumb gently swiped at the curl of
hair between Dorian’s legs. “Can I ...?” his words slurred in only partial wakefulness, but another stroke of his thumb made his meaning plainly known.

“Yes,” Dorian said without hesitation as his voice cracked from disuse.

He wiggled out of his boxers and scooted closer to Adaar, letting his eyes flutter shut as Adaar reached for the bottle of lube in the nightstand drawer and soon slicked fingers wrapped around Dorian’s cock in a firm grip. Burying his face into Adaar’s chest, Dorian took in the scent and feel of the man next to him, trying to shake off the last vestiges of his dream. The hand stroking him was vastly different from the one lingering in Dorian’s memories as was the long, heavy erection rubbing along his thigh. But Dorian couldn’t stop thinking about dark eyes set in a pale, handsome face, the softness of closely shorn black hair, and a gentle Tevinter accented voice.

Felix.

Dorian sank his teeth into Adaar’s thick skin to stop the wrong name from tumbling out from his lips and to stifle his greedy noises as he quickly spilled over Adaar’s fingers to the sound of warm nothings being whispered in his ear.

As Dorian took a moment to come down from the peak of his orgasm, his heart finally calming down, Adaar grasped his own erection, pumping it with his lube covered hand. It was a sight that Dorian greatly appreciated, Adaar with his mouth slightly open with his eyes tightly shut as his flush of pleasure crept down from his cheeks to his chest. The way Adaar touched himself was almost mesmerizing, the steady and even movements, and the way his thumb brushed at the head, teasing the slit with each stroke. As much as Dorian enjoyed the show, he was not one to be idle, so he spread his legs, batted Adaar’s hand way and eased Adaar’s slickened hardness between his thighs.

“Oh!” Adaar half gasped, thrusting his hips gently into the warm space between Dorian’s legs. “Oh, that’s so good, Dorian,” Adaar purred. After a several thrusts, Adaar groaned softly and Dorian could feel Adaar’s cock twitching between his thighs with warm cum sticking to the hair and skin of his legs.

Nuzzling Dorian’s hair, Adaar sighed happily. “That was a pleasant way to wake up. Were you having a good dream, beautiful?”

A watery laugh shook loose from Dorian. Good wasn’t usually how he described such dreams, normally because he woke up hard, needy, and alone.

Dorian stretched his neck up to kiss Adaar, the Qunari tasting slightly sour from sleep, but he was comforting under Dorian’s mouth. “It had a nice ending,” he answered honestly.

“Good.”

Adaar got out of bed and chilled air replaced where his hot body was snuggled with Dorian, causing Dorian to pout and hiss at the cold.

“I’ll be right back,” Adaar promised, crossing the room briskly to the bathroom and returned with a lukewarm damp cloth that he touched to Dorian’s skin to clean up the worst of the mess. The moment Adaar pulled the cloth away and Dorian was relative clean, Dorian grabbed the blankets and cocooned himself in them.

“Want to take a shower with me?” Adaar asked, his fingers hooking into the blankets, preparing to pull them back.
Dorian held onto the covers tightly and was well aware of the fact that somewhere in the house was Adaar’s parents. “You know that we’re noisy during shower sex.”

“Who said we’re going to have sex?”

Dorian raised an eyebrow.

“Good point,” Adaar chuckled lightly. “The last thing I want is my parents overhearing anything. Tal-Vashoth parents are way too nosy.”

“Then we’ll do good to keep up the veil of mystery.”

After Adaar disappeared into the bathroom, Dorian grabbed his phone from the nightstand and started fiddling with it. There were a few holiday well wishes from friends on his social media accounts and snapshots of holiday dinners and smiling people, enough to hold Dorian’s attention for a few brief seconds as he scrolled through, enjoying a couple moments alone. Finished with the barrage of holiday photographs and messages, he moved onto his email, not expecting anything since the university was closed for several days due to the holiday, except maybe a note from Livia or Maevaris. So Dorian was surprised to find a real email waiting for him and not from anyone he was expecting.

It was an email from Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast.

It shouldn’t have been such a shock to see an email from her. Dorian did his due diligence as she always harped on him about and forwarded to her the unfamiliar Tevinter number and unheard voicemail he received a few days prior on Satinalia evening. Even though it was the weekend, a holiday weekend at that, Cassandra was never far from her work.

His finger hovered over the email, but Dorian was unable to tap on it. If Cassandra found something suspicious, if she revealed that the contents of the voicemail was a spew of abuse or relayed news of his mother or father on their deathbed, Dorian wasn’t sure if he could keep himself together.

“Are you ok, Dorian? Are you feeling unwell?”

Adaar stepped out of the bathroom naked, his skin looking slightly damp and flush from the shower with only a frown spoiling the otherwise delicious picture he presented. He crossed the room quickly, sitting on the edge of the bed and pressed the back of his hand to Dorian’s forehead.

“Just the start of a headache,” Dorian fibbed as he calmly put his phone away and was glad that Adaar gave him a good excuse for whatever expression that was stuck on his face.

“Do you want me to get you something?”

“I’ll be fine,” Dorian tried to reassure Adaar, though the Qunari looked unconvinced. “But I should probably go—”

“You can rest here,” Adaar interrupted swiftly. He paused and colored at his presumption, “If you want to. I just wanted to say that you don’t need to leave. You can stay and rest here, I’ll even stop Tama from coming upstairs to fuss over you.”

A protest formed on Dorian’s tongue, but Adaar interrupted him again.

“I know you like your space, but I’m happy that you’ve spent most of the break with us and my parents, and I just like having you here with us,” Adaar added earnestly. “I want you to feel
comfortable here.”

The objections that Dorian had withered away at the open and sincere look that Adaar gave him and the warm touch of Adaar’s hands on his face. Turning his head, Dorian brushed his lips to Adaar’s rough palm.

“It is entirely too difficult to deny you,” Dorian murmured, looking up at Adaar through thick eyelashes.

Leaning over to press a soft kiss on Dorian’s lips, Adaar grinned. “I’m glad to hear it. I’ll leave you alone and let you rest, just call if you need anything.”

Adaar got dressed and left the room, leaving Dorian lying in bed and listening to the shuffling below him. He could hear the low rumble of Bull’s voice, the higher pitch of Kos’s Qunlat, and a hearty laugh from Tallis. It was never quiet in the house, especially with Kos and Tallis there. Despite being so used to the silence of his own home, Dorian was quite accustomed to it.

It was unsettling how attuned he became to Adaar and Bull, the simple sound of their breathing, the feel of their touch on his skin, and the sight of them going about their daily business. There was a sense of reassurance just by their presence that ingrained itself into Dorian quickly, surprising considering how prickly he could be. The only person whoever integrated himself so fast into Dorian’s life was Felix.

Wrapped up in layers of blankets and surrounded by the lingering scent of both his lovers, Dorian closed his eyes and tried to summon the courage to open the email from Cassandra. He reminded himself firmly that it was just an email, that no great evil or harm could come to him from whatever brisk sentences Cassandra wrote.

He tapped on the message and held his breath as it opened on the cellphone’s screen.

Dorian,

I hope you had a good Satinalia. The Satinalia party at Josephine’s house was pleasant, thank you for asking. And no, Thom did not have food in his beard. For most of the night.

I have received the number and voicemail you forwarded to me and it was just a call from your mother from a new number wishing you well on the holiday, as you suspected. I am glad that you have heeded my instructions and notified me of the call immediately. I’m sure nothing will come of this, but as I always tell you, it is important to document these events.

Cassandra

Rubbing at his face, Dorian let out a long sigh as he blinked down at the email. Relief flooded him as he reread Cassandra’s short note and was hollowly satisfied to have his initial suspicions about the call confirmed, allowing him to let the brief outreach on the part of his mother to roll off his back. Wishing him a happy Satinalia was the least of her crimes, no matter how unwelcome it was.

“Do you think Mother truly wanted to say happy Satinalia to me, amatus? Or did she hope to remind me of my ungratefulness?”

Burrowing deeper into the soft pillow under his head, Dorian twisted the silverite ring on his left hand and laughed softly at himself.

“Silly of me to sequester myself and to get so worked up over a simple email, wasn’t it, amatus? I shouldn’t have made Adaar worry over me.” A sense of release and comfort came over Dorian just
from being able to speak to his husband aloud. “Cassandra would have contacted me directly had there been anything of note, but you understand how I can get with my parents. And it is best not to subject Adaar and Bull to the whole sordid affair, especially with Kos and Tallis around.” He paused and added quietly, “I think you would like Adaar’s parents, they’re nice, though perhaps overly so.”

Dorian clutched tightly at the layers surrounding him.

“I’m sorry that I haven’t had a chance to really talk to you lately, Bull and Adaar have been keeping me rather busy and I’ve spent more nights here in a row than I normally do. I’ve only been home to pick up the mail and to grab some clothes, not much time for chitchat. Though I suppose it doesn’t really truly matter,” Dorian sighed heavily, but he remembered Cole, the young man’s gaze peaking out from under the wide brim of his hat as he rambled off nonsense that was as sharp as a dagger. “Sometimes the things that Cole says … Are you listening, amatus?”

The only response Dorian received was the sudden boom of laughter from Tallis and the Iron Bull in the kitchen below him.

“Right. Silly of me.”

After several days of being constantly surrounded by exceedingly welcoming Qunari, Dorian took advantage of some time alone, which consisted mostly of quietly packing away his emotions and baggage, dozing, and puttering on his phone. It was a couple more hours before Dorian finally got out of bed and got ready for the day. Showered, carefully primped, and dressed, Dorian still thought that he looked too tired for having lazed in bed for so long. Dark circles sat under his eyes and his mouth was set in a pinched line that he couldn’t seem to smooth over.

“I look like less than charming company, don’t I, amatus?” Dorian fretted over his appearance in the bathroom mirror. “But I cannot hide up here forever nor would it be good form for me to sneak out.”

Slipping out really wasn’t an option as Dorian discovered when he descended down the stairs. Adaar may have prevented Kos from going upstairs to fuss over Dorian, but she obviously kept her ear out for him as she instantly appeared at the bottom of the stairs. Once Dorian was within reach, Kos cupped his face and pressed her cheek to his forehead, humming in approval and muttering under her breath.

“No fever,” she declared and a soft sigh of relief puffed from her lips. “Doren feel ok?”

“I feel quite well, thank you.”

“Tama make Doren good breakfast and Doren go rest with Kaaras, Ashkaari, and Tallis. Tallis and imekari sleeping.”

Dorian’s brow creased. “What do you mean that they’re sleeping?”

Kos pointed towards the living room.

Taking a peek into the room, Dorian saw the TV on with flickering images of Fereldan football and an enthusiastic announcer blared from the speakers to a sleeping audience. Tallis was sound asleep in the armchair that was reclined all the way back with the footrest up and a knitted blanket over his knees. Over at the couch was Adaar, stretched out with his eyes closed, a pile of student papers on his chest and a red pen on the floor next to his dangling hand. And Bull sat snoring away with Adaar’s feet on his lap, along with a slew of spelling tests and an overabundance of pumpkin
Dorian snorted as nostalgia rose up in him, tugging on his heart sweetly. He turned his back at the sleeping Qunari with ill-concealed exasperation and finding Kos lifting an eyebrow at him as she smiled fondly at her family.

“Felix always fell asleep while grading too,” Dorian explained suddenly as he sat down at the breakfast table in the kitchen. “He would lie on the couch like Kaaras, get through two assignments, and then would be snoring away, though not as loudly as Ashkaari,” Dorian’s tongue tripped over the Qunlat names. “I would wake him up and Felix would always insist that he never fell asleep and that I needed to stop bothering him because he was very busy grading.”

Kos sat down with him, giving Dorian a thoughtful look, though Dorian had no idea how much she understood. More than she probably let on, Dorian suspected.

“Felik was Doren’s kadan?” Kos asked slowly.

“Yes,” he nodded, “my late husband.”

“Felik teacher?”

“He was a professor, like Kaaras, but in mathematics.”

“Ah! Doren’s kadan smart,” Kos lit up.

“Yes, he was very smart. I seem to have a type,” Dorian laughed at himself, not caring for a moment whether or not Kos understood him.

Understanding or not, Kos nodded along and then asked, “Felik good? Good to Doren?”

His throat tightened. “He was the very best man I have ever known and no one has treated me better.” Swallowing, Dorian hastily added, “Though Kaaras and Ashkaari come very close.”

But Kos frowned, small creases formed between her gently arched eyebrows. “Kaaras and Ashkaari not give Doren enough,” she tapped the table with her open hand.

Dorian blinked. “Pardon?”

“Quiet in bedroom, no,” Kos tapped the table again with her hand. Dorian furrowed his brow at the gesture, not comprehending Kos until she added, “Not making Doren feel good in bedroom. Not good.”

Blood rushed to Dorian’s face instantly and embarrassment filled every nook and cranny of Dorian’s being. Not once in his life had he ever spoken to a parental figure about something so intimate in such an open way. On more than one occasion Dorian hurled vulgarities about his sleeping around at his stone faced parents, but his parents always referred to his sexuality and sex life indirectly as his deviance and never expressed a real concern for his happiness.

“No worry,” Kos squeezed Dorian’s hand, “I tell Kaaras and Ashkaari. Doren be happy.”

“No! No,” Dorian said quickly, real panic leaching into his plea. “I get quite enough from the two of them, I promise. I am very happy, Tama, you do not need to speak to them about anything.”

“No worry,” Kos repeated, smiling with a touch of condescension as she patted Dorian’s cheek. “Tama make better.”
“That is completely unnecessary, Tama, truly.”

“No understand Common, Doren,” Kos said far too cheerfully to him for the first time during their acquaintance.

“I am quite certain you do, more than you tell your son at least,” he accused with very little heat.

But Kos just got up and started putting around the kitchen, pretending to not understand him.

“Maker’s breath, she is worse than Sera,” Dorian groaned to himself, burying his face into his hands.

He remained hunched over at the table for long, agonizing minutes as Kos hummed over the clang of pans and the opening and closing of cabinet doors. Dorian couldn’t seem to lift his head up, still burning with an embarrassment that was worse than when Gereon nearly walked in on him and Felix during an intimate moment. His only saving grace was that while he suspected Kos understood Common fairly well, her verbal command of the language was limited and it stilted her speech, making her reach for a simple expression, rather than allowing her to express her complex thoughts and concerns.

Kos softly touched Dorian’s shoulder, finally forcing him to uncover his face. She placed a mug of cocoa and a large plate of leftover blueberry pancakes, sausages, a pile of hash browns, and sliced fruit in front of him and sat back down at the table.

There was no way Dorian was going to be able to eat the heap of food in front of him, but he merely said, “Thank you, Tama.”

The richness of the cocoa hit Dorian instantly as he took a sip, coating his mouth with the satisfying sweetness of the chocolate, though the drink was a touch cooler than Dorian would have preferred. With careful concentration, Dorian gently heated his cocoa, being mindful not the scald the milk. Kos watched with her face carefully neutral as she lightly laid her hand on Dorian’s arm.

“Doren use magic, good with magic,” Kos said, her Common coming out strained and choppy around her thick accent.

“Yes, I like using my magic and I am very good at it,” Dorian agreed.

Kos nodded firmly and held out her free hand, her palm up and fingers curved upward. A small arch of white lightning, vibrant and hot, leapt between her fingers and a sad smile tugged on her scarred lips, stretching the faded remainders of the needle that had pierced her flesh. “I like magic. Pretty.”

“It can be very beautiful and it’s a great gift,” Dorian asserted.

“Yes. Doren learn good, is good with magic,” Kos repeated. “But Qun is … ah … Qun is caution, is fear,” she struggled with her words as the arch of lightning disappeared. “Qun treat magic not like past, but magic not open, saarebas not use magic, only for army and controlled. Much fear for magic in Qun. But I like magic, before I use magic like Doren.”

Sharp anxiety spiked in Dorian’s chest and it spread through his nerves, threatening to consume him. Dorian knew right away where Kos’s story was going.

“Arvaarad find out and take me, say it’s wrong, hurt me, give me fear.” Kos motioned to her mouth, her old needlepoint scars seemed more visible than ever in the backdrop of dark grey skin.
Dorian took Kos’s hand, making her scarred mouth curl up into a smile. Her crinkled palm and fingers were calloused in his grip and spoke of a long life of hard work, quite the opposite of the unnaturally soft hands that Livia and his mother possessed. Dorian knew that he had no words to comfort Kos and nothing that he could utter could ease the memories of the monsters of her past. But he could hold her hand, as she often held his.

“What they did was barbaric, unforgivable,” Dorian said, unable to stay silent on the topic and his statement rang true but was meaningless.

“Yes,” Kos agreed kindly. “Tallis look for me, he help me run from Arvaarad. We run, go to Free Marches, become Tal-Vashoth, but fear never leave. Then Kaaras born, become saarebas and I teach caution. I fear for imekari, I, uh, I can’t, not let, not to Kaaras—” Kos stumbled hard on her words, the thoughts and feelings she had were trapped up in Qunlat and unreachable by Dorian. Instead, she motioned to her mouth again and said, “This not happen to Kaaras. I make sure.”

Dorian found that his eyes were beginning to smart, even as Kos’s gaze remained steady.


Dorian did not. He didn’t fully understand why she told him all of that. Dorian knew that the Qunari still oppressed their mages, though not to the horrific extents that they used to, at least not on a regular basis. He understood that Adaar and Bull came from vastly different cultures than him, but neither expressed disdain for Dorian as a mage, especially since Adaar was a mage as well. And Dorian wasn’t sure as to the moral of Kos’s story and the message she was trying to convey to him that he did not already know.

