"There are two kinds of pride, both good and bad. 'Good Pride' represents our dignity and self-respect. 'Bad Pride' is the deadly sin of superiority that reeks of conceit and arrogance." - John C. Maxwell

Thirty-two-year-old artist, Breeyanna Grant finds herself thrust into a game she barely remembers, except for one thing - Solas is Fen'Harel, and he is a liar.

Stuck in this strange world by an ancient, she must now find a way to live through Thedas' 'boot camp' and save everyone from the Dread Wolf.
Elven translations are from Elven DAI Translator at lingojam.com/ElvenDAI and Elven DAI spreadsheets at docs.google.com/spreadsheets
Bioware for all cannon dialog, characters, and the general world we all know and love called Thedas.
Prologue

It doesn't matter.

I gazed out over the soft ripples of water while shoving my long hair out of my face.

I knew better than to say yes...why didn't I just listen to myself and say no? Am I still trying to please parents that could give a shit less what I do?

Sighing heavily, shaking my head, I feel like I am in the wrong time... that I shouldn't even be here, I feel it... something is fundamentally broken inside me – and God, I am just so fucking tired of it all. If I could go somewhere this shit didn't exist... that would be great.

I didn't have it in me to appreciate the way the moon sent a dazzling silver reflection over the water's surface, or how the stars twinkled brightly in the ebony night's sky. My mind is racing, running, screaming – reaching up with clenched fists and hold my head tightly while my mind replayed the conversation with Seth over and over again - mocking me.

"I cannot live this way... not with you, I'm sorry. I just don't love you Bree, and I can't marry someone I don't love. It's not you - it's me, your great. I know you will find someone new."

It was almost comical how hard he was trying to convince me of how unhappy he was and how fabulous I was. Snorting with that thought, I shook my head.

"Then go Seth," I told him calmly.

God, he looks so relieved when I tell him to go. He grabbed his jacket and the keys to his car from the counter before turning back to look at me with his hand on the doorknob. All of this is done before I could even blink.

"I really am sorry Bree," he said again before closing the door behind him.

I watch the door close and mutter softly, "so am I."

I will endure this new failure... as I have done countless other times before.

What is wrong with me? Why don't I care about this, about him... shouldn't I care? Wiping again at the tears of failure that fell, I take a deep shuddering breath of the warm summer air and stare at the wetness on my hands angrily.

"I can't even cry over a broken heart, no that is what other women do," I mock myself angrily. "Me, I cry over my fucking pride, my failure. Jesus, I'm pathetic," I say aloud bitterly into the darkness. Closing my eyes, digging deep into the dark silence I know will comfort me, I just need to push it back down deep: I am a survivor, I can endure, I remind myself. Pride can be patched, my heart can't. That reminder sobered me and the tears came to a stop.

Finding my dark, welcoming silence that brought me comfort since childhood from enduring a judgemental mother and a demanding father, I mentally embraced it to me. Wrapping myself in the sudden quiet of my mind, I wipe the last of the tears that would ever be shed for this lapse of judgment from my face, straighten my shirt and shove my hair out of my face again before turning away from the view of the moon kissed water I hadn't even looked at.

Closing the French doors that led to the deck behind me, I walk by the blinking answering machine
and go straight by it for my liquor cabinet. Pulling out a bottle of Glenfiddich, I measure out about three fingers of the eighteen-year-old scotch into a glass and throw in a couple of ice cubes before taking a healthy swallow. Closing my eyes, I embrace the burn rushing down my throat to warm my belly, reminding me that I was still alive as I press the glass to my forehead. My phone rings – again, and I stare at it as if it is going to jump out and bite me. Ignoring it, I take another drink and stare absently at the wall as the machine finally kicks on.

"Hey, Bree... I uh... I just heard about you and Seth. You should have called me. If you need someone, ya know... to talk to. Well – shit, just call me if you need me... Oh, it's Shanda."

A humorless laugh escapes as I stare at the machine. I will not, 'need' you Shanda, I thought annoyed with the message. Everyone comes out of the woodwork and pretends to be your friend just to get the gossip.