Still, Dorian nodded.

The graveness on Kos’s face slid away and was replaced with a relieved smile. She patted Dorian’s hand and said something to him in Qunlat that he had no hope of following. Then she added, “Doren-kadan good imekari. Now, eat breakfast, Tama care for Doren-kadan.”

Dorian couldn’t deny that warmth that filled him just from being called a good child by Kos and he did not miss the endearment she called him. It was the same cursed feeling that would overcome him when Livia or Gereon would praise him, or long ago, when his parents were free with their compliments towards him. There was a touch of bitterness in that warmth though, an acknowledgement at his own neediness.

He took the approval where he could get it though and it dislodged any concerns that Kos’s story caused. But those concerns and clarity over her meaning would come to him a couple weeks later.

Dorian met Adaar and Bull at their house for dinner the first night after Kos and Tallis left for the Free Marches. While he enjoyed the warm and openhearted company of Kos and Tallis, Dorian was eager to spend time alone with Bull and Adaar away from prying eyes. There was even a little extra spring in his step as Dorian made his way up onto the front porch and he even felt generous enough to use the hideous dragon door knocker.

“Hey, sweetheart,” Bull smiled easily as he answered the door, his hand grasping Dorian’s hip and leaned down to kiss him in the open and well-lit doorway.
“Hey,” Dorian couldn’t stop the smile spreading on his face after Bull pulled away and let him inside. “It smells great in here. What did you make?”

Bull helped Dorian out of his coat and took the small overnight bag he carried. “It’s Adaar’s night to cook.”

“Ah, so which takeout place are we eating from tonight? It smells like Rivaini.”

“Dinner’s from the Rivaini place near Skyhold University.”

Stepping into the kitchen, Dorian was greeted by the sight of Adaar plating spicy Rivaini noodles, crab cakes, and crispy vegetable rolls from paper containers still sitting in the plastic bag. Adaar raised his head from his work and was self-conscious enough to look sheepish.

“I have no judgements,” Dorian told him with a kiss to the cheek.

“I’m glad. Now, will you get the drinks for me? There’s beer in the refrigerator.”

They went through the unassuming motions of domesticity of getting ready to share a meal. Drinks were grabbed, placemats were placed on the table, plates laden with dinner brought out to the table along with the extra food and both Adaar and Dorian had to call Bull away from the TV to join them. It was simple, but a comforting routine.

“Did your parents have a comfortable trip back home?” Dorian asked Adaar as they dug into dinner.

Adaar shrugged, his shoulder brushing Dorian’s and his smile did not inspire much confidence. “As comfortable as a Qunari can be on an airplane made for humans and elves. But they called me this afternoon to let me know that they made it home without incident. Tama and Dad said that they were really happy to meet you.”

A tide of contentment rose in Dorian, though he was careful to keep the bulk of his pleasure off of his face. “I’m not surprised as I am a delight to get to know and I admit I enjoyed meeting them as well. Will they be back in town for First Day or Wintersend?”

Adaar beamed at Dorian’s response, “Wintersend. Tama is already asking about how long they can stay. She’s also told me she’s expecting me to feed you more so that you to have some fat on your body when she returns.”

“Tell your mother that she is a menace and that to change me is to ruin perfection,” Dorian answered swiftly and with a little more feeling than he intended.

Adaar didn’t seem to notice, but Dorian saw the way Bull eyed him carefully at his words. Rather than say anything about it, Bull teased good naturedly, “Tama’s just worried about your health because you’re so delicate.”

“Perhaps compared to an enormous, seven foot Qunari,” Dorian retorted.

“And she’s concerned we’re not banging you enough.”

A groan of horror came from Dorian at the realization that Kos followed through with her promise to talk to Adaar and Bull about their sex life. His hands rose up automatically to hide his blushing face. Adaar slapped his hands over his own ears, his face burning hotter than Dorian’s.

“I thought we agreed never to bring that up ever again. I don’t care how open real Qunari are about
sex, I don’t want to hear it from my parents,” Adaar moaned in equal horror.

“There’s nothing to be ashamed of, kadan, other than our apparent lack of performance,” Bull’s grin widened and Adaar sunk down in his seat.

“I hate you so much right now.”

“Well, I have completely lost my appetite.” Dorian pushed away his plate and straightened up his posture as if to leave. “I’m going home. Adaar, would you like to join me?”

“Please.”

“Hey, whoa, let’s not get crazy here,” Bull replied quickly, though the twitch of his lips acknowledged that he knew Dorian and Adaar weren’t going anywhere. “Besides, it’s the first time we’ve had the house to ourselves since Satinalia. It’s been awhile since we’ve been able to be loud and I really want to see how loud you can get, sweetheart.”

That was enticement enough for Dorian and he grinned back, “Well, I do hate to disappoint.”

They finished dinner and for once left the dishes piled in the sink in favor of retiring upstairs early. It was only a couple of weeks since they could be together in that way, other than quick and silent hand jobs in the late hours of the night or in the early light of the morning. But Dorian had missed the intimacy and craved it in a way he hadn’t felt in years. He just wanted to be touched and to reaffirm his place in his lovers’ lives.

Dorian wanted to be fucked senseless, he didn’t want to be able to think and doubt anymore.

Their clothes left pools of cloth on the floor of the bedroom and Dorian allowed himself to be tugged towards the bed by Bull. Sitting up on the mattress, Bull pulled Dorian onto his lap and Adaar ended up in the familiar position of being sandwiched between both Bull and Adaar. They had been intimate for less than two months, but Dorian quickly grew to love being in bed with the two Qunari and felt gluttonous for their attention. He was perfectly contented while straddling Bull’s lap on the bed, their cocks sliding together and with Adaar kneeling behind of him, his erection rubbing along Dorian’s ass.

Twisting around, Dorian grabbed one of Adaar’s gently curling horns and kissed him fiercely. “I want you to fuck me until I forget my name,” he murmured in a low, hungry voice and enjoyed the way the pupils of Adaar’s green eyes dilated immediately at his statement.

There was a small stutter in Adaar’s breath before he replied, “It’d be cruel to deny you.” Then Adaar stretched his arm beyond Dorian, cupping Bull’s face and scratched gently at his stubble.

“Warm him up for me, kadan? I want him desperate for it.”

“I think he’s already halfway there, kadan,” Bull chuckled. He nipped at Dorian’s ear, “Fuck, can’t wait to watch you bouncing on Adaar’s cock, it’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever seen. But first I’m going to take you apart for him, open you up until you’re begging for his cock in you.”

“I’m beginning to think that you’re all talk,” Dorian sassed, but did not go unaffected by Bull’s words.

Bull’s lips swiftly latched onto Dorian’s mouth, dominating the kiss as he always did with his tongue and teeth. Nearly losing balance as Bull seized his ass to pull him closer, Dorian grasped Bull’s wide shoulders and let his fingers run over old scars and lines of Bull’s body once he steadied himself. He enjoyed the varying textures and heat of Bull’s skin, and Dorian’s heart always sped up a bit at the sheer strength under his hands.
Curling his fingers, Dorian dug his nails into Bull’s skin and earned a pleased hiss from Bull.

“A little harder, sweetheart,” Bull encouraged against his mouth. “Drag your nails down my chest. Yeah, like that, a little to the left.”

Adaar’s laugh tickled the back Dorian’s neck. “So bossy.”

Dorian could only hum in agreement and did as Bull commanded. He knew the spots that Bull liked to be touched, digging his fingers in and testing how rough Bull might like it. Encouraged by Bull’s pleased growls and grunts, Dorian pressed his palm on Bull’s chest and let a careful tickle of electricity to dance over his skin, remembering distantly in the back of his mind how it drove Felix wild.

It had the opposite effect on the Iron Bull.

“Katoh!”

Dorian wasn’t used to the watchword, but just the sheer panic in Bull’s voice and the lurch of his massive body made Dorian withdraw as quickly as Adaar did. With sweat rapidly cooling on his skin and his heart hammering in his chest, Dorian stared at Bull, trying to figure out what went so terribly wrong. Nothing he did could have physically hurt Bull and the slight tingle of his magic should have done just the opposite.

Seeing how Bull recoiled from him and heaving for breath to still his shaking body, left Dorian in shock. Just a simple touch of his magic left Bull paler than he had ever seen the great, hulking Qunari. But as Dorian mind raced and traced back the path of his interactions with Bull whenever he used magic, the way Bull went rigid and looked at Dorian with wariness, and how Adaar never used his magic at home, Bull’s reaction made perfect sense. He came to a conclusion that he should’ve months ago, that Bull, who grew up under the Qun, was afraid of magic.

Dorian suddenly understood what Kos was trying to tell him before.

Numbness overtook Dorian as he stumbled out of bed, hardly noticing the chill of the floor on his bare feet, and automatically reached for his glasses on the nightstand and started fishing for his clothes amongst the mess of scattered shirts and pants.

Adaar was up in an instant, his overheated hand grasping Dorian’s bicep. “Dorian, wait, it’s ok.”

He couldn’t stop the way he jerked out of Adaar’s grip and Adaar stepped back, shocked. Looking back at the bed, Bull was calming down, but even in the dim light of the room, Dorian could see the unsettled expression in Bull’s one blue eye and the stiff way that he held himself. The sight was unbearable to Dorian.

“I can’t,” Dorian started and then fell silent as he went back through the motions of getting dressed.

“It’s ok,” Adaar reasserted softly, moving back in closer, but cautious not to touch Dorian again. “It’s ok, we know it was an accident. We should have made that a clear boundary to begin with, it wasn’t your fault that you startled Bull.”

“Startled?” Dorian repeated sharply. “When were either of you going to tell me?” He demanded as the numbness faded away into outrage and pain. “When were you going to tell me that Bull is scared of magic? Why did you two let me carry on in such a way without mentioning that it terrified him every time I reheated my tea?”

His voice and his body shook at the realization of Bull’s fear and he burned over the humiliation at
his own blindness over the situation. Dorian should have seen it earlier and he hated himself for it, but he was also furious that both Adaar and Bull neglected to tell him that Bull was frightened of something so integral to Dorian’s life. Magic was like another limb to Dorian, an essential part of him that he could not imagine living without, and the fact that Bull feared it, was afraid of Dorian, was a dagger into Dorian’s heart.

“It’s not like that,” Adaar was far too hasty to say.

But Dorian already turned his back and was heading out of the bedroom, his legs carrying him down the stairs without a second thought. In the foyer of the house, Dorian unintentionally started shoving his left foot into his right shoe when a hand encircled his wrist. He jerked his arm again, but this time he was unable to shake the grip on his limb and he turned his head sharply to find Bull behind of him. The Iron Bull managed to shed his alarm long enough to chase after him with an edge of desperation in his pale blue eye.

“Dorian,” Bull’s hold was strong and unyielding, on the very verge of painful, but not yet tipping to that point.

“Let go,” Dorian spat bitterly, lashing out to hurt Bull just as much as he did, “before I give you a reason to be afraid.”

There was a real fragility to Bull’s voice as he said, “I know you wouldn’t do anything to hurt me. I’m not afraid of you, sweetheart.”

The endearment riled up Dorian’s anger even more and sarcasm rolled naturally off his tongue, “Yes, I completely believe you, because you look so delighted every time I use my magic.”

“I am afraid of magic and demons,” Bull admitted, his voice shaking just the slightest bit. “I learned to fear them growing up, but I’m not afraid of you or Adaar.”

“Oh good, so you don’t think I’m a sack of demons ready to burn you to bits.” The bitterness bled out, leaving Dorian aching and hollow. “Tell me, how many times have you given Adaar that look? That look of pure terror from just a little spark. Or is magic forbidden in this house? Are there rules that I’m just not privy to?”

“No, no, of course not. Look, it’s different with Adaar, he uses his magic in research labs and I’m not used to seeing it all the time. He doesn’t use his magic like you do.”

“What do you mean like I do? You mean that Adaar is a model mage, a proper saarebas, unlike me who uses my magic irresponsibly?”

Dorian said it to be bratty, to purposefully escalate the argument, but the lack of instant denial from Bull spoke greater volumes than Dorian ever intended. There were two things that Dorian had unshakable confidence in, his physical appearance and his complete mastery over his magic. His magic was a source of unquestionable pride and love from Dorian’s parents, his sheer talent made Gereon look past the wreck of a teen that he was and led him into the Alexius home and to Felix, and it opened many doors for him in his academic and professional careers.

To question Dorian over his magic, a foundation of who he was, and to think twice about his usage of it, was insufferable.

“Let go of me,” Dorian repeated into the heavy silence and Bull finally obeyed. After a couple silent gulps of air, Dorian calmed down enough to put on his shoes properly and his hand fell onto the cold metal doorknob.
“Please,” Bull begged him, the word thick in his throat. “Don’t leave, Dorian.”

Dorian’s hand stilled and his neck twisted to stare at Bull in the foyer, looking oddly vulnerable standing there naked with a frown wrinkled along his face and a watery sheen of tears covering his eye. And behind of him was Adaar, draped in flannel robe, his hands tangled anxiously up in the sash, and his lips were pressed in a firm line, despite the gentle wobble of his jaw.

Every muscle in Dorian’s body was tense, ready to move and barge out. His fight or flight instincts were kicked into high gear, spurred on by the confrontation with his brain screaming at him to go home and his palm burning with the anger that was spiked up in him. Then, for reasons beyond Dorian, he vividly recalled Felix’s never ending exasperation every time Dorian’s reaction to flee or to lash out during a fight flared up.

“Dorian, we can talk this out. Do you trust me, amatus? Do you trust me to love you enough to work anything out?”

But they were not Felix, Dorian reminded himself viciously, who loved him without question. Iron Bull and Adaar did not have the same feelings or the same understanding that Felix had and they did not need him like Felix needed and wanted Dorian. They had each other, loved each other, and Dorian just helped to warm the bed.

“All right,” Bull begged again. “Don’t leave like this. We can talk this out.”

Everything hurt, but the crack and tremble of Bull’s voice threatening to crumble into tears made Dorian’s hand fall away from the doorknob and he turned to face Bull. The towering Qunari looked smaller than usual with his slumped shoulders and thoroughly chastised expression. Before Felix, Dorian had argued and walked out on numerous lovers, but none ever looked or sounded half as distressed as both Bull and Adaar.

The energy that was ready to propel Dorian forward and out the door dissipated and his limbs were leaden. There was still a part of Dorian that whispered that he was too invested and needed to leave, but there was a larger part of him that was just tired of hurting, tired of being alone.

“Why?” Dorian asked and bitter acid churned in his stomach at his own pathetic question. “Why would you even want me to stay when you’re afraid of me and think that I’m irresponsible with my magic?”

Bull’s single eye widened and he looked legitimately surprised by Dorian’s question, as did Adaar. “I’m not afraid of you and you’re not irresponsible, and I know I need to work on making you believe that and earn your trust again. I care about you, Dorian,” Bull answered earnestly, “we both do and we want to make this work.”

An involuntary and frustrated noise escaped from Dorian, coming out as half a groan and half a snarl. “What does that even mean? You two always say things like making this work and wanting something more, but where do you see this going? What more can you possibly expect from this arrangement?”

Adaar stepped up closer, his throat bobbing as he swallowed. “We want what anyone wants from a relationship, to be with you and to build something permanent for all three of us. When you’re ready, I mean, if you want that too.”

It was only the second time in Dorian’s life that any man gave him hope for the future and it left him nearly as winded as when Felix asked Dorian to move to Ferelden with him. Dorian shouldn’t have been surprised though, not with the way that Adaar acted with Bull taking his lead. Adaar’s
eagerness to be seen in public with Dorian, the willingness to move at Dorian’s pace, and his enthusiasm in introducing Dorian to his parents.

Dorian suddenly wished that they were having this conversation sitting down instead of the middle of the foyer. His limbs started to feel weak and exhausted and his heart was heavy in his chest. “Maker, the things you say, Adaar …”

“It’s true, all of it,” Adaar confirmed. “If you’d let me, I would hold your hand and kiss you in public and introduce you to everyone as my boyfriend, because that’s how I think of you. It’s how I’ve always thought of you since we started this.”

“I guess you’ve demonstrated as much from the get go,” Dorian allowed a brief smile before letting the weight of his emotions drop it. Shifting his gaze to Bull, Dorian asked, “And you also want all of that with me? After this?”

He purposefully held out his hand and let a small spark of lightning pop in the air over his palm, a small flash of harmless light that made Bull go rigid. Doubt poured into Dorian and the bit of hope he felt from Adaar withered away. But the moment the little spark faded into darkness, Bull quickly closed the gap between them, stepping into Dorian’s space and his hand enclosed over Dorian’s.

“Yes,” Bull answered easily and without hesitation. “I want you and I want you to be exactly as you are.”

“And if exactly as I am terrifies you?”

Dragging Dorian’s hand to his bare chest, Bull laid Dorian’s palm over his heart. “Then I want you to teach me to not be afraid.”
Dorian isn't sure it's working out, Lavellan is wrong, and Cullen gives advice.

“Do it like you did before with the lightning.”

“I’ll be gentler this time.”

“Yeah, ok, you’re the expert.”

Bull’s rough, grey skin radiated its usual warmth, but Dorian could already see the rigidity in his arm before he even laid a finger on the Qunari. There was an unease building in Dorian’s chest, a dread that settled into the pit of his gut, and he knew that he didn’t want to go through with it. But still, Dorian carefully placed his hand on Bull’s arm and sent a small tinge of electricity through his fingertips, a tender current of lightning that in Dorian’s experience brought his past partners pleasure.

The closed look on Bull’s features spoke of anything but pleasure, along with the surprised spasm of his muscle and the white knuckled grip he hand on Adaar’s hand. The sight of Bull’s response nearly sickened Dorian. Without the overwhelming feelings of shock, humiliation, and anger to protect him, all Dorian felt was the burn of acidic bile in his throat as the remnants of dinner turned unpleasantly in his stomach.

This was his fault, Dorian told himself as he swiftly retracted his hand. His magic made Bull look and react that way, and the wretchedness that overcame Dorian threatened to completely overwhelm him. Dorian didn’t want to do it anymore, he wanted to withdraw, and he didn’t want to even touch Bull since it obviously made him so miserable.

“Do it again,” Bull prompted.

Dorian reluctantly obeyed.

The results were the same for the next half hour. Bull controlled his flinching, but looked no more relaxed, and Dorian did not throw up, but felt no less ill. Exhaustion that had nothing to do with mana depletion choked Dorian and his request to turn in early for the night sounded like a pitiful plea.

“I’m sorry,” Bull cupped Dorian’s cheek, “I know this is taking a lot out of you and I should’ve been paying more attention to you.”

“Please don’t apologize, not for any of this,” was all Dorian could say.

They didn’t linger at Dorian’s townhouse for much longer as everyone made unenthusiastic and stilted excuses about early mornings and long work days ahead of them. Dorian knew he was ushering them out and not offering to spend some time in his bed so he could retreat into the lonely depths of his home to lick his wounds. At the very least, more sincere promises for plans for dinners and movies were then made, something more familiar and in known territory.
After exchanging kisses and goodnights, Adaar loitered in the doorway as Bull stepped out, his hand resting on the back of Dorian’s neck. “It’s only the first day, it’ll get easier from here on out.”

“Yeah, you’re probably right.” There was an emptiness to Dorian’s agreement that Adaar did not call him out on.

Adaar’s responding smile was more strained than encouraging. “I usually am.”

The click of the door shutting behind of them was loud and harsh in Dorian’s ears, but relief flooded him once it was just him in the townhouse. Drained and shattered, Dorian leaned heavily against the door, letting the back of his head thump upon it.

“Oh, amatus,” Dorian’s voice cracked as hot tears of frustration slid down his cheeks, “you must be laughing at the mess I’ve created.”

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In his library, Dorian was in his element. Sitting in his office, he typed away at a grant proposal for outsourced preservation work on a set of books. Sweeping into the reading room, he spoke to researchers, asking about their research and giving his advice on additional resources. He stalked the staff area, checking in on the progress of various projects and answering the questions his staff saved up for him. And when he had a moment of free time, Dorian swiped his card key to the secure stacks, swung open the door, flipped on the lights and letting his eyes close briefly as the cool, climate controlled air hit him in the face.

The stacks were a physical testament to all that he accomplished at the Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Strolling down the aisles of the stacks and breathing in the scent of old leather and paper, Dorian mentally tallied the books and manuscript collections he acquired since becoming the director years ago. Sometimes his fingers carefully brushed the spine of a book or along the metal edge of a grey manuscript box, just to confirm to that it was real, that everything he accomplished was there.

At work, Dorian felt good, like he belonged and was contributing to something greater than himself.

Glancing at the clock in his office and watching the thin silver second hand tick away, Dorian sighed quietly. He knew that he needed to leave soon, but he was anchored to his seat and his legs turned to lead, unwilling to move.

“Have a good evening, Dorian,” Minaeve, one of his staff members, bid Dorian good night through the open doorway of his office. “Try not to work too late tonight,” she added, a touch of nervousness coloring her tone. “I’m sure you’ll finish that grant well before its deadline.”

“Don’t worry, Minaeve, I’m leaving soon,” he reassured her. “Have a good night and I’ll see you tomorrow morning for the staff meeting.”

“Don’t forget that it’s your turn to bring in donuts,” she reminded him gently before ducking out of the doorway.

“Right,” Dorian murmured to no one, “time to go.”

The lights of the building were dimmed for the evening and the world was dark when Dorian stepped outside into the frosty night. Pulling his coat close to his torso and wrapping his scarf around his neck, Dorian silently cursed the cold as he crossed the campus to where he parked his car at one of the outrageously expensive metered spots close to the library building. He was sitting
in the car for several minutes, letting the heater run on full blast and thaw out the iciness of the car, when his cell phone rang sharply in his coat pocket.

“Hello, Adaar,” Dorian answered.

“Hey, Dorian, I’m just calling to let you know that Bull has a bad cold, so we won’t be coming over tonight and I’m pretty sure we won’t be able to come the next couple of nights either. Unless you want me to come over?”

“Oh,” Dorian stiffened, immediately wondering if it was just an excuse to get out of seeing him even as relief washed over him. “Oh, uh, no, you should stay home and take care of Bull. I hope he isn’t too sick,” he said lamely.

Almost on cue, a loud, thundering sneeze erupted over the phone, followed by Adaar’s soft laugh. “He’ll be ok, there’s just been a nasty cold going around his classroom the last few weeks and he’s finally caught it.”

“I understand, small children are basically walking petri dishes of germs. Is there anything I can get you? Cold medicine or anything like that, I’m just about to leave the university,” Dorian offered, a little hopeful that he could make himself useful.

“No, no, that’s ok, he just needs to rest. Hey, let’s get lunch soon, I’m pretty much free this week and I could meet you at your office.”

“This week isn’t good, I have a couple lunch meetings and I have that grant deadline coming up on Friday,” Dorian replied and cringed at Adaar’s quiet noise of disappointment. “How about this weekend?” he suggested.

“I’m leaving Saturday morning for a symposium in Redcliffe.”

“Oh, right, I forgot about that.”

“Maybe you can meet up with Bull over the weekend or keep him company if he’s feeling better. He shouldn’t be contagious by then.”

“Yeah, maybe. We’ll play it by ear. Well, tell Bull that I hope he feels better soon for me and have a good rest of your week.”

“You too, Dorian.”

Dorian let the phone drop into his lap and slumped in the car seat, running a hand through his hair and blinked back a mixture of discouraged and relieved tears. “Fuck. Fuck.”

He believed that Adaar was being truthful about Bull’s cold, but he wondered if they were thankful about having an excuse not to see Dorian. Not that he would blame them, since over the last couple of weeks Dorian could feel the strain between him and the pair, and he admittedly felt the reprieve of not keeping their appointment. But it left the bitter taste of remorse in Dorian’s mouth and he was beginning to feel the familiar helpless dismay that filled him whenever things fell apart with his old lovers.

“How is this ever going to work, amatus?” Dorian whispered.

A sudden and brisk series of taps against the driver side window nearly gave Dorian a heart attack and he jerked wildly in his seat before whipping his head around to see Lavellan standing outside. She was peering into the car, her round face hardly visible under her long plaidweave scarf and
woolly hat.

“Kaffas.”

Rolling down the window and letting the warm air escape from the window, Dorian managed to greet Lavellan with a paper thin smile.

“Need a ride home, Professor Lavellan?” he asked as steadily as he could.

The smile she gave him was just as thin. “If you would be so kind.”

Dorian unlocked the doors as Lavellan scuttled to the other side of the car, wrenching open the door and slamming it shut behind of her. Her glove covered fingers were instantly fiddling with the vents, turning several in her direction, despite Dorian’s token protests. He didn’t continue to fight her on it though and instead he fell quiet, concentrating on driving rather than having the breakdown he was planning on having a scant few minutes ago.

The car was silent beyond the rumble of the tires on the pavement and the hum of the heater working to keep the little space warm. Neither of them spoke, no inquiries about each other’s day, no updates about friends or how Cullen was doing, there was only silence between them. Dorian thought about turning on the radio, but his hand refused to move from where it was stiffly holding the wheel, almost afraid that if he moved then the uneasy calm might break.

“Want to come over for dinner?” Lavellan asked suddenly as they were halfway to her house.

Dorian tightened his grip on the steering wheel. “I don’t think I’d be good company tonight.”

“Let me rephrase that,” Lavellan replied abruptly. “You’re coming over for dinner.”

He should have chafed under her demand, but instead a tired laugh tumbled out of him and some of the tension unraveled from his chest at her determination to take control of the situation. “Well, how can I refuse such a charming invitation?”

“Damn straight,” she agreed.

Lavellan lived in a neighborhood heavily populated by professors from both Herald and Skyhold University. There were rows upon rows of beautiful houses, well maintained, and eclectically decorated in an academic sort of way. Lavellan’s large farmhouse inspired home was certainly Fereldan by architecture, but its lush green garden was all Dalish, giving it a striking distinction from its neighbors even in the winter months.

Even in the darkness, Dorian admired it as he pulled up into the driveway. The way the yellow glow of the streetlights spilled across the winter bare tree limbs, prickly shrubbery, and vines of arbor blessings made the yard eerily beautiful.

“Cullen’s not home yet,” Lavellan observed as they walked up to front door, seeing that the large picture window into the house was dark.

“Always working himself to the bone,” Dorian replied flatly, failing to come up with something witty to say.

A couple flips of light switches and their presence livened up the large house along with the eager barking of Cullen’s old slobbering dog, Mabari. After Lavellan shooed Mabari into the rec room, they shuffled into the kitchen where Lavellan started pulling a bottle from the built in wine rack in the wall and offered, “Wine?”
Dorian perked up at the proposal. “Maker, yes.”

Lavellan grabbed a couple of glasses and placed them and the bottle on the kitchen island. Her pour was conservative and she stood on the opposite side of the island from Dorian, keeping the bottle out of easy reach from him.

“Thank you,” he murmured.

He looked at Lavellan and was suddenly grateful that she forced him to come over to her house. Dorian recognized that he wasn’t in a great place at the moment and he knew that if he went home, he would’ve spent the evening wallowing and drinking. Instead, Lavellan offered stability, a safe space to mope if he needed, but she wouldn’t allow it to become destructive. He was lucky, Dorian mused, to have such a friend in his life.

As much as he detested confessions, Dorian might have told her that, but Lavellan spoke up first.

“I know you’re having an affair with Adaar.”

Dorian froze, the wine glass was halfway to his lips and his eyes went wide and unblinking. He stared at his friend and expected to see the judgement Lavellan was known for, but in its place he saw an expression of sheer protectiveness. Her brown eyes were dark and steely, her mouth pressed in a hard, straight line, and her body was rigid. She looked very much as she did years ago as she stomped out of Felix’s hospital room, entering the fluorescent hellscape of the hallway to place herself between Dorian and his father.

“I didn’t want to say anything, I wanted to wait for you to come to me about it, but the way you’ve been these last couple of weeks, well, I’m not going to let you spiral down any further than you have.”

There was nothing Dorian could say, his tongue, thick and dry in his mouth, refused to move and he felt like a halla standing in the road and in the headlights of the car ready to strike him.

“I don’t like him,” she added with great conviction that it felt like a physical blow and made Dorian physically flinch, setting down his glass of with a firm click upon the granite countertop.

“Lavellan—”

“I didn’t know you before you were with Felix,” Lavellan cut him off, “but I know about your past and Felix always shared a bit after too many drinks. I know that you’re used to sneaking around and being someone’s secret, that it’s what you think you deserve, but you’re wrong.” Her face reddened with emotion, the tips of her pointed ears burning, and her tone was strong and resolute. “If Adaar cares about you enough to cheat on his beast of a long term boyfriend, then he should have dropped the Iron Bull to be with you, but no, the fucking Dread Wolf take him, he’s just been stringing you along!”

She spat out those last words like they left a bad taste in her mouth and her usually cool and calm features were twisted up bubbling anger.

“I hate that he makes you so happy, because he’s going to hurt you all that much more when this ends.” Lavellan breath huffed, unwinding some of the tautness coiled up in her as she conceded, “I know you’re an adult and you got yourself into this, but I still feel like he’s taking advantage of you. You were in a vulnerable place, just starting to date again after Felix, and Adaar knew that or knew enough. We have enough mutual friends that he would have known pretty quickly. But he pursued you anyway and he knew full well that he wasn’t going to leave Bull.”
Lavellan went silent and her accusations hung thick in the air. Her anger and protectiveness was so far off base that Dorian would have laughed, but the seriousness of her expression stilled the hysterical amusement tickling Dorian.

“I’m not having an affair with Adaar,” he broke the silence, though just barely with his quiet voice. Disbelief made Lavellan reel back, her head nearly jerked as her eyes narrowed at him and her face crinkled up. “Mythal have mercy, don’t tell me you’re with the Iron Bull,” she ventured cautiously. “Cullen will be unbearably smug if you are.”

Dorian closed his eyes and took a deep breath.

“I’m sleeping with both of them. Together.”

“Oh.” Lavellan dropped down on one of the kitchen stools, the word coming out more like reflex than an actual response. Her brown eyes widened at Dorian and the redness that had built up on her tanned skin drained away, making her look paler than usual.

She blinked slowly. “Both of them?”

“Yes, I, uh …” His shoulders slumped and the laughter he held back before finally came through. “I love both of them.”

They both startled at Dorian’s declaration, though Dorian was probably even more shocked than Lavellan. But considering the easiness those words slipped from his mouth and the rightness he felt when he was with them, he held no doubts in his heart. There was a real truth to his statement, even as the whole relationship seemed to be going terribly wrong.

“Are you angry at me?” he asked.

“Angry?” Lavellan frowned at him before shaking her head. “No. I guess I’m just disappointed that you didn’t trust me with this. I’ve been your friend since the moment you came to Skyhold and you didn’t think to tell me?”

“I’ve wanted to tell you, though there’s not much to say that I haven’t already blabbed and there might not be anything to say soon. But honestly, I didn’t think you would approve.”


A small, sheepish smile crept onto her face, easing the harshness of her earlier statements and made her look less intimidating. It was the first smile after what seemed like ages of her frowning and simmering rage and it was a relief to Dorian to see it. He took a step forward, but paused, feeling uncertain despite the shift in Lavellan’s mood.

She took notice of the movement and was on her feet in a moment, closing the gap between them and pulled him into a much needed hug. Despite standing several inches shorter than Dorian, her embrace was fiercely strong and the sharpness of her slender frame dug almost painfully into Dorian, but he didn’t let her go. Telling her about his relationship lifted a burden from Dorian, left him feeling lighter, despite the recent uncertainty he faced with Adaar and Bull.

After several minutes, Lavellan finally let go of him and she looked up at his face. “You said there might not be anything to tell anymore. What did you mean by that?”

“Kaffas, I don’t think you have enough wine for it.”
Grabbing the bottle and shoving the cork back into the opening, Lavellan glared at Dorian. “Nice try, Pavus. I’ve got a box of Orlesian chocolates with liquor in the middle. That will have to do.”

They went into the living room and curled up on the overstuffed couch, sitting close to one another under a large, fluffy throw blanket with the promised chocolates between them.

“I screwed it up,” Dorian said, the miserableness of his current situation of his own making bleeding out as tears welled up. “I don’t think it’s going to last much longer.”

“Oh,” Lavellan replied softly and with slow caution. “Ok, tell me why you think that.”

“A couple weeks ago, I used my magic in bed on the Iron Bull, without talking to them about it first—”

“Well, that was stupid.”

“Yes, thank you, Ellana, I am well aware of that.” He couldn’t stop the roll of his eyes or the sarcastic emphasis on her first name. “Anyway, it did not go over well. Bull, as I found out so delightfully, is afraid of magic. Specially, he’s afraid of how I use magic.”

Lavellan’s eyes went dark. “Did he do something to you?”

“What? No! No, of course not,” Dorian was hasty to assert, though his quickness did not put Lavellan at ease. “Everything is fine, nothing like that happened, I promise. If anything, Bull is eager to be cured of his fear, but it’s been …”

Just the previous day, Bull sat in Dorian’s living room with Adaar at his side, their fingers laced tightly together as Bull held his massive body stiffly under Dorian’s hands as he repeated the bit of magic he used weeks ago in bed. Over two weeks into the process, of Bull diligently coming to Dorian’s home to subject himself to Dorian’s magic, and Bull still flinched under Dorian’s touch. And every time Dorian’s heart sank further and further down.

“I thought you were trained to be a soldier under the Qun,” Dorian had halfheartedly teased midway through the first week.

“I won’t flinch if you throw a fireball at my head, but our training didn’t involve mundane uses of magic. It’s like being able to fight a giant spider, but screaming every time you see a little one,” Bull had answered. There was nothing teasing or warm about the statement, just a raw fact and Dorian didn’t utter another word.

The lack of progress seemed to seep into everything for Dorian. Every time he laid a hand on Bull, all Dorian could think about was the fear on Bull’s face that night weeks ago. It ran through Dorian’s mind every time he kissed Bull, caressed him, or held his hand, tainting their simple intimacy. He began to hate the apologetic way Bull looked at him, Adaar’s quiet fretting, and Dorian was beginning to hate himself.

“It hasn’t been going well,” Dorian finally told Lavellan and quickly swallowed down the rest of his wine.

He grabbed a chocolate from the box and popped it into his mouth, the earthiness of dark chocolate and smoothness of Orlesian brandy melted quickly on his tongue. The brandy was strong enough that Dorian idly wondered if he could get drunk just from alcoholic chocolates alone.

“I was angry that they never said anything about Bull’s fear, I was ready to storm out of the house and out of their lives, but now I just feel like this is my fault.”
“I’d say the blame is somewhere in between,” Lavellan chimed in unhelpfully, grabbing a chocolate for herself and took a sip of her wine. “You should’ve come to me to begin with. You know that I’m married to an ex-Templar, someone who was trained in handling magic.”