"If you already know then it was probably you, he was fucking. I mean we just broke up today... Shanda. Dumb box," I mutter angrily, glaring towards the phone. The sudden urge to rip the fucking thing out of the wall is strong, and I take another drink.

The machine clicked off, and I set my glass down and move to turn the volume of the machine down and the ringer to the phone off. Picking up my drink again, I walk into the living room and sit in one of the overstuffed armchairs. Gazing around the room, I suddenly realize that there is nothing that reflects even a small history with Seth. Well...I guess that could be considered convenient, I joke with myself morbidly before draining the last of the scotch and set the glass down deciding sleep was in order before choosing to have another drink.

The sounds of the birds warning calls in the canopy of pines overhead went a long way to soothe the anger I felt towards myself, even in my dream state.

Move

My mind told me, and so I did. I moved through the forest with a single focus on keeping the calming silence I held so tightly to myself for sanities sake for so long. Moving until I reached the end of the forest, I saw a small flash of green light from the corner of my eye and turned to investigate.

What is that my mind questioned at the site of the small tendril of green smoke. It sat in the mouth of a cave, beckoning me closer like a finger curling towards me, calling to me. I stepped closer to get a better look at it feeling almost compelled to do so, and with the extra step closer, I suddenly smell ozone. Like before the rain comes, one of the first odors you notice as the winds pick up and clouds roll in. The sweet, pungent zing permeates my nostrils and somewhere in my subconscious, I realize that this is a very realistic dream, to realistic, I thought and took a small step back from the green smoke inticing me closer to the mouth of the cave.

The green smoke swirled and thickened around my feet. Hurriedly, I try to step even further back out of its reach and feel the cold touch of the green smoke that rapidly grew to a thick fog, wrap tightly around my legs the more I tried to move. It was no longer some see-through thing, it was corporeal, strong, and wrapping itself around me rapidly. Now the feeling of fight or flight was kicking in and I was panicking, fighting against the restraints.

Wake up!

With a scream of fear, I can feel myself being dragged forward into the cave and I fought even
harder. The green fog wrapped around my entire body now, I was hogtied by fog and it dragged me in roughly while I continued to scream in terror. My eyes dart around desperately looking for anything, while my lungs heaved with exertion and fear. I scan the area again and find only blinding darkness.

*I don't know why, but I don't think I am still in my dream – so where? Some kind of in-between place?* I wrack my brain trying to think of where I am, and why I can't wake up.

Mythal listened to her mental comments and folded her arms unable to stop the laughter from escaping. *Oh, she is more than ready to return, and will do quite nicely,* she thought suddenly pleased with herself.

Dark laughter echoed around me, sending streaks of fear through my blood as the sound bounced around the darkness.

"Still ever the clever child I see."

I jolted at the sound of the husky voice.

"You have nothing to fear from me daughter of the people," I hear echoing around me.

"People? What people... I don't know any people. What do you want?" I say aloud while my eyes look for where the voice is coming from. Somehow it is oddly familiar, but I just couldn't place it.

"Oh child, you certainly have people. But it is finally the time that you must return to them. I brought you back so you may help them. Will you do this?"

"Brought me back? To where? What happened?" I ask quickly while my eyes squint at the sudden light. A woman walked towards me through the darkness, the light at her back so I couldn't see her clearly but only her outline.

"Only what needed to be done at the time. Our people were warring with each other, enslaving them to gain power. Most of us became drunk on our own power, and as you well know it corrupts."

My eyes and head follow the woman warily now that I could finally see her, while she walked around me in gilded armor. I quickly notice the sharped tipped, elongated ears and recognize what she is. *Why am I dreaming about a sodding elf?* Even though I am thinking that there is something very familiar about her.

"How would I know it corrupts? I wouldn't, so why should I help you fix something that has absolutely nothing to do with me?"

Again her husky laughter echoed in the darkness raising gooseflesh on my arms and I rubbed at them briskly.