“You mean in disrupting magic and hunting mages.” Dorian frowned, even though he knew he was being immensely unfair.

Lavellan kicked Dorian from under the blankets, hard enough to jolt him. “I mean someone who spent years solving crimes involving magic and mages, including crimes against mages and protecting innocent mages in danger. Like some idiot from Tevinter that I know.” She kicked at him again, but gentler the second time.

“I suppose I will take all the help I can get at this point.”

“Good,” Lavellan sounded pleased. “Now, tell me all about how you got together with Adaar and the Iron Bull. I find that I want to know now that I no longer have a burning hatred for Adaar.”

There was nothing to do but to laugh and while the sickly weight of depression was still heavy in Dorian’s stomach, he keenly felt the sudden freedom to speak to his friend so openly. Dorian had Sera, who looked out for him, but who also mostly thought of the whole venture as a fling. But as Lavellan demanded details with her better understanding of his heart, Dorian knew he would be telling a drastically different tale.

The story tumbled from him, from the wine soaked moment when he and Adaar first kissed after the reception at the university to Bull’s declaration that he wanted to be cured of his fear of magic. It was a long, winding tale and Dorian’s stumbling through his relationship with the pair becoming glaringly obvious to him as he told it. Lavellan’s pointed looks and her long sighs emphasized those shortcomings to him.

That was how Cullen found them. After dropping crinkling reusable bags of groceries in the kitchen, Cullen ventured into the living room to catch Lavellan rolling her big brown eyes at Dorian as they shared a blanket and a box of candy between them. All the while Dorian was insisting that, no, how was he supposed to understand what Kos tried to warn him about and that it only made sense in hindsight.

Cullen’s expression was one of cautious amusement. “Am I interrupting?”

“Dorian’s sleeping with both of them,” Lavellan answered as if that explained anything.

Apparently, it did. “Oh!” Cullen said, the word startled from him before mild disappointment overcame his features. “Does that mean neither of us wins the bet? Or do we both win?”

“You were betting on my love life!?” Dorian managed to sound outraged.

Lavellan continued, willfully ignoring her friend, “Dorian needs your help, all three of them managed to screw things up.”

“I don’t know what I can do to help, but ok,” Cullen blinked slowly, his handsome face scrunched up in confusion. “Should we get into this now or can it wait till after I make dinner?”

“You can do both at the same time.”

“You mean like Dorian?”

To Dorian’s horror, the former Templar held up his hand for a high-five after the jab and Lavellan
enthusiastically slapped his hand.

“This is when you develop a sense of humor?” This time the outrage was more genuine.

“Come on,” Lavellan closed up the box of alcoholic chocolates and kicked off the throw blanket. “We’ll fill Cullen in as he makes dinner.”

Dorian followed them back into the kitchen, sitting down at the island as Cullen unpacked various ingredients from his grocery bags and started up dinner as Lavellan gave him the condensed history of Dorian’s involvement with Adaar and Bull. Cullen took it as well as Dorian could imagine, his features were stoic as always, the only giveaway to his emotions were through fleeting amused smirks and the occasional groan of exasperation.

“I’m not surprised about Bull’s aversion to magic,” Cullen noted, vigorously chopping vegetables, though he didn’t elaborate on his observation. And considering Cullen’s experience in investigating crimes against mages, Dorian didn’t want to know. “What sorts of exercises are you doing with him?” Cullen asked.

“Mostly I’ve just been doing the same thing I did before, touching him with a small tingle of lightning, though I’ve dialed it done quite a bit. But even though it doesn’t hurt and he’s expecting it, Bull still hasn’t been responding well.” Dorian’s shoulders dropped and he had to clench his jaw to keep it from trembling. “I’m beginning to think that this whole endeavor has been in vain.”

Cullen put down his knife, his eyes wide and his mouth dropping open. “You’re starting with lightning?”

Dorian straightened up in his seat. “Yes, it’s what Bull asked for. Is that wrong?”

A shudder ran through the former Templar and his mouth twisting as if he bit into something sour. “It feels the most unnatural,” Cullen explained.

That caught Dorian’s full attention as his interest was piqued by the observation. “What do you mean?”

“Look, most people don’t encounter lightning or electricity like they do heat or cold and if they do it isn’t pleasant. I even liked spirit magic more than lightning. I don’t know how to really describe it, but no matter how many times the mages we trained with touched me with just a spark of electricity, nothing more than something that would tickle, I still expected it to hurt.”

Dorian wondered if it really could be so simple. “It never bothered Felix or any of the other men I’ve slept with.”

“Have you ever slept with a non-mage before?” Lavellan asked, her eyebrow arching delicately.

“I slept with a man, Cadash was his name, who wasn’t a mage, though I admit he was a very odd dwarf,” Dorian answered easily, a small fondness stirring for the dwarven lyrium dealer he half suspected was a member of some Carta clan. “But point taken. So, you think I should try fire or ice elements?”

“Yes!” The response burst from Cullen’s lips. “Anything but lightning.”

“Well, anything is worth a try at this point, even taking relationship advice from you,” Dorian allowed.

“Hey, what’s wrong with taking relationship advice from me?” Cullen narrowed his amber eyes at
Dorian as an incredulous tone crept into his voice. “I happen to have a very happy relationship!”

“You sprained Lavellan’s wrist when she tried to break your fall while ice skating on your third date,” Dorian shot back.

“That was the same night he spilled his beer on me at dinner,” Lavellan added.

“Was that the same dinner when he caught his sleeve on fire from the candle on the table?”

“No, that was our rehearsal dinner. Remember that Keeper Deshanna froze off his sleeve to put out the fire?”

“That’s right! Delightful woman, your Keeper, but always overly eager to freeze something off of a ‘shem.’”

Red blotches colored Cullen’s cheeks from embarrassment at the recollections and his vigorous vegetable chopping resumed. “This only proves that I’ve had a few unfortunate mishaps, not that I’m bad at relationships.”

A fond smile spread on Lavellan’s lips and she leaned into Cullen’s space, her mouth brushing against his stubble covered jaw. “You’re the very best at relationships.”

A spike of longing pierced Dorian through the heart, a quick and familiar sensation of grief and loss as watching Cullen and Lavellan triggered a simple memory of Dorian pressing a kiss along the dark stubble on Felix’s cheek as they made dinner together. But it also reminded him of kissing Bull’s scratchy beard and trailing his fingers along Adaar’s freshly shaven face.

Dorian would never get back those casual, sweet moments with Felix, but he could try to continue to make new ones with Adaar and Bull.

The walk from the light rail station to the townhouse was a short one and the sidewalks were well lit in the early darkness of a Fereldan winter, but Dorian walked quickly to escape the seemingly never ending cold. With his hands shoved into his coat pockets and face wrapped in a cashmere scarf, Dorian hurried along, week old snow crunching under his shoes, and felt no small amount of relief as he approached his home. The townhouse was always a welcome sight after a long workday, but even more so at the end of the week and especially after Dorian finally turned in his grant proposal.

“Finally making it home at a decent hour this week, amatus,” Dorian mumbled to himself.

The little iron gate leading up to his home was frigid under his grasp and its old hinges squeaked loudly as Dorian pushed it open. He took a couple steps along the pathway to the front door when Dorian froze at the sight of large, dark shadow on his doorstep. A moment of blind panic made his heart leap into his throat and a flash of heat filled his hands. But wide horns quickly told Dorian to the identity of his visitor and a different kind of tension took over him as his surge of magic dispelled and he approached the Iron Bull.

“Hey there, sweetheart,” Bull greeted, raising his hand halfway to wave at Dorian.

“I didn’t think you’d be by today,” Dorian stated as he climbed up the steps and into Bull’s space. The slight wheeze of Bull’s lungs and the sniffle of his nose made Dorian wince. “I hope you weren’t waiting long, especially after you’ve been sick all week.”
“Just a few minutes, I had to make up some meetings with parents, so I just got off of work and I’m feeling ok, just shaking off the last bit of my cold.”

“And yet you still decided to linger in front of my house without even calling me. You could’ve been standing here for hours and made yourself sick again,” Dorian groused as he opened up the front door and let Bull inside. “Did you want anything to drink? A snack?”

“Nah, I’m good. Adaar said he’ll pick up dinner once his grad student stops having a meltdown over her dissertation. Living room like usual?” Bull asked as he hung up his black leather jacket in the closet.

Dorian nodded absently and despite his renewed resolve to make this work, Dorian couldn’t stop his heart from sinking at the thought of going through the whole process again. “Yeah.”

There was limp to Bull’s usually smooth, long stride and a tightness to his face as his left leg was obviously giving him trouble as they moved into the living room. Despite being intimately familiar with Bull’s myriad of scars from a past life of being a soldier under the Qun and then a security guard as a new Tal-Vashoth, it never occurred to Dorian that those old injuries might still bring Bull pain. It was a hard thought to reconcile, the image of the Iron Bull as a hardened fighter, used to pain and battle, with the current man at Dorian’s side, in his light blue shirt, pink nug print tie and khaki pants, who spent his days teaching children to spell words and add and subtract numbers.

Bull caught Dorian staring and shrugged his wide shoulders. “Just an old injury that gives me some trouble in the winter.”

An idea sparked in Dorian, Cullen’s sage advice echoing through his brain. “I want to try something different this time.”

“Ok,” Bull nodded in agreement, not even asking what Dorian planned to do.

“Take off your pants.”

Bull’s eye widened and his mouth curled into a wicked grin.

“Maker, not like that!” Dorian huffed. “I just need access to your knee and I don’t want to wrinkle one of the only marginally acceptable pairs of pants you own by rolling them up.”

“Ok, ok, whatever you say, sweetheart.” Bull unbuckled his belt and opened the fly before shucking off his khakis, kicking them carelessly to the ground and leaving them there.

“Do have a care about your clothes,” Dorian groused, picking up the pants, neatly folding them, and draping them over the back of the couch. “Now, sit down, I’m going to get changed and get something.”

Running upstairs to his bedroom, Dorian stripped out of his nice work clothes and threw on a pair of flannel pants and an old long sleeved shirt. Then he went straight for the master bathroom and dug into the cabinet under the sink to find a half empty container of a thick, lavender scented lotion. Returning to Bull, Dorian knelt down in front of him, opening the container and dipping his fingers into the lotion, smearing it on his hands. Glancing up, Dorian caught an eye full of Bull’s apparently new and brightly colored boxers with a repeating pattern of little high dragons.

“Really? That’s your underwear?”

“We can’t all wear pretty little silky underthings. But if you need me to take off my boxers, I’m more than happy to,” Bull offered.
“You’re not getting a blow job.”

“I’m not picky, hand jobs are nice too.”

“How does Adaar put up with you all the time?” Dorian wondered out loud as he warmed his hands a few degrees above normal body temperature. “I’m heating up my hands, not too much, and I’m going to massage your knee,” Dorian explained. “Is that ok?”

“Have at it, big guy.”

Under his overly warm fingers, Bull’s leg jumped and tensed, but the limb settled down after a moment and the muscles of the leg loosened after a couple minutes of Dorian’s ministrations. Above him, Bull let out a long, slow sigh and his entire body seemed unwind, relaxing and sinking deeper into the couch. His head tipped back, the tips of his horns resting against the wall and his eye fluttered shut.

The floral scent of the lotion hung in the air and the only sound in the room was soft, appreciative grunts from Bull and the occasional cough and sniffle leftover from his cold. The hardwood floor was unyielding and cold under Dorian’s knees and his legs ached from bearing his weight as such, but the serene expression that overtook Bull was well worth it. It was a vast difference from the rigidly neutral expression Bull maintained before and relief flooded Dorian.

“I like this a lot better,” Bull mumbled.

A real smile spread on Dorian’s lips. “I thought you might.”

“It’s still kind of weird and I’m a little freaked out,” Bull admitted, making Dorian’s heart skip an unpleasant beat, “but it feels too damn good.”

A wobbly, weak chuckle came out from Dorian. “Well, that’s more progress than we’ve made before.”

“That’s…” Bull trailed off with a long groan. “Fuck, yeah, dig your thumb harder into that spot. Yeah, right there. Oh fuck, you’re really good at this.”

Dorian let out a low, breathy laugh, more sincere than his last one. “I have a lot of practice. I used to rub Felix’s back like this all the time. It was good excuse to get him out of his shirt before we were together and Felix later confessed that he pretended that his back hurt so I would touch him.”

“I bet the two of you were adorable together.” Bull snorted, which only served to make him cough.

“Painfully so, yes.”

The conversation trailed off, but it was a comfortable silence that settled between them. Dorian was busy concentrating on carefully controlling his magic, slowly pushing up the temperature in his hands and kneading the old scar tissue of Bull’s knee, while Bull let Dorian ease the pain in his limb. Bull reached down and palmed the top of Dorian’s head, his fingernails lightly scratching at Dorian’s scalp in the way he enjoyed and it sent shivers down his spine.

“Hey, sweetheart,” Bull tugged on Dorian’s hair.

“Hm?” Dorian hummed questioningly, his head bowed in concentration until Bull tugged on his hair again. Huffing in annoyance, Dorian tipped his chin up and glared at Bull. “What—Oh!”

“What can I say? You on your knees and touching me like that.”
While Dorian’s massage produced the desired effect in helping Bull with his sore knee, it also had unintended consequences. Bull’s ridiculous boxers were tented in front of him with a small damp spot soaking through the fabric. Without really thinking about it, Dorian reached up and hooked his fingers into the elastic band of the boxers, pulling them down. Ever obliging, Bull slid further down on the couch and made his large, redden erection accessible.

“Can I touch your thighs with my hands like this?” Dorian was conscious to ask.

“Yeah,” Bull answered softly as he spread his legs further apart, “yeah, that’s good.”

Dispelling some of the heat from his hands, Dorian grasped Bull’s thighs, kneading them as he leaned in towards Bull’s cock. It was tempting to swallow Bull whole, but without a condom within easy reach, Dorian didn’t attempt it, but instead he gave the shaft a long lick. Dorian rubbed Bull’s legs as he lapped at Bull’s cock, running his tongue up and down its length and teasing right below the head.

“Oh fuck,” Bull moaned, “you’re so good with your tongue. You’re so fucking good, sweetheart.”

The low, pleased groans he earned from Bull were a balm for the festering worries that had wounded Dorian. It felt good on several levels to know that his magic and touch had such an agreeable effect on Bull. He needed this, to reconnect with Bull physically and to feel desired again.

After several minutes, Dorian felt Bull push his head away and he couldn’t prevent the raw, disappointed noise that escaped from his throat. A nauseous sensation of anxiety that he did something wrong began to fill Dorian.

“I’m enjoying myself, but maybe too much,” Bull was fast to reassure Dorian as he straightened up on the couch and held his hand out. “Come up here and keep me company. I want to save this,” he squeezed the base of his cock with his freehand, “for when Adaar comes to join us.”

Dorian took Bull’s hand and let Bull pull him up to the couch, feeling light headed not just from arousal, but also from the blood rushing back into his stiff limbs. He nearly collapsed onto Bull, but the Qunari was quick to gather Dorian up in his arms and kept him propped up. Straddling Bull’s lap, Dorian found himself staring at Bull’s stupidly happy grin. Fingers slid into Dorian’s hair again and Bull touched his forehead to Dorian’s.

“That’s better,” Bull breathed, “I like having you close to me.”

The gap between their faces closed as Bull basically devoured Dorian’s mouth in a hungry and eager kiss. Dorian automatically rolled his hips forward into Bull’s, his own neglected arousal was beginning to demand some attention. But Bull, the cruel man that he was, slipped his hand into Dorian’s flannel pants and simply teased him through the silky fabric of his underwear.

“Touch me,” he whined.

“Patience, kadan, we’ll make it good for you,” Bull merely promised, his thumb rubbing along the head of Dorian’s silk covered cock, though it was not nearly enough. Dorian was always needy, always desirous for touch and affection, but Dorian was ravenous for it and he could hardly wait for Adaar to arrive.

Dorian’s smile widened against Bull’s lips as he heard the front door open and slam shut. He started to pull away to be a good host and get up to greet Adaar, but Bull grasped his hips firmly and pulled him closer. Had Dorian not been so thoroughly distracted, he might have remembered
that Adaar didn’t have a key to the townhouse and that the steps treading across the floor were far too light to belong to Adaar.

And it was far too late by the time Sera, tapping away at her cellphone, rounded the corner into the living room.

“Oi! Fancy britches, what’s for—Aw fuck! What did I walk in on!?”
Chapter Summary

Dorian struggles with voicing his feelings, Bull continues to make progress, Adaar is happy, and Felix was apparently gifted.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long delay in this chapter! Travel, the holidays, and my offerings for the Adoribull Holiday Exchange took up the last couple of months. One more chapter to go!

“The then I walked in and there they were, totally banging on the couch.”

“Kaffas, Sera, we were not having sex! You may have noted that I was fully clothed!”

“Totally. Banging.”

“It’s my townhouse! I can do whatever, or whomever, I please in my own home, and for Maker’s sake, lower your voice!”

“Make me, fancy britches!”

A blush seared Dorian’s face and humiliation filled him as he tried to defend himself, though he had no idea why he even bothered. Sera was completely unfazed and unapologetic as she detailed to Lavellan her stumbling in on Dorian and Bull during an intimate moment. After overcoming her apparent trauma, Sera was delighted to have a story to tell and even more so to have found a willing audience in Lavellan. Thankfully, the usual bustle of the Herald’s Rest covered up Sera’s gleeful cackle.

Lavellan smiled into her beer, choosing at that moment to be amused by Sera’s antics rather than be exasperated by them. “I’m assuming that the experience hasn’t stopped Sera from barging into your house all the time.”

“She ended up staying for dinner,” Dorian huffed, his mouth twisting down into a displeased scowl.

“Me and Widdle popped over the next day too,” Sera added, her white teeth gleaming in the lights of the bar before she bit savagely into her burger.

Dorian wrinkled his nose in disgust and he pushed his leftover lunch to Sera, no longer hungry. Her long, thin fingers managed to snatch half of his pile of onion rings before Lavellan forcefully shoved the plate back towards him, her dark eyes narrowed at his second empty pint glass and his picked at lunch. Lavellan didn’t stop glaring until Dorian took another unenthusiastic bite of his partially eaten sandwich.
“Varric’s having a private shing-ding at the Hanged Man for First Day Eve this week.” Bits of food flew from Sera’s mouth, annoyingly enough that Lavellan shoved her sharp elbow into Sera’s bony ribs. “Ow!”

“Manners,” Lavellan barked as Sera blew a raspberry at her.

“Anyway,” Sera continued, digging out envelopes from her backpack and handing them to Lavellan and Dorian, “you’re all invited. Hawke’s paying for an open bar and there’s gonna be tons of food.”

“Andraste bless that woman and her willingness to get us all drunk,” Dorian grinned. “Are you working that night?”

“As much as I ever work there,” Sera shrugged her shoulders. “I’m going to make all my tips to set me up for the year. Hawke and Varric’s friends are loaded and they’re generous when they’re sloshed.”

“Sounds like it’ll be a good party, Cullen and I will be there,” Lavellan confirmed.

“Varric’s inviting your Qunari boy toys too, so you’re coming, right?” Sera leaned forward on the table towards Dorian. “You can snog both of them at midnight!”

Dorian barely managed to swallow down a bite of onion ring before he sputtered at Sera’s statement. “Varric’s party is a bit public for that, isn’t it?”

Both Lavellan and Sera stared at him with wide, judging eyes that made Dorian shift uncomfortably in his seat.

“What’s it gotta be a secret for?” Sera demanded swiftly. “You’ve already made it serious with your feelings, you met the new in-laws, and you told bossypants,” Sera jerked her thumb towards Lavellan. “No one’s gonna care if you snog two Qunari at midnight. This isn’t Tevinter with all your stupid social rules.”

Lavellan frowned almost accusingly, but then her expression shifted in thought, becoming more worrying than disapproving. “Are you still having trouble with the Iron Bull about your magic?”

Her tone was painfully gentle, the kind of tone that left Dorian wishing for her judgement rather than her sympathy.

“What!?” Sera squawked in outrage, her eyebrows furrowing together and her face scrunching up in confusion. “What are you talking about? Bull doesn’t like Dorian’s magic?”

“No, no,” Dorian was quick reassure Lavellan, who looked only halfway placated. “Bull’s been doing really well and we’ve been making real progress.”

“If there isn’t an issue, then what’s the problem with snogging them in front of everyone?” Sera demanded. “Besides, no one’s gonna even be that surprised, everyone can see how much Adaar and Bull like you and they all know you’re a size queen.”

Spine stiffening and throwing back his shoulders, Dorian protested immediately, “How exactly am I a size queen?”

“Smarty britches had huge hands and you know what they say.” Sera spread her fingers out to try to imitate the size of Felix’s. “Anyway, I’ve walked in on you and smarty britches enough times to know that you’re a size queen. The fact that you need two Qunari in bed just confirms it, right?”

She paused as if in contemplation and added, “Andraste’s tits, smarty britches was real hung for a
human if you need two Qunari, yeah?”

Dorian’s jaw dropped as his outrage and embarrassment left him in a rare bout of speechless that only Sera could put him in. But he was even more horrified by Lavellan’s howls of laughter, loud enough to draw the attention of the other occupants of the restaurant. Her dark skin was flushed with humor and tears were beginning to stream down from her eyes, leaving grey streaks of her eyeliner and mascara down her cheeks.

“It’s really not that funny,” Dorian insisted and pushed his lunch away for a final time, ready to hunt down their server for his check.

“Oh, Mythal have mercy, Dorian, it really is that funny.” Lavellan wiped at her eyes, her breath coming out in small, high pitched hiccups and she didn’t bother to lower her voice. “I remember going to one of those hot springs in Orlais with you and Felix and I distinctly recall that his bathing suit left very little to the imagination. I think Cullen was feeling rather inadequate afterwards.”

“Yes, Felix was particularly gifted, but that does not make me a size queen!” Dorian hissed as he struggled to keep his voice down, well aware of the many pairs of eyes on their corner booth.

Sera put up two fingers and wagged them in Dorian’s face. “Two Qunari.”

“Well,” Dorian pulled out his wallet and slapped down enough money to cover his meal and drinks, “this has been a most delightful lunch and now we’ll never see each other again, correct?”

“Sure, never see you again until Monday. Widdle’s gotta work late and I hate eating alone,” Sera was good enough to inform him.

Dorian snorted, but he knew there was no stopping Sera from barging into his home. Not that he wanted her to stop. “Until Monday then.”

The late year weather was sharp and cold as Dorian stepped out of the restaurant and rushed towards his car. But an abrupt burst of rapid footsteps falling upon the concrete behind of him made him pause and his limbs were rigid as he turned. Dorian instantly relaxed at the sight of Lavellan approaching him with purpose, hair swept up in the bitter Fereldan wind, her coat and scarf thrown hastily on and her hands stuffed into her pockets.

“Did I forget something?” Dorian asked as Lavellan caught up with him.

“You should tell them.”

Dorian’s mind was blank, uncomprehending what she was talking about.

“You told me that you loved them,” Lavellan clarified. “If everything’s fine with you and them about your magic and all that, you should tell them.”

The very breath seemed to be stolen from Dorian’s lungs and replaced by the fragile coldness of the air. Lavellan’s hand reached out and her chilly fingers wrapped around Dorian’s covered wrist, squeezing his bones through the layers of his coat and sweater.

“Tell them.”

With his throat tight and his mouth dry, Dorian managed, “I’ll take your advice into consideration.”

“Do better than that, Pavus,” Lavellan pressed. “If you’re really serious about them, and I know
that you are, you need to tell them.”

The swift wind stung Dorian’s face with icy needles, making his cheeks color and eyes smart. There were a hundred witty and scathing remarks racing through his mind, but all that came out was, “And what if they don’t feel the same?”

Lavellan’s grip on his wrist tightened. “Of course they feel the same, you idiot. I’ve always known that they both liked you, which was obvious enough. I just didn’t know that you were with both of them until you told me.”

“Why did you think it was Adaar I was having an affair with if you knew they both liked me?”

Lavellan shrugged her slender shoulders with a half-smile tugging on her lips. “He’s a smart, dorky professor, who adores you. Sound familiar? I knew you’d be drawn to that.”

The comparison tugged sharply and painfully at Dorian’s heart, though it didn’t come as a terrible shock. “I seem to have a type,” he replied faintly, repeating the observation he had made to Kos after Satinalia.

“It’s not that surprising and when you get to know Bull, you realize that he’s almost as big of a dork as Adaar and that he adores you just as much,” Lavellan shrugged again, a distant sadness in her dark eyes before they steeled up in her usual determination. “Look, just get it over with and tell them, you big sap.”

She gave his wrist one last squeeze before going on her way, allowing Dorian to duck into his car and shelter himself from the cold. Sitting in the frigid interior of his car, letting the engine run to heat it up, Dorian thought upon Lavellan’s advice and he loathed admitting that she was right. Considering all that Adaar and Bull had provided and accommodated for him, Dorian knew that they deserved to know that their actions and words did indeed touch his heart.

“But maybe not today, what do you think, Felix?” Dorian procrastinated as he pulled onto the street and started the all too familiar drive to Adaar and Bull’s house. “I’ve known them for barely half a year, so it’s much too early to be making any rash declarations about love. However, I do promise not to wait nearly as long as it took us to confess our feelings.”

A small laugh fell from his lips, even as his throat tightened and his eyes began to burn.

“Had I known I’d have so little time with you, I would have certainly confessed my love for you much sooner.”

Raindrops began to splatter upon the windshield, driven by the whistling winds, and it made Dorian miss the mild winters of his homeland. He knew that the rain would eventually turn to snow as the temperature dropped in the evening, surrounding Dorian in a white hellscape. Felix, the odd man that he was, had always been delighted by the snow, sitting by the window for hours as he watched it cover the neighborhood with a cup of Tevinter cocoa while Dorian rued what he could not change. Now, Dorian would suffer through a thousand snowfalls just to spend one last evening with Felix.

“Lost time, amatus,” Dorian whispered, watching as the rain started to turn to slush. “Maybe that’s reason enough to tell them now.”

Adaar and Bull, Dorian noted idly, enjoyed watching the snow as well.

Soon enough, Dorian was parked in front of the house and rushed to the porch, eager to get out of the inclement weather. Dorian took out his keys from his coat pocket and quickly found the new,
shiny silver one on his keyring. It was a simple item that Adaar had pressed into his hand just a few days ago with a bashful grin, a little gesture of trust and intimacy between them. The key slid into the lock with ease and the door to the house swung open with a simple twist of the knob without Dorian having to knock or ring the doorbell. Like he was coming home.

Stepping inside, Dorian’s skin tingled with the sudden change of temperature and his nose was hit with the tempting scent of sugar and vanilla. Following the smell into the kitchen, he found the Iron Bull liberally applying pink frosting to rows of perfect, pale golden cupcakes in sparkly wrappers. Looking up from his work, Bull’s single blue eye lit up and he leaned forward to plant a frosting flavored kiss on Dorian.

“Have a nice lunch with Sera and Lavellan?”

“Yeah,” Dorian nodded as he smacked his lips and grimacing at the cloying sweetness sticking to them. “You know that you need to save some frosting for the cupcakes? What are you making cupcakes for anyway?”

Bull shrugged and shook a container of red sugar crystal sprinkles over the tops of the completed cupcakes. “No reason, just wanted some. Vanilla’s your favorite, right?”

“As if my tastes were so plebeian,” Dorian insisted as he sniffed indignantly, even as his mouth watered and his fingers twitched towards one of the pink frosted treats.

“Mm-hm, sure thing, sweetheart,” Bull nodded, his pale eye sharp and knowing.

“I have a much more sophisticated palate,” he replied pretentiously, before conceding, “However, you do make very fine vanilla cupcakes. Now, where is Adaar?”

“Where do you think?”

“Asleep on the couch after reading his students’ papers?”

“Yes,” Bull let the ‘p’ pop off his lips. “Hey, once I’m finished frosting the cupcakes, we can do our magic time.”

Dorian rolled his eyes, but his mouth curled upwards under his mustache. “You mean your training to acclimate you to magic?”

“Yeah, our magic time,” Bull grinned insufferably. “I’ve actually got an idea for it this time if you’re taking suggestions, but you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

Dorian was pleasantly surprised that Bull had an idea and it was heartening to know that Bull was thinking of how Dorian’s magic could be of use and benefit. “Of course I want to hear your idea. I can hardly believe you’d come up with something I’d object to, unless you’ve taken an interesting and dark turn in your opinion about magic.”

“Great! Go change into something more comfortable while I finish up, we’re not planning on going out again today. And could you bring some horn balm for me on your way down? Oh and wear those new briefs I bought you!”

“Those awful ones with the little pink dragons on it? Not on your life!”

“It’ll help make me more comfortable while you’re doing your magic thing.”

“I’m not falling for that line again!” Dorian sighed heavily and marched himself upstairs, turning
his back on Bull’s grinning and hopeful face.

In the bedroom, Dorian jerked opened the drawer in Adaar’s dresser that was filled solely with Dorian’s spare clothes, items that had been accidentally left behind or brought over for convenience sake. His eyes shifted towards Bull’s closet, where a few of his dress shirts and pants were hanging. Fishing out a pair of soft flannel pajama pants and a worn Skyhold University sweatshirt, Dorian pondered at how comfortable he had gotten with Adaar and Bull. With previous lovers, he would have been mortified if they saw him in his pajamas, but, as Dorian reminded himself, Adaar and Bull were not just simply his lovers.

Entering the adjoining bathroom, Dorian scanned the countertop, his eyes barely registering his own cosmetics and hair products that littered the surface, and focused on the several jars of horn balm. Picking one up, he read the label, knowing that Adaar preferred the one that was a lighter mix of royal elfroot, while Bull liked a heavier balm with Crystal Grace and embrium. Amongst the little jars, Dorian found his own mustache wax, sitting there inconspicuously as if it belonged. All of his odds and ends seemed to fit so neatly amongst Bull and Adaar’s things, in the house they built a life together in.

Shaking off those thoughts, Dorian grabbed Bull’s favored horn balm and bounded down the stairs, finding that the kitchen was empty with the exception of rows of pink cupcakes. He wandered into the living room, looking for Bull and found Adaar was lightly snoring away on the couch. Bull was waiting for him, sitting patiently on the floor and in front of the armchair.

Patting the seat of the chair, Bull beckoned Dorian over. “Come on, sit behind of me.”

“Am I icing your shoulder again?” Dorian asked as he sat down behind of Bull.

Bull shook his head carefully and pointed to his wide horns. “It’s my horns this time,” he said with an eager smile. “I want you to heat up your hands and rub some horn balm into them.”

“I don’t know if you’re actually getting used to my magic with all the heated massages and icing I do for various parts of your body, I think you just don’t want to pay for a physical therapist,” Dorian muttered, but he was removing the silverite ring from his finger, heating his hands and dipping his fingers into the little glass jar.

“Hey, this is helping me associate magic with only good things. You, Adaar, nice massages, you making me feel good …”

Bull’s voice trailed off into a groan as Dorian began rubbing in the balm with his heated palms into the wide and tall horns on Bull’s head, imitating how he’d seen Adaar work the stuff into Bull’s horns before. The horns were rough and dry under Dorian’s palms, almost like bone, but not quite the same texture. His hands, protected by the balm, worked from the base up at the top of Bull’s head to the very tips of the horns, careful not to catch his fingers on the sharp tips, then started back down at the beginning. He also rubbed the balm into the skin at the base, noticing that it was flaking from the bouts of dry and severe cold that sometimes hit the city.

“Oh, that’s good, keep doing that.” Bull let out a long sigh that stretched out in his pleasure. “You can use more heat, sweetheart, my horns aren’t as temperature sensitive as my skin. And stop right away if your hands start getting sore, don’t want to chafe your skin.”

Bull fell into silence, with only the occasional soft moan of appreciation escaping from his throat, mixing in with Adaar’s snores. The gentle scent of Crystal Grace in the concoction filled the room, overlapping with the smell of warmed vanilla from Bull’s baking, and it left Dorian with sense of
domesticity that he often found missing within his own home.

Even if they weren’t talking, there was something comforting to the small noises that Bull and Adaar made, the evidence of their presence, and signs of their activity. Sex and secret dates were great fun, but it was the often the little things that got to Dorian in a significant way. Vanilla cupcakes, naps in the afternoon, his shampoo on Adaar’s grocery list, and stupid dragon briefs sitting in a drawer. All together they squashed the hollow of loneliness that had occupied Dorian’s heart for a rapidly approaching three years.

Dorian nearly jumped in his seat as dry, cool lips pressed against his forehead and an amused voice asked, “Am I next, beautiful?”

Caught up in his thoughts and task, Dorian didn’t even notice that Adaar had gotten up from the couch. He smiled instantly at the other Qunari and stretched up to give him a proper kiss. “I’ll dote on you once you have a freak out about magic.”

“But I’m really good at magic,” Adaar stuck out his bottom lip dramatically. “Doesn’t that deserve a reward?”

“I can teach you how to do this,” Dorian offered slyly, “knowledge is its own reward.”

“But your control is so much finer than mine, you don’t want me singeing Bull’s horns. No, this is a task that only you can do,” Adaar teased, before he asked more seriously, “You’re monitoring your mana, right?”

Dorian glared up at Adaar in indignation, feeling the sting of the unintended insult that he could not manage his mana and causing him to very nearly sneer, “My mana is perfectly fine, I needn’t a reminder like I’m a mere apprentice.”

Unimpressed by Dorian’s flare of anger and crossing his arms, Adaar countered sternly, but calmly, “You fell the other day after you were massaged Bull’s legs.”

The initial heat of Dorian’s outrage died down, tempered by Adaar’s obvious concern, and he was left with only a mild annoyance. “That’s because I was crouched on the ground and my legs fell asleep.”

“You looked rather pale for just having pins and needles in your legs.”

“Hey,” Bull grumbled at Adaar before Dorian could defend himself, “you’re interrupting my magic acclimation time.”

Adaar snorted as the topic was dropped and gave Bull a wry smile. “You mean your pampering time.”

“I’m working very hard to get used to magic,” Bull reached for Dorian’s knee and gave it an affectionate squeeze. “Besides, don’t you have papers to grade?”

A long groan slipped from Adaar and his shoulders slumped miserably. “I’ve got a couple that are on the fence for a failing grade. I hate failing students on an assignment, but I’m not sure they deserve to pass.”

“Grab us some cupcakes from the kitchen and read the papers aloud to me,” Bull told him. “I know that usually helps you decide and I’m sure Dorian can actually make heads or tails of what your students write.”
Adaar brightened at the mention of the baked goods and immediately retreated into the kitchen, coming back with enough treats for all of them.

“My hands are rather occupied at the moment,” Dorian lamented when Adaar offered him one of the pink frosted cupcakes.