"There was a time you would never have questioned me, it is good to see you have grown lethal'lan. What was done cannot be undone and he would never have done what needed to be done had you not been taken from him. I am sorry about that. I never meant to keep you away from your own for so long, but it could not be avoided," she offered cryptically. She stopped to gaze into my eyes with her own cat-like yellow ones and stroked my forehead almost affectionately.
"What in the hell is this chick talking about? He who? Oh, my God, I am losing my fucking mind."

"I would not know, I do not remember anything you are even talking about."

The mystery woman laughed at me as my eyes stared at her cautiously.

"You have not lost your mind, that I can assure you. Soon, child, everything will become clear to you. I would not send you into this world completely unprepared. I apologize for the pain you must endure reclaiming what I took from you, but it cannot be avoided," she said calmly.

My body stiffened with her words, and suddenly I felt the warmth of something ripple over and through my body. It was agony to have information abruptly thrust into my mind that focus soon changed when I felt other changes burning through me as well. Gripping my stomach and curling into a fetal position it felt as if my whole body was on fire from the inside. Suffering on the ground in pain, I cry out and feel her hand gently caress my cheek.

"You must find a way to help them and him, or they will surely perish, and so will you, dear child."

My eyes slid slowly closed as my body surrendered to the awaiting darkness.
My eyes flash open with the sudden sharp pain running up my left arm. Trying to shake the fog that had settled over my senses, I look around at my surroundings. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw a flash of green light reflect off of the damp rock I was laying on that coincided with another sudden spasm of pain in my hand.

That isn’t a good sign.

I try again to lift my hand to look at it, but find that it and its mate are restrained with heavy metal shackles.

That is definitely not a good sign.

Groaning, I roll onto my side to sit up. Trying to get my bearings, I glance around now that I feel a little more cognizant and notice the guards, all with swords pointing at me.

Seriously? I’m chained to a damn floor, and you’re holding me at sword point. Wait, sword point? Fuck it! I have landed in another damn dream like the last one wasn’t weird enough.

Flinching at the sound of a door ricocheting off a wall, I stare at the opening of the only hallway leading out of here from where the sound echoed from. I watch light flicker, and shadows dance as two bodies move swiftly down the stairs to where I’m being held. The sound of metal clinking against metal getting louder as the shadow figures drew closer.

Why is this familiar? I must have had this dream before.

I watch warily as a dark-haired woman stalked through the arched doorway towards me with a cloaked woman following closely behind her.

Wait! No fucking way...no - fucking - way. I knew it! I shouldn’t have started playing that damn game again.

The dark-haired woman I knew to be Cassandra Pentaghast, reached down and grabbed my shirtfront roughly, before snarling into my face.

“Tell me why we shouldn’t kill you now. The Conclave is destroyed. Everyone who attended is dead. Except for you,” she spat in my face angrily.

Well ouch?! I don’t remember my dreams ever getting this real before. I also don’t remember her being this rough with my character either.

Kneeling silently, she grabbed my hand and jerked it up roughly.

“What do you mean, you can’t?” she growled from behind me. Instinctually I flinch away from her expecting her to cuff me in the back of the head.

“I don’t know what that is or how it got there,” I told her.
I follow her with my eyes anxiously, cringing when she grabs the front of my shirt again and yells into my face.

“You’re lying!”

Leliana places her hand on Cassandra’s shoulder in restraint, thank fucking God as I try to pull myself together.

Wake the fuck up now Bree!

“We need her Cassandra,” she says calmly.

Shit! Shit! Shit! Shit! This is not happening. They are actually playing good cop, bad cop. Leliana approach me slowly, with an expression of compassion I know is false but I will cling to a lie for now.

“Do you remember what happened? How this began?” She asked calmly.

I close my eyes to think about the beginning of the game, and finally spit out anxiously.

“I remember running. Things were chasing me. And then… a woman?” Wait…there was a woman…wasn’t there?

“A woman?” Leliana jumps on the information quickly, narrowing her gaze at me.

At any moment I am going to wake up and laugh this whole thing off.

“I…think she reached out to me, but then…” Cassandra moved from her position of leaning against a wall back towards us.

“Go to the forward camp, Leliana. I will take her to the rift.”