“Don’t worry, sweetheart, I’ve got you covered.” Bull took the cupcake and tore off a piece, reaching behind him to bring the vanilla cake to Dorian’s lips. Dorian happily accepted the offering, making sure to clean the crumbs and frosting off of Bull’s fingertips, receiving a soft groan for his efforts.

Adaar snatched the stack of student papers from where they had been abandoned on the couch and got comfortable on the floor in front of Bull, fishing out the offending assignments from the bunch. Sitting with one leg tucked in and the other stretched out in front of him so his foot was resting against Dorian’s ankle, Adaar began to read from one of the papers with Bull in rapt attention and Dorian half listening as he watched the pair.

He should say something, Dorian thought as his fingers traced the shape of Bull’s horns and he listened to the steady rise and fall of Adaar’s voice. Tell them about how they made him feel, how much happier he was, how much he cared for them, like Lavellan insisted. The timing was good for it. Dorian had never been on more stable ground with them, their intentions were made plain to Dorian, Bull was steadily warming to his magic, and Adaar was as affectionate and open as ever. He should tell them.

It was such a simple thing, words that Dorian had boldly spoken before. He remembered how easily the words and his feelings poured out of him once Felix confessed his love, a torrent of emotion and affection that swept over Dorian as the dam was broken open. And despite the doubts he voiced to Lavellan earlier, he knew that Adaar and Bull cared for him and wouldn’t reject his feelings.

But those words were currently stilted and stalled on Dorian’s tongue, leaving him in continued silence as Adaar read aloud, interrupted only by Bull’s occasional inquiries. The confidence he possessed over his own feelings and in theirs meant nothing as his mouth remained motionless, unable to broach the topic.

Perhaps it was harder the second time around, because Dorian knew how it could end.

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First Day Eve fell on a clear, cold and crisp night and much of Skyhold was ready for a celebration after the long, dark and barren month. The black, moonless sky was ideal for the city’s annual firework display and the cold, while uncomfortable, lost much of its bitter bite. Which was fortunate, considering that Dorian was forced to park several blocks away from the Hanged Man due to the crowds and the fact that Adaar refused to let Dorian use his magic to shove other cars out of the way so they could park closer. So Dorian, along with Adaar and Bull, had to walk over to the bar through the throng of people milling through the city, looking for a party or bar to duck into.

Dorian buried his glove covered hands into his pockets, seeking some warmth in their depths as they hurried along the sidewalk with old snow crunching under their feet. His perpetually cold hands were regaining some heat in his pockets, but Dorian was keenly aware that strolling next to him, Bull and Adaar were walking hand in hand. Their fingers were laced together and were defiant of the persistent chill of the evening in favor for the simple contact.
Dorian’s hands felt empty as his flexed his fingers in his pockets, his silverite ring digging into his flesh in a lonesome reminder.

He remembered going to the Science and Magic Museum with Adaar, standing close together as they looked at the displays, and of Adaar taking Dorian’s hand in public, eager and completely unashamed. While secrecy still burned Dorian, filled him with an old anger and disgust, he abided by it and reacted as such. They hadn’t held hands in public since.

Almost without thinking, Dorian slid one of his hands from his pockets and reached across the short space between the two of them. Adaar’s free hand was dangling at his side, so it was easy for Dorian to slide his fingers in between large, grey ones.

The gesture seemed to surprise Adaar, his brilliant green eyes going wide and looked down to their joined hands. A wide smile instantly consumed Adaar’s face, his white teeth and eyes gleaming in the yellowed streetlights, and his fingers tightly squeezed Dorian. On the other side of Adaar, Bull leaned forward a bit and caught sight of them, his own grin brightening his features.

Without a word, they walked holding hands towards the Hanged Man.

Dorian would have been lying if he said his heart didn’t thunder in his chest or that his throat didn’t feel overly dry, but he managed to keep it off his face as they entered the bar. He was long used to making spectacle of himself without batting an eyelash, so he could endure this with equal visible cheer despite his real emotions.

The sports bar was decorated in bright streamers and balloons with the bar staff handing out festive paper masks, obnoxious noise makers, and plastic flutes filled with golden sparkling wine. The noisy crowd inside was made up of familiar faces, their laughter and joy filled the nooks and crannies of the building. They were friends, coworkers, and associates who were long acquainted with Dorian and most of whom were once friends with Felix as well.

Instantly, Dorian spotted Sera behind the bar handing out drinks, while pointedly ignoring Carver Hawke and flirting harmlessly with Bethany. Dagna was sitting close by, sipping on something vividly red in a pint glass through a straw and chatting cheerfully with Merrill. There was Josephine, dressed beautifully in a gold and purple cocktail dress, hanging onto Thom’s arm as they chatted with Solona Amell and her wife, Leliana Nightingale. A shiny bald head and pointed ears in a corner indicated that Lavellan’s dreaded ex, Solas, was in attendance. He also spotted Cullen’s immaculate hair in the crowd, talking excitedly with Krem, and he knew that Lavellan was somewhere nearby.

In the center of it all was Varric and Marian Hawke, their strong personalities and stories drew people to them like moths to a flame. Fenris hung back in Marian’s shadow, glaring at anyone who was caught too close in her orbit. Cassandra was badgering Varric, standing in his space as the dwarf rolled his eyes, and Dorian could only assume she was talking about *Swords & Shields*. And Dorian was sure that he spotted Cole sitting up on one of the ceiling beams above them all, but the young man was gone when Dorian took a second look.

These people made up Dorian’s world, both professional and social. And soon, with his hand linked with Adaar’s, Dorian would feed fodder into the gossip that often spread like wildfire through the group. It was fine though, Dorian told himself, as he always enjoyed being the center of attention.

Bull let go of Adaar as he greeted approaching friends who came to wish the couple well for the new year, but Adaar held fast onto Dorian, not letting him go. While their linked hands were mostly concealed in the bustle of the bar, Dorian noticed Thom’s gaze drop down to them, then
shifting away quickly, and he was sure that Leliana noticed as well from her secretive smile that she shared with Solona. Dorian’s face began to flush from more than just the heat of the building.

*It’ll be ok, Dorian, just keep holding my hand.*

His nerves calmed for a moment as he suddenly recalled the confident words Felix had whispered to him before they told Gereon and Livia about their relationship. Dorian remembered that he hadn’t been as sure as Felix, that experience had taught him to be cautious and not optimistic, but he knew that everything would be fine as long as he had Felix. The anxious pressure in Dorian’s chest faded as he looked up at Adaar and Bull.

They were well worth it.

His anxiety unwound further once they got their drinks and found a table to sit at. The table was low enough that it obscured Adaar and Dorian’s still joined hands and curious gazes found other things to look at. Sitting on the other side of Dorian, Bull gently said to Adaar, “You might want to let go of Dorian so he can take off his gloves and coat, kadan.”

Adaar scrunched up his face for a moment and then blinked in surprise as if just realizing that Dorian was still bundled up. “Oh! Sorry.”

Even with his gloves on, Dorian’s digits felt cold as Adaar released him, but he tugged off his gloves and coat anyway. Dorian didn’t take Adaar’s hand again, but he laid his palm on Adaar’s knee, which Adaar immediately covered with his own. And he let Bull stretch his arm across the back of his chair, his hand resting comfortably on Dorian’s shoulder.

A cycle of friends and acquaintances passed through, sitting down at the unoccupied chairs at the table to say hello. No one commented on the arrangement, even though eyes darted nervously to where hands were placed and what was being touched between the three of them. Smiles were stiff, greetings were stilted, and looks were sharp and questioning. Dorian was well aware of when he was being judged, when people disapproved of his actions and choices, and as he smiled defiantly at each slighted gesture, he couldn’t help but choke on it a little.

It felt too much like Tevinter, Dorian thought. The side glances in his direction and hushed whispers of scandal. Dorian could easily imagine that people were whispering about his corrupting influence over Adaar and Bull. People had said much of the same about him and Felix. And he could almost hear the speculation that he had gone crazy over grief and loneliness, and that he had reverted back to his long rumored ways of his youth.

But Krem and Lace’s knowing smiles soothed the crinkled edges of Dorian’s distress as did Dagna’s excited giggles and Sera sticking their tongue at them, saying in a huff, “Finally!” Lavellan seemed rather smug as she and Cullen sat to chat with them. Hawke just laughed good naturedly, her grin teasing, with Fenris giving his same, unflinching expression that he always gave Dorian. And there were many others who didn’t even blink, didn’t miss a beat at the sight of all three of them together.

So, maybe it wasn’t exactly like Tevinter.

“More beer?” Bull asked as the beer in their pint glasses dwindled.

“Please,” Dorian answered, not close to the buzz he hoped to achieve.

“Yes!” Adaar said with enthusiasm, his cheeks a rosy pink against his grey skin and his eyes brightened by his alcohol consumption. His open merriment stood in contrast of the cautious ease
Bull displayed, who was generally more observant and better at reading a room than Adaar. Bull gave Dorian more than one significant and concerned glance that evening, but it did not overshadow the pleased glint to his eye.

“I’ll get us a refill then.”

As Bull left, Adaar shifted his chair closer to Dorian’s and wrapped his arm around Dorian’s shoulders, getting comfortable by leaning against Dorian. The grin that lit up Adaar’s features had yet to fade, any shifting glances and whispers were completely lost upon him or held no weight. It was the same unflappable ease and happiness Adaar possessed when they went to the museum together.

His enthusiasm was infectious, bleeding into Dorian and helping him to relax under Adaar’s embrace.

“Well, Sparkler,” Varric started, dropping down into the seat that Bull vacated and his grin was nearly unbearable as he eyed Adaar’s arm around Dorian, “it seems that I need to tell Cole that he was right.”

Dorian lifted an eyebrow. “What are you on about?”

“He’s been insisting that you were seeing both Tiny and the Inquisitor here and I told him that was complete nonsense. I appear to have been proven wrong or have I had more to drink than I thought?” Varric nodded to Adaar.

“Cole would be correct,” Dorian slowly acknowledge as Adaar smiled into his hair.

A smirk tugged on Varric’s mouth. “Yours is a story that I’m going to put onto paper one day, Sparkler. You’ve got everything, forbidden love, running away, tragic loss, a kidnapping, even a couple of villainous Magisters, and now a happy ending with a pair of Qunari.”

“A kidnapping?” Adaar asked, his voice was pitched in a curious arch as his words beginning to run together with his beer.

Dorian glared sharply at Varric for reminding him of his parents’ delightful attempt to remove him from Ferelden and the dwarf, for once, fell blissfully silent. In a light and playful tone, Dorian artfully fibbed, “It’s a funny, but long story, which I’ll tell you later.”

Adaar, even in his alcohol cheer and with no Bull around to be suspicious, did not look entirely convinced. Dorian changed the subject immediately, asking, “How is your nickname the Inquisitor? I get called Sparkler, but you get to be called by a historical figure. I want a better nickname.”

“How have you seen his movie collection and library, Sparkler? I think he has a copy of every film, documentary, and book about the first Inquisition. He’s a little obsessed,” Varric gave a pointed look at Adaar.

“I enjoy historical studies, yes, there is nothing wrong with that,” Adaar replied far too swiftly, his voice inclined in a defensive tone.

“He did touch the diary of the Dreamer Telana at my library and I do believe he had a religious experience,” Dorian teased.

“I hate to break it to you, Sparkler, but I think the Inquisitor here seduced you for access to your library.”
“That much is true, but I got him to stick around.” The corner of Dorian’s mouth lifted at Adaar’s incensed look.

“Well, I need to continue making my rounds to my guests.” Varric stood up from his stolen seat and nodded to the pair. “Good chatting with you two, I’ll call you all up for a game of Wicked Grace soon.”

Varric disappeared into the crowd and Bull soon returned with pints of foamy Fereldan beer. With drinks in hand, they abandoned their table to mingle with friends and the moment Adaar’s back was turned, Dorian was quickly singled out by Lavellan and Cullen.

“See,” Lavellan cozied up to Dorian’s side, “that wasn’t so bad, was it?”

“I don’t think Thom can look me in the eye anymore, Carver choked on his drink, and Sera and Dagna can’t stop laughing at us. So yes, this has all been a rousing success,” Dorian answered with a keen edge.

“Adaar and Bull look rather happy,” Cullen helpfully supplied, his observation said in optimism and kindness.

“They do,” Dorian agreed heartily, any pretension of irritation was dropped as he flattered himself over the pleasure he brought the pair in just a simple gesture. Then, allowing a moment of true arrogance, Dorian added, “And why shouldn’t they be happy? I am quite the catch.”

“You are,” Lavellan confirmed with a lopsided smirk and her eyes held a soft expression.

Finishing his beer with a speed that left Lavellan scowling at him, Dorian excused himself to get a bit of fresh air, leaving Adaar and Bull behind as he made his way up to the second floor.

Stepping outside onto the bar’s empty second floor deck, Dorian was hit with shock of cold air, but he breathed a little easier despite of it. Walking up to the railing, Dorian looked out at the view of the city, its buildings aglow in twinkling, festive lights, streetlights dotting the roads in a yellow hue, and its people still milling about, excited for the coming First Day. The chatter of others outside as well as those inside reached Dorian’s ears, along with the pops of early fireworks, people too eager to wait for the stroke of midnight.

Parties were all good and well, and Dorian often excelled in the attention, but there was some attention where a little could go a long way. He was bolder in his youth, Dorian mused, feeling like he had nothing to lose after he had all but disowned by his family. But now, Dorian was just tired and perhaps a little less brave without Felix at his side. Considering that he was willing the retreat into a winter night for a moment of privacy, Dorian was willing to concede to his own cowardice, and the fact that he couldn’t say simple words to Adaar and Bull about his feelings was proof enough to him.

Long arms draped themselves over Dorian’s shoulders and were secured across his chest as a warm body pressed against his back and a chin rested on the top of his head. A familiar sandalwood cologne intersecting with Bull’s usual musk tickled Dorian’s nostrils as he leaned back into the embrace and his self-berating thoughts vanished instantly.

“Hey there,” Bull greeted happily, his smile almost audible in his tone. “You’ve been awfully sweet tonight.”

Dorian sucked in a short, sharp breath. “That isn’t quite the word I would use to describe myself right now.” Nervous was better word. Anxious, twisted up in himself, cowardly, and also
wonderfully relieved.

“You’re always sweet, that’s why you’re my sweetheart.” Bull’s arms squeezed Dorian as he nuzzled Dorian’s hair. “You know, this is the first place where we talked.”

“We spoke at the art gallery,” Dorian corrected, “when I was devastated to find out that Adaar already had a boyfriend.”

A small laugh shook Bull’s body. “I mean where we first really talked. I barely got your name at the art gallery before you ran away.”

“Of course I ran away,” Dorian snorted. “I was flirting with Adaar and then his impossibly large Qunari boyfriend, called the Iron Bull, appeared. I was thinking foremost about my immediate wellbeing, not being polite.”

Bull chuckled, a low sound that vibrated through Dorian’s body. “That much was obvious, but I was kind of disappointed when you ran off, I thought you were cute. After Adaar told me about his interest in you, I was glad that we ran into each other here and I could get to know you.”

“Well, I was terrified that you were going to try to beat me up,” Dorian replied honestly, that hot summer night months ago felt like years away from them at the moment.

There was another chuckle and Bull’s lips pressed into Dorian’s hair. “I was glad that I got to know you,” Bull repeated in a murmur. “I knew right away that you’d make Adaar happy and after talking to you, I knew you could make me happy.”

Something gripped Dorian’s heart at the confession, something almost painful and wonderful at the same time. “Bull,” the name rolled off his tongue, “Bull, I…”

“There you two are!” Adaar’s voice sliced through the chilly air in playful outrage. “You both left me behind.”

Wedging himself between the iron railing and Dorian, Adaar faced him and Bull, his expression was beaming with the same good cheer that was carrying him through the night. Large hands reached up to cup Dorian’s face, palms searing Dorian’s nearly numb cheeks, and the press of Adaar’s body chased away the last bit of cold that had plagued him.

Dipping his head down, Adaar touched his forehead to Dorian’s with their noses brushing against each other. “Thank you,” Adaar whispered. “It means a lot to me. Letting us hold your hand, touch you, just being with you in public. I’m really happy right now, kadan.”

Dorian wrapped his fingers around the arms clutching him and his sight began to blur behind of his glasses. “After Felix died, I was convinced that my life was over. I thought that I could never … I didn’t think … What you both mean to me—”

After several false starts, it was stuck, what he wanted to say was lodged in Dorian’s throat and unable to come out. The arms around Dorian tightened and Adaar’s fingertips stroked his cheeks. Adaar closed the gap between this, his lips pressing upon Dorian’s and relieving him of the need to speak.

“It’s ok, kadan,” Bull told Dorian, “we love you too.”
Years

Chapter Summary

It's been three years.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Dorian’s eyelids were heavy and his eyes were dry as he stretched out on his side, resting his shattered body next to Felix on the soft bed, being careful not to jostle his IVs. Their morning was rough, Felix was unable to keep his breakfast down and the ordeal left him too exhausted and weak to eat lunch. Thankfully, the nurses at Divine Victoria’s Hospice Care were attentive and efficient, making Felix as comfortable as possible after his bouts of violent illness.

But despite the excellent care Felix was receiving, it did little to undo the knot of worry and dread that was building up in Dorian. It twisted inside of him, smothering Dorian with crushing helplessness and grief. It strangled him every time Felix was ill and it was destroying him as he witnessed his husband, who was only in his thirties, grow weaker and frailer by the day. For reasons that he could not articulate, that morning felt especially bad to Dorian and he couldn’t help but to fall into bed next to Felix for a moment of much needed respite.