Leliana gives me one last piercing gaze with her cold blue eyes, the facade of compassion gone, before she turns on her booted heel, and leaves me alone with Cassandra. I dart a glance at her apprehensively when she walks towards me. She unlocks the shackles, and for a brief moment I let out a breath of relief before she replaces the shackles for rope.

Well, that was short-lived…okay, anytime on the wake up would be fabulous.

“Come, I will show you what has been done,” she says simply. I move to try standing and she helps me by grabbing the rope around my wrists and yanking me up, and I barely hold back a sound of pain from escaping my mouth. I narrow my eyes at her with the action and slowly follow her up the stairs that would lead out of the dungeon.

I had to shield my eyes at the sudden brightness as we emerged from the dark corridor and when I did, I stumbled a little. I continued to shield my eyes from the brightness coming from the open doors that led outside. I could feel the cold air rush over my face making goosebumps that spread down my arms as we got closer to the opening. Walking through the archway, I follow Cassandra’s gaze to the massive hole in the sky.

The Breach – okay, lucid dreaming is great and all, but now would be a really good time to wake up.

“We call it the Breach. It’s a massive rift into the world of demons that grows larger with each passing hour. It’s not the only such rift, just the largest. All were caused by the explosion at the
“conclave.”

“An explosion?” I repeat like an idiot while still staring up at the giant hole in the sky.

“Yes. Unless we act, the breach may grow until it swallows the world.”

I watch as the breach shudders, growing just a bit larger in horror. It also coincides with the sudden flash from the mark on my hand, and with bone-crushing pain, it knocked me to my knees with a cry of surprise.

_I should not be feeling any kind of a pain in a dream, especially the excruciating kind – this can’t be real… can it?_ Cassandra moves swiftly towards me and kneels down to look me in the eye.

“Each time the Breach expands, your mark spreads… and it is killing you. It may be the key to stopping this but there isn’t much time.”

I stare at my hand and I feel a sense of foreboding at what was to come before I glance at Cassandra.

“I understand,” I hear myself say, and wish I could just wake up already.

“Then you’ll…” Cassandra looks at me hopefully.

“I’ll do what I can,” I confirm for her as I move to get up from the ground.

Cassandra smiles at me pleased before helping me up, thankfully this time without dragging me up by the rope around my wrists. I walk along next to her and glance around at the angry stares that threaten violence. My eyes widen as a villager spat at me and called me a ‘murdering knife-ear’.

_wait, what? Oh, come on…I don’t even get to be me?

Cassandra must have seen the look of apprehension settle over my face at the taunts and slurs from the villagers because she began to explain their actions to me as if it was okay for them to be like that.

“They have decided your guilt. They need it. The people of Haven mourn our Most Holy, Divine Justinia, head of the Chantry. The Conclave was hers. It was a chance for peace between mages and templars. She brought their leaders together. Now, they are all dead.”

Soldiers open a gate for them and I can’t help feeling suddenly like Alice falling down the rabbit hole, except Alice will wake up. I am getting the sneaking suspicion I won’t get that lucky.

“We lash out, like the sky. But we must think beyond ourselves, as she did. Until the breach is sealed.” Cassandra turned towards me and grabbed the ropes around my wrist to cut them away. Looking at me with a raised eyebrow, she cut the ropes. “There will be a trial. I can promise no more.”

I stare at her for a moment before nodding my head in understanding. _I mean, what the hell can I say to that?_

“Come it is not far,” she says to me before turning to jog up a hill.

_Oh yes… running – greeeeeat_

I try to take in the scenery, but I soon found that it best to _not_ take it in when we ran by the first dead body. My stomach lurched for a second before I tear my gaze away from it. Three soldiers running down the hill glance at us as they pass. I try to keep my eyes forward, but I am finding it difficult to
look at the massive destruction that I am running towards like some blithering idiot.

The thundering rumble of the breach overhead makes me tense up expectantly. The excruciating pain flashed from palm to shoulder, and I cannot keep my feet beneath me or the sudden cry of pain from escaping. Hitting the ground hard on my knees, I hold my wrist and stare at the mark in the center of my hand.