Within seconds, Dorian’s eyelids fluttered shut as he began to sink into the quiet, dark bliss of unconsciousness.

“Let’s get out of here,” Felix rasped suddenly, his breath rattling wetly in his lungs.

With great pain and reluctance, Dorian peeled open his eyes and blinked in both concern and curiosity at his husband as he murmured, “What was that, amatus?”

“Let’s get out of here,” Felix repeated, “before Mother returns with the photographer and takes a hundred more photos of us. I can’t wait to get up to our hotel suite for a bit of privacy and I know that Father upgraded it as a surprise.”

Lifting his head, Dorian looked down at Felix, his husband’s dark eyes were glassy and distant, but he also had an expression of great fondness and affection. Dorian recalled having this exact same conversation with Felix at the reception of their wedding, a grand affair in the ballroom at the Halamshiral Hotel, the fanciest hotel in Skyhold. He remembered being coaxed by Felix to sneak out early before Livia cut off their escape with one of the photographers in tow as they were making their way to the hotel elevators. They didn’t make it up to their upgraded hotel suite until after midnight, stumbling into the room tired, tipsy, and wildly happy.

A slow smile spread on Dorian’s face and he gently laced his fingers between Felix’s. “Ok, amatus, let’s go up to the suite now.”

The grin that tugged on Felix’s mouth transformed his entire face, the lines of exhaustion eased, his dark eyes came into sharp focus, and his washed out complexion seemed to brighten. His fingers flexed around Dorian’s with a morsel of strength. “You look so beautiful right now, amatus, but I can’t wait to get you out of your suit and spread out on that giant bed.”
Felix had said the exact same thing to Dorian on their wedding night. Raising Felix’s fingers to his lips, Dorian replied as he did years ago, “You can have me all night, Felix, and for the rest of our lives.”

“I have something to confess, amatus,” Felix said off script, startling Dorian with his unexpected declaration.

“Oh?” Dorian asked, amused. “And what would that be?”

“I saw you in your suit before the wedding, I know you wanted it to be a surprise,” Felix told him in a whisper as if someone might overhear him. “Cullen accidentally showed me the picture Lavellan took of you when you were getting your suit fitted.”

Dorian was shocked by the admission. The memory of Felix’s face as they met at the altar was clear in Dorian’s mind. The delight and love on Felix’s features was unmistakable and he vividly remembered the way Felix’s eyes widened as he drunk in the sight of Dorian on their wedding day. Dorian had thought the reaction was from the surprise of how exceptionally perfect he looked on their wedding day and he would have never known that Felix had seen a photo of him in his suit had he not said anything.

“Maker, Dorian, I was breathless when Cullen showed me that picture of you, but you were so much more beautiful in person, it couldn’t even compare. Andraste help me, I love you so much, my beautiful amatus.”

“I love you too, amatus.” His smile became wider and tears stung his eyes as he playfully asked, “Now, what else have you been hiding from me?”

They talked through the afternoon, Felix telling Dorian all the deeds and incidents that he hid from Dorian. The things he told Dorian were lighthearted tales of episodes and accidents that had left Felix too embarrassed to ever fess up to until that moment.

Like the fact that he was the one who stole Dorian’s favorite band t-shirt when they were teenagers, because it smelled like him, which Dorian knew. That Felix had learned to cast a simple lightning spell to torture one of Dorian’s lovers with a terrible and persistent case of static shock, because Felix thought he treated Dorian poorly, which Dorian always suspected was the case. And that Dorian’s ring was actually the second one that Felix bought, because he dropped the first one in a storm drain and Cullen had cried laughing at him even as he promised never to breathe a word of it, which Dorian didn’t know.

Dorian couldn’t remember the last time he had laughed so much, enjoying each tale more than the last and took a rare pleasure in Felix’s relaxed and easy countenance.

They talked until they both drifted off into an afternoon nap as the weight of fatigue was too much for either of them to bear for long. An hour later, Dorian opened his gritty eyes, his limbs stiff and achy, but much of the tension that he had carried since Felix was admitted to the hospice facility was strangely and welcomingly lifted. Getting up with his back to the bed, Dorian rolled his stiff neck and stretched his cramped arms, catching the time on his watch.

“It’s almost time for dinner, amatus. Shall I order something for you from the kitchen? Some soup, perhaps? You haven’t eaten anything all day.”

He received no response.

“Amatus? Are you awake?”
Dorian turned around to see if Felix had stirred from their nap.

“Amatus?”

The room was completely silent, except for the ragged draw of Dorian’s own breath.

Dorian woke up slowly and lazily in morning, there was no rush to get ready for work despite it being a Tuesday. He had long scheduled the day off, so instead, he remained in bed, gradually becoming aware of the warm blankets he was cocooned in, the softness of the pillow under his head, and the empty spot next to him in his bed. Dorian rolled onto his side when he finally reached full consciousness and stretched his hand out to the other side of the mattress.

“Good morning, amatus.” His fingertips caught the edge of the unoccupied pillow. “It’s just us today. You may have had competition for my company though, since it’s so close to Wintersend. Kos and Tallis are coming in next week before the holiday and Adaar said that his mother has plans for us all. She’s quite bossy and very determined that everyone will have a magical Wintersend. She rather reminds me of your own mother.”

Dorian laughed at himself for comparing Kos and Livia, a Tal-Vashoth and an Altus.

(Of course, I would have made time for you today, I would have been more than prepared to brave Kos Adaar’s motherly wrath. So, I was thinking a light breakfast at the coffee shop and a little shopping and lunch at the Wintersend market in Vint Town. Maybe even a short walk at the park if the wind isn’t too bad, how does that sound?)

There was no answer, not that he was expecting one, but Dorian did hear the telltale sound of the floorboards above the bedroom creaking, urging him to start the day. Peeling himself up from the bed, Dorian went straight to the bathroom and stood under a hot shower for nearly half an hour before stepping out and inspecting his face in the wet streaks his hand left across the steamed over mirror.

He didn’t look any different that day and his features were just as handsome as they were the day before. Dorian was of course pleased by his appearance with strong, classic Tevinter bone structure, lively silver eyes, and thick, dark hair made him a devastatingly handsome man. But he did wonder at the fact that his experiences, and he had many, did not leave a physical mark on him, that the weight he carried did not affect the exquisiteness of his face.

Leaning in closer to the mirror’s surface, Dorian noted that there still was not a wrinkle on his skin. His mother would have been overwhelmingly proud.

Pulling back, Dorian finished his morning routine. Moisturizer on his skin, a thin line of kohl around silver eyes, hair styled to perfection, and mustache carefully shaped with his favorite wax. Stepping back into the bedroom, Dorian dressed for the weather, choosing a soft sweater, thick socks, and tight dark jeans. As he passed by his jewelry box on his way out of the bedroom, Dorian paused for a second to fish out a silverite ring from the box. It was the twin to the one he wore on the middle finger of his left hand, with a single word engraved on the inside.

Amatus.

The ring slid easily onto his left ring finger, fitting comfortably and clinking cheerfully against its twin. Dorian twisted the ring, remembering a time when he thought he’d never take it off. Without thinking, he brought them both to his lips, pressing a kiss upon the silverite metal.
Once he was ready, Dorian headed downstairs to pull on his long coat and lace up his boots, listening to the light tread of steps above him, making the wooden floorboards creak.

“Are you ready to go, Cole?” Dorian asked aloud, letting his voice carry through the quiet halls of his townhouse.

Dorian didn’t stick around for a reply, but Cole was already waiting for him in the backseat of his car before Dorian even finished locking the front door. Cole merely nodded as Dorian got into the car, his face turned towards the window, watching the neighborhood pass by as Dorian drove. Neither of them spoke a word, there was no need.

There was coffee shop a half mile from the townhouse, an easy walk in the warmer months, but a necessary drive in the winter. The shop was great favorite of Dorian’s, brewing some of the best Tevinter coffee outside of Vint Town and they made a proper hot chocolate with spices and little sugar.

The coffee shop was as busy as usual with a press of people on their way to work pick up some caffeine and others with more flexible schedules trying to stake out a table to setup their laptops and tablets. Dorian was lucky to have snagged a table situated in front of the large picture window that afforded a pretty view of the snow covered garden behind of the shop. Chilly air leaked through the glass, forcing Dorian to keep his coat on, but a server came by quickly with his order, bringing Dorian a hot drink to help fight the discomfort.

He had ordered a rich, dark coffee with a little steamed milk for himself and a second drink, a latte with overly sweet hazelnut syrup, which sat across from Dorian and in front of the empty chair at the table. Dorian also got a large poppy seed muffin for breakfast, slicing it in half and putting his half on a napkin, while pushing the plate next to the extra drink. The morning slipped by as Dorian sipped on his drink, picked at his muffin while reading the newspaper, and the latte across from him cooled, remaining untouched. Dorian took out the Sudoku page of the newspaper and laid it next to the latte.

Partway through his breakfast, he was interrupted by a young man in an ill-fitted suit asked Dorian for the extra chair, oblivious of the drink, paper, and half muffin in front of it. But the young man turned away with a sort of dazed look as Cole whispered to him, unnoticed, “It’s occupied.”

Dorian was interrupted a second time when a hand lightly touched his shoulder, startling him for a moment.

“Young man.” A kindly elven lady with faded vallaslin on her face and white hair addressed him. “Whoever stood you up is a fool.”

Dorian could only stare up at the lady, unsure of how to respond.

“You certainly deserve better,” the elderly elf continued. “I say, unless your date has a damn good excuse for leaving you here, drop them. Especially if they’re a shem.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Dorian managed to say, the muscles of his face ached as he kept a neutral expression. “I appreciate the thought.”

The lady nodded, obviously satisfied, and slowly walked away, leaning heavily on a cane.

Once she was out of sight, Dorian let out a soft laugh and his gaze shifted to the empty seat across from him. “I do believe she said the same thing last year, isn’t that right, amatus?”

“He’s insulted,” Cole’s voice drifted from behind of Dorian, where he was sitting at the next table
and busy fiddling with a napkin. “He would never stand you up.”

The ghost of a smile hovered over Dorian’s lips. “I know.”

After breakfast, Dorian drove into Vint Town where the Wintersend market was in full swing. Withonly two weeks until Wintersend, the market was packed with a bustle of shoppers despite it beinga weekday. The market was a long stretch of several rows of vendors under the cover of a largepavilion in the center of the district. As many of the vendors and shoppers were immigrants fromTevinter, there were outdoor heaters keeping everyone warm, which Dorian greatly appreciated ashe strolled past the stalls.

The bright colors of the wares, the warm smells of spice and roasting meats, and the sound of sharpTevene being batted back and forth between shoppers and sellers reminded Dorian sharply of themarkets in Minrathous. Only the ice and wind betrayed the illusion.

An antique abacus at a stall caught Dorian’s eye, its high polished obsidian beads set in a strong,oak frame drew him in. The small item had a hefty weight to it as he picked it up and the blackbeads slid smoothly along the wooden dowels.

“It would make a lovely gift,” the vendor at the stall, a short woman with salt and pepper hair, toldDorian in crisp and fluent Tevene with a strong northern accent. “You look like a smart man and Ibet your girlfriend is just as smart as you. She’d like it.”

“My husband is a math professor,” Dorian corrected automatically, allowing himself the slip of thepresent tense just for the day.

Her dark eyes widened in her brown face before they softened in understanding. “Was wonderingwhat a posh looking Altus like you was doing in Skyhold,” she said with a sympathetic smile andthen offered, “I’ll give you a bargain on it.”

“There’s no need.” He pulled out the bills from his wallet and placed them in her thin, crinkledhand, and in exchange he received the abacus, wrapped in white tissue paper and placed carefullyin a paper bag.

“He’d like it,” Cole murmured. “He likes the order and the rules, finding answers in the numbers,mysteries solved by balance and symmetry. Neat, orderly, less messy than magic.”

“That’s his opinion,” Dorian replied. “Come now and make yourself useful, Cole, and hold mybag.”

Dorian and Cole continued weaving through the market, stopping as items caught Dorian’s fancy.He found a silk scarf for Lavellan, Tevinter chocolates for Sera, an old and dormant rune forDagna, hot sauce for Cullen, candy for Cole, and a few trinkets for his staff at work. An old,cracked leather book on the Fade drew Dorian’s eye and his wallet, making him recall the wayAdaar’s eyes lit up as he touched the old books at Dorian’s library. He also found a small snowglobe with a miniature Hivernal high dragon perched on a little mountain. Shaking it, tiny flakesand glitter swirled in the globe around the dragon and its mountain.

It was downright tacky, so Dorian bought the stupid thing for Bull.

For lunch, Dorian stopped at one of his favorite food vendors, ran by an older man who had a giftfor making some of the most delicious roasted spiced meats Dorian had eaten outside of Tevinter.He ordered a serving of lamb on top of a pile of fluffy rice. The food was reasonably priced, filling,and the portions were more than generous, and a single serving could easily feed two people.
Dorian ate half of it.

“He wanted chicken,” Cole complained, poking at the leftover rice with a plastic fork.

“Next time he can wait in line,” Dorian retorted, eyeing the long line of hungry shoppers that he was just standing in.

Cole left the portion of lamb and rice alone, but he seemed interested in frosted white cakes in the shape of bunnies, so Dorian bought him two. He also purchased a package of cookies with a strong anise flavor that he didn’t care for, but once held a prominent place in his cupboards years before.

“He doesn’t understand that it tastes of sickness,” Cole commented upon the cookies. “In bed, sweat beading on my forehead, cough burns my lungs, thick black syrup stuck in my throat. Where is Mother? Father? But there’s only Nana, her ears sharp, missing teeth like dark windows, her hands cool, kind and healing.”

“That and anise flavored anything is disgusting,” Dorian added.

It was almost one by the time Dorian finished his shopping and secured the bags in the trunk of his car in a nearby parking lot. But instead of getting into his vehicle, Dorian wandered over to Imperium Park, which was the jewel of the district. It was a lovely park in any other season with acres of land, a lake, a popular playground and it sported a very fine Tevinter garden that was at its best in the fall when its colors were rich and vibrant. In the winter, everything was still, silent, and dead.

These days, Dorian didn’t visit the park much, but he had spent a great deal of time there in the past. He walked those grounds, hand in hand with his husband, always comparing what flora looked like Tevinter and what was blatantly too Fereldan. He spent countless hours on long, winding walks on pathways, over bridges, watching sunsets, stopping to picnic, and never tiring of it or each other.

He squeezed his left hand as he walked up to a bridge arching over a narrow point in the lake. Both rings dug into his skin, clinking against each other softly.

Dorian paused at the midway point of the bridge, staring down at the ice cold lake. The water was dark and blue below him, hiding its true and deceptive depth with ice clinging around the edges of the shore. Several years ago, Dorian recalled hearing on the news that someone had jumped into the lake on a dare during the winter and had perished for the effort. Dorian gripped the bridge’s railing, the frosty metal stinging his dry hands.

“The first year, you wanted to go to him.” Cole sat on the railing, his head bowed and his pale eyes were fixed on Dorian’s hands.

“Yes, I did,” Dorian acknowledged softly. “You wouldn’t let me.”

“You weren’t ready and he wasn’t ready for you, but you didn’t know that,” Cole mused. “It was better last year. You knew then.”

Dorian let out a quiet snort of laughter. “And how does this year compare?”

“Better,” Cole acknowledged. “The pain will never stop, but it’s getting better. They help, heal, mend. Large, grey hands, so gentle with each touch. Warm and open hearts, just enough room for one more. Whispered words of love. Sweetheart. Beautiful. Kadan. It doesn’t hurt like it did.”

Sucking in a long breath, cold air burning his throat, Dorian nodded in agreement. “They help.”
“Adaar wants to make you smile, your laugh dances across his skin, it makes him want and need. The Iron Bull wants to shoulder the responsibility and keep you safe, secure, let nothing hurt or bleed ever again.”

Dorian shifted his weight, his heart thudding in his chest in rapid bursts. “You know I don’t like it when you talk about people like that.”

“Feels like invading their privacy, corners of the mind overturned and invaded. But they don’t mind, they want you to know.”

Dorian let go of the railing and tore his eyes from the water, say, “Let’s get going, I still need to go to the florist.”

He purchased a large bouquet of Crystal Grace at a florist’s shop not far from the park before heading back to his car and driving towards Haven University. Dorian watched through the windshield as the Vint Town district gave way to other neighborhoods, like the small, vibrant Antivan community he drove through, which was not far from the Rivaini enclave, and then through a district simply called the Marches, which was composed of several groups of Free Marchers living close together. He and Felix never intended to stay in Skyhold forever, they discussed moving to Antiva or finding well-paying university jobs in Nevarra. Plans that never came into fruition.

“Hard to imagine leaving Skyhold now, amatus,” Dorian observed as Haven University soon came into view. “Too many good friends and memories.”

Cole sat in the backseat with the flowers in his lap. “He was worried you’d leave and fade away, with nobody to notice or stop you.”

“Well, thankfully moving is a huge hassle that I could not be bothered with.”

Haven University’s campus was subdued in the winter hush. Students were sequestered away in the warm buildings, attending class and studying for upcoming exams before the Wintersend break. The main quad in the center of the university was left mostly empty and the lawn was covered in a layer of undisturbed snow with just a few people shuffling along the sidewalks, darting from building to building. Only Dorian lingered outside as he walked up to Frostbacks Hall, which housed the Department of Mathematics, without even Cole to accompany him.

“He likes to speak with you in private,” was all Cole said before he wandered off. Dorian knew he’d eventually make his way back to his apartment in Varric’s attic, or, if the afternoon ended poorly, back to the townhouse.

In front of the building there was a small tree and a white marble bench covered in snow. The tree would bloom in the spring, covered in delicate white blossoms and new green leaves, but it was bare in the winter with the exception of little colorful ribbons tied to the barren branches to mark the day. Bending down, Dorian brushed the snow off of the base of the tree, revealing a bronze plaque in the ground with raised lettering that simply read:

_In Memory of Dr. Felix of House Alexius, Professor of the Department of Mathematics and Beloved Member of Haven University’s Community_

Dorian laid the bouquet of flowers on the plaque and straightened back up. “One day I’ll be able to make my proper respects to your urn in Tevinter, amatus, but this will have to do until then. I suppose you aren’t alone today though, I have no doubt that your parents are going through the proper rituals.”
Dorian had once burned with anger and grief, unable to accept that he couldn’t do something as simple as visit his husband’s urn in Tevinter. With Gereon threatening to strike him from House Alexius and losing all the protections that came with the title, and his parents were not above underhanded methods to bring him to heel at the time, Dorian’s friends presented a united front on convincing him not making the pilgrimage to the Alexius family plot to pay his respects. Reluctantly, Dorian had yielded to their better wisdom, but it was the bitterest of concessions.

Instead, all Dorian had to honor Felix was a tree and a bench to lay his flowers down onto. He had a well-meaning plaque that did little to summarize what Felix meant to Dorian and everyone else who had the pleasure of knowing Felix. He had the blistering reminder that because of his situation, his parents’ interference and Gereon’s continued anger, he could not perform the simplest of rites that a spouse should do.

Clearing his throat, Dorian continued on, “Three years today, amatus. Maker’s breath, it’s hard to imagine that so much time has already passed. I still miss you every single day, but it’s … It’s better. It hurts less and I can bear it. I’m actually happy again, but I think you know that.”

His eyes stung fiercely and he had to clench his hands to keep them from shaking.

“What I wouldn’t give …” His voice trailed off. “Well, I suppose there’s no use in that, is there? But I …” Shutting his eyes, Dorian took a deep and calming breath. “Don’t worry about me, amatus. Truly, don’t. Our friends keep an eye on me and I’m being well taken care of. Adaar and Bull love me and I love them, so you needn’t worry, amatus.”

Moving away from the tree and plaque, Dorian cleared the snow from the bench and sat down. He didn’t notice the way the cold seeped through his coat and jeans, making its way under his skin. His mind was too occupied, too full of what once was.

He couldn’t count the hours he and Felix spent sitting on the quad’s lawn, at the very spot where the bench currently sat, having lunch, studying, or grading papers. Felix always brought a blanket because Dorian refused to sit on the grass, keeping it up in his office after he was hired by the university. But even when Dorian was a student at the Magi Circle College and Felix was studying at Skyhold University, Felix would come up to Haven’s campus with a blanket tucked under his arm along with lunch, making sure that Dorian took a break from his studies to eat.

It hurt every time to think that they’d never sit on that lawn together again. They’d never go back to the Alexius summer home on an Antivan white sand beach or get to tour through Nevarra as they had always dreamed. Their talks about starting a family were silenced forever. There were too many things that would never happen again or were left undone.

A shadow suddenly passed over Dorian, startling him out of his spiral of grief. Adaar appeared in front of Dorian, wrapped in a large blue coat, bundled up in a woolly scarf, and looking at Dorian softly with his large green eyes.

“Hey, kadan.”

Adaar sat down next to Dorian on the small bench, their arms brushing together and their knees knocking against one another. His hand found Dorian’s instantly, their fingers were interlaced together. The contact instantly soothed the old ache in Dorian’s chest and helped to unravel some of the pain that the day brought.

He hadn’t expected to see Adaar all day, having already made his excuses about how busy he would be to Adaar and Bull. Instead of his usually warm greetings, all Dorian could say was,
“What are you doing here?”

“What are you doing here?” Adaar replied, unaffected by the rudeness of Dorian’s salutation. “She said you usually take this day to yourself, but that you’d probably end up here. I just … Well, I didn’t want you to be alone and Bull would be here too, but we found out too late for him to get a substitute for his class.”

“I wasn’t alone, Cole spent the day with me,” Dorian supplied.

“Yeah, Sera said that was probably worse than being alone.” Adaar gave him a half smile before it faded as he added, “I can leave if you want. Just say the word and I’m gone, though I can’t guarantee that Bull isn’t going to come looking for you after school lets out. But you don’t have to be alone. We can do whatever you want. If you’ve got things to do, I’ll come with you, or if you want to go home and let me hold you, I’m always up for that.”

Dorian wasn’t sure what to say. The anniversary of Felix’s death was a day where no one approached him, except for Cole, who had no boundaries. Everyone else left Dorian alone, giving Dorian his space to grieve. He took full advantage of a day to go back to the places where he and Felix went, to sit in the home he once shared with his husband, and to think about all of his regrets and things left undone.

“Come home with me,” Dorian’s voice cracking as he pleaded. The thought of going home by himself and confronting the empty rooms, the space bereft of life, suddenly felt unbearable.

Adaar squeezed Dorian’s hand. “Of course. I can ride with you, I took the light rail into work.”

“Yeah, ok. We can go now.”

“I don’t want to rush you, we can stay for as long as you like.”

“It’s no rush, I would rather like to get out of the cold,” Dorian stood up and brushed off the bits of snow clinging to his coat. “Besides, if Felix wanted me to prostrate myself for hours on end at his memorial, then he would have passed in the summer.” Reaching up, Dorian touched one of the bare branches of the tree, smiling with fondness. “You always did enjoy being difficult, didn’t you, amatus?”

The last word got caught in Dorian’s throat, realizing that he had spoken aloud to Felix. But Adaar didn’t comment on it, didn’t give him a look other than to smile kindly.

“Amatus is an endearment in Tevene, right?” Adaar asked curiously.

“Oh, yes, something akin to kadan in Qunlat.”

“I like it. It’s a nice word.”

Dorian started to head back towards his car as Adaar got up from the bench, but paused when he didn’t hear Adaar’s immediate footsteps behind of him. Turning around, he caught the sight of Adaar bending down towards the plaque and placing a small flower made of folded, pink paper next to the bouquet of Crystal Grace Dorian left.

Adaar caught his stare and shrugged his wide shoulders. “It felt rude not to bring anything and I didn’t think I’d have time to pick up flowers.”

“Felix would’ve liked it.”
The drive back to the townhouse was quiet with just the meditative rumble of wheels on the pavement and the slow draw of Adaar’s breath. Adaar’s hand found its way to Dorian’s knee, his palm cradling the joint and just the weight seemed to anchor Dorian down, kept him present instead of wandering off towards fading memories.

Dorian was enormously relieved that Adaar came back to the townhouse with him, that he didn’t have to come home by himself and face its emptiness. Drifting towards the kitchen, Dorian put down all of his purchases from the market on the kitchen island and quickly laid his hands on one of his pricier bottles of Tevinter wine and asked, “Would you like a drink?”

“Oh, sure.” Adaar leaned against the countertop of the island and his hands started poking through the brown paper packages.

“Don’t snoop through there! Those are presents for Wintersend,” Dorian scolded as he pulled out the wine cork with a sharp pop that echoed off the high ceiling of the kitchen.

But Adaar was already pulling something out of one of the bags, the small package of the anise flavored cookies Dorian bought. His lips pulled back into a full grin and his green eyes were lit up in excitement. “I love these things! Krem always buy them at the Tevinter grocery store he goes to. Can I have one?”

“Please, eat all of them if you will, I’m not even sure why I bought them in the first place,” Dorian insisted. He poured a generous amount of the dark red liquid into each wine glass and pushed Adaar’s serving towards him.

“Thanks!” Adaar was already pulling apart the crinkly plastic packaging and the heavy scent of anise made Dorian snort in disgust. He stared in an achingly familiar horror as Adaar chomped down on a cookie, its crumbs spreading on the kitchen island.

“I, uh, I invited you over here, but I don’t …” Dorian brought the wine glass to his mouth and took a long drink, barely tasting the alcohol running over his tongue.

Adaar swirled his glass on the countertop, the wine sloshing up the sides of the glass as he munched on a second cookie. “What do you usually do on this day?”

Dorian shrugged and smiled weakly. “I do the things that Felix and I usually did together, go get breakfast at our favorite coffee place, shopping at the Wintersend market for presents for our friends, get lunch, and stroll through Imperium Park. Then I lay flowers at his memorial at the university since his ashes are in Tevinter. Everything else after that …”

He looked down at his glass of wine, the dark pool reflecting the lights of the kitchen. His memories of those past anniversaries of Felix’s death were blurred by the bottles of Tevinter wine he would consume upon returning to the townhouse. Dorian could barely recall the taste of home sitting bitterly in his mouth and the heavy pain in his heart when he cried out his grief in his empty bed.

“Everything else after that is not worth repeating this year,” Dorian concluded, tipping his glass of wine to his lips and draining its contents.

“If you have no ideas, I have one.” Adaar took Dorian’s hand and tugged him away from the kitchen island and towards the living room, abandoning the wine.

He led Dorian to the couch and sat down, swinging his legs up onto the cushions with the armrest to his back. Then he pulled Dorian onto his lap, grabbing the throw blanket off of the back of the
couch and laid it over them before folding his arms over Dorian, holding him close. Dorian felt thoroughly swaddled with his body wrapped up in the blanket, pressed against Adaar’s warm chest and his head tucked under Adaar’s chin.

“I always feel like a child whenever you or Bull hold me like this.” It was an empty protest as Dorian stretched out his legs and relaxed in Adaar’s embrace. “I’m still getting used to being the small one in a relationship,” he huffed.

Adaar chuckled, squeezing Dorian in his arms. “Were you much taller than Felix?”

“Not really, I was only a little taller than Felix, but I did enjoy lording over him about it.”

“Tell me about him,” Adaar murmured as he nuzzled Dorian’s hair.

Dorian’s chest tightened briefly, but it slowly unwound, the tension bled out of him as he started to talk. “What can I say? Tevinter could use more mages like Felix, always putting others before himself. He was always that way, even when we were teenagers, which is probably why I pretty much fell in love with him right away.”

He could almost feel Adaar’s smile upon his scalp.

“He was actually a bit like you. A serious and respected academic, a much beloved professor, he instantly became everyone’s friend, and he was a giant dork.”

There was a short, loud snort from Adaar before he added, “Don’t forget that we’re both wild about you.”

“You both have excellent taste in men, I’ll give you that,” Dorian smiled.

“We’re basically twins,” Adaar teased.

“Though you are a far more talented mage than Felix ever was, he possessed very little ability for magic. It made him an outsider in our social class and even his own grandfather gave Felix and his parents grief over it. It’s funny how Tevinter has progressed through the years, yet has stayed the same in many respects.” His smile faded. “Felix was eager to leave Tevinter and to do his graduate studies in the south as all the best schools in our homeland are, unsurprisingly, focused on the study of magic. Even the best universities for soporati in Tevinter cannot compare to mid-level schools in the south.”

“He was probably eager to leave Tevinter because he also knew that the two of you could openly be together in Ferelden.”

“There was that incentive, true.” Dorian slouched further into Adaar’s embrace, his body on the edge of being too warm, but he loved it. “He caused the first scandal of his life by running off with me, but his parents didn’t care, they were good like that. All that Gereon and Livia cared about was if Felix was happy, even if it meant running off to another country with Gereon’s apprentice.”

“I can imagine it was an exciting time for you two.” Adaar’s tone turned wistful. “Pining for each other for so long, then getting to finally express your love and moving to Skyhold so you could be together properly.”

“Terrifying is a better way to describe it.”

The words suddenly stopped and while Dorian liked to talk about Felix, liked having other people remember him and keeping his memory alive, Dorian didn’t want to pick at old hurts anymore. He
knew that was where he was heading if he continued delving into their early struggles, of Dorian’s interfering parents, and a hundred little regrets. He didn’t want to spend the entire day stuck in the past.

“Tell me about how your research is going,” Dorian said, changing the subject.

There was a short pause and then Adaar complied. His voice carried, filling every nook and cranny of Dorian’s ears and his home, making the place feel more alive than it did in the morning. He closed his eyes, listening to Adaar’s story about how his research assistant almost lost the results of their latest experiment and letting the sound of Adaar’s voice wash over him and take him away.

Sleep came easier than it should have, but Dorian didn’t fight it and happily slid into unconscious until sometime later when Bull’s deep voice sank into Dorian’s brain, rousing him into something resembling awareness.

“Dinner should be here in about an hour, I called delivery from that curry house he likes. Want me to move him to the bedroom, kadan?”

“No, he’s good where he is.”

“How was this afternoon?” The end of the couch sank down and a large hand rested on Dorian’s ankle.

“It wasn’t nearly as bad as Sera made it out to be. Dorian seemed a little distant, but ok.”

There was a lull before Bull replied softly, “I’m sorry I couldn’t be there.”

“Don’t be. Everything was last minute and you have a responsibility to your class and I’m the one with a flexible schedule. If I really needed you, I would have called the front office,” Adaar answered kindly before adding, “I think we would have liked Felix.”

“A smart, hot guy, who loved Dorian? Yeah, we definitely would’ve liked him.”

“He would have hated you,” Dorian mumbled as fingers stroked his hair and made him almost purred at the sensation as he buried his face deeper against Adaar’s chest. “You would’ve flirted with me in front of him and Felix would’ve been instantly jealousy.”

The hand on Dorian’s ankle gave him a comforting squeeze. “Hey, I wouldn’t have given him a reason to be jealous,” Bull protested, “I would’ve flirted with him too.”

Dorian just snorted and didn’t resist when Bull cupped his face as he leaned over to give Dorian a kiss, but he was surprised when Bull gripped him by his arms and dragged him out of Adaar’s lap, telling him, “Come over here.”

“I was quite comfortable there!” Dorian yelped as he was manhandled away from his very happy spot on Adaar.

“You’ve been crushing Adaar for at least two hours.”

“Impossible, the only one here who could crush him is you.”

“Haha, very funny.” Bull rolled his eye at Dorian, but his smile was warm as was his hug as he gathered Dorian into his arms, letting Adaar stand up and stretch out after being trapped under Dorian for so long.
Dorian was surprised at his relief to have both Bull and Adaar there. Bull’s easy going nature helped to balance out Adaar’s gentle concern, making him feel cared for, but not smothered. Just the sound of their voices took the edge off of the painful quiet of the townhouse and the touch of their hands upon his body reminded Dorian that he wasn’t alone, that there was no need to endure this day, or any other day, on his own anymore.

The night was cold, prickling Dorian’s exposed skin, though his palms were slightly warmed by the cup of royal elfroot tea in his hands as he sat out on the back deck, the partial moon providing a meager amount of light. He sat cross legged on his lawn chair, dressed in sweatpants, thick socks, and an old sweatshirt. The steam from the mug curled up in the air like a wisp before tapering off into the night as Dorian kept it hot through a steady application of heat.

It wasn’t lost upon Dorian that he had abandoned his warm and full bed, crammed with the overheated bodies of his two Qunari boyfriends, in favor of sitting alone in the cold and dark. But he needed a moment of privacy, to get a few things off of his chest.

Somewhere inside the townhouse, a clock chimed out twelve times.

“Made it through the day, amatus,” Dorian murmured into his cup of tea, “but this year was easier, they helped quite a bit.” Taking a deep breath, Dorian started, “I want you to know that if I don’t talk to you as often, it’s not because I’ve forgotten you or that I love you any less, but … It’s just because I don’t need to. I don’t think I need it like I did before and besides, Bull and Adaar are loud enough as it is, right?”

A weak laugh tumbled from Dorian.

“I also don’t want you to be jealous if I call them amatus. It’s not to lessen the endearment, but merely to express what they mean to me. I can’t keep it bottled up anymore, I know that they know how I feel, but I should know that these things cannot be left unsaid.” Dorian flexed his fingers around the mug. “I think you would understand.”

He took a long sip of the tea, letting it warm him from the inside before setting it aside.

“Sometimes I’ll need you to listen, amatus, but not like before. I just … I just wanted you to know that.”

There was a part of Dorian wished that Cole was there to feed into the illusion that Felix was listening to him, but he didn’t wait, didn’t linger for ghosts anymore, and walked back inside with the intention to return to bed and to his boyfriends. As he stepped inside, Dorian was a little startled to see both Adaar and Bull awake and coming down the stairs from the bedroom. Bull looked more alert with a concerned awareness and Adaar appeared barely conscious.

“Something wrong, sweetheart?” Bull asked softly.

Dorian moved towards them immediately, landing in Bull’s arms first and was keenly aware when Adaar’s arms wrapped around his waist from behind. Dorian found that he was unable to let things go unsaid for another second and he found the voice he had lost on First Day Eve during his fumbling attempts at expressing himself.

“I love you, amatus. I love both of you.”

“Tell us something we don’t know, kadan,” Bull laughed gently, his lips brushing Dorian’s forehead.
“We love you too,” came Adaar’s sleepy voice, repeating what they had given so freely before.

There was a deep sense of relief just from saying those simple words, of letting himself express what was in his heart. For so long Dorian had feared that he’d never find anyone who loved him like Felix did and that he’d never love anyone as he did his husband. But Dorian was happy to be proven wrong twice over.

Chapter End Notes

I somehow finally finished this! Though I do have a sequel or two planned to tie up some loose threads/things alluded to. We'll see how that goes :)

As always, thank you for all of your kind and sweet comments, and for sticking with this monster of a story. Now off to the next project!

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