“Son of a bitch,” I mutter at my hand as if it would listen and not hurt while I try to catch my breath. Looking at the mark closely I notice that red roadmap burns have spider webbed from the center and flipping my hand over it was over the top half as well. *This does not look very good.*

Cassandra walked slowly towards me and held a hand down for me to grab.

“The pulses are coming faster now. The larger the Breach grows, the more rifts appear, the more demons we face.”

She must see the terror in my eyes because she squeezes my shoulder before heading back up the hill. I urge my feet to follow, while my stomach suddenly knots with anxiety. We ran for a little further and soon came to the bridge that I knew would collapse, and I suddenly stop, which makes Cassandra stop.

“What did you stop? Are you okay?” She is gazing at me with concern, but I can hear her impatience.

Shaking my head for a second, I bend over acting like I am exhausted – which isn’t really a lie. I don’t think I have ever hurt this bad or this much in my life. I just need to keep her here long enough for the bridge to fall.

“How did I survive the blast?” I pant convincingly. Thank God the woman took pity on me and gave me a moment to collect.

“They said you… stepped out of a rift, and then fell unconscious. They say a woman was in the rift behind you. No one knows who she was. Everything farther in the valley was laid waste, including the Temple of Sacred Ashes. I suppose you’ll see soon enough.”

I knew she meant for me to pull it together and get moving again, and I stood back up preparing to pretend faint when the bridge collapsed from a fade meteor.

Thank you whatever Gods are listening.

Cassandra stared at where the bridge used to be for a moment with a surprised expression. “Thank the Maker” she breathed, before motioning for me to follow her. “Come, we will have to climb down there to get to the other side.”

I follow her down the steep ravine to the frozen river proud of myself for not falling on my ass when my foot slips. Reaching the bottom, I freeze suddenly in terror at the two demons coming towards us.

“Fuck me,” I yell, while Cassandra calmly pulls her sword from her hip and her shield from her back.

“Stay behind me!” She tells me quickly before slamming the flat of her blade against her shield.

*There has got to be something here that I can use to protect myself...Damn it...isn’t there supposed to be a fucking crate around here?*
I start searching the ground and see only a dead Templar. He was face down on the frozen river, still holding a sword. Running towards him, I pull it from his frozen grasp.

“Sorry guy, but I am going to need to borrow this,” I said mumbling a quick apology to him before turning to help Cassandra. My eyes catch her fighting and when I see the demon coming at me, my legs decided that they didn't want to move.

“Shit! Shit! Shit!” I curse quickly. Tightening my grip on the borrowed sword, I swing it as if I am playing baseball as soon as the thing is close enough for me to hit. Lucky me, I wasn’t always horrible at sports and sliced the thing from gut to gullet. Sadly the way I did it, sprayed demon ichor over my chest. Lovely

“It’s over,” I say pleased with myself even if I am covered in gore.

Cassandra ran towards me with a nervous expression when she saw the large sword in my hand.

“Drop your weapon. Now!” I hear her yell at me.

Dropping the borrowed sword quickly I hold my hands up in the universal ‘please don’t kill me’ sign.

“No problem, I only borrowed it from that guy,” I tell her motioning with my chin to the dead man behind me.

Cassandra sheaths her sword and lets out a heavy sigh.

“I cannot protect you, and I cannot expect you to be defenseless. I should remember that you agreed to come willingly.”

She walked past me to the dead Templar and began removing his belt. The belt had the scabbard and a couple of small daggers on it. Turning back towards me she held it out. “Put this on.”

Taking the belt I wrap it around my waist, cinching it to the last slot in the belt. Picking up the sword from the ground, I slip it into its scabbard and make sure it was as comfortable as I could get it before I realized that I would now be running with an extra ten pounds of metal on me. Marvelous...just fucking marvelous. I should have exercised more, maybe smoked a little less. Oh, focus, shit she is already moving.

“Let’s get moving,” Cassandra says and heads for the other side of the ravine.

Joy

Following behind her, we start climbing up the other side. Everything seemed familiar – yet not. I glance at the burning wagon and shake my head slightly. I don’t remember any of this...I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised. I didn’t play for three years and just started playing again last week. Yes, and when I do wake up, I am burning this fucking game.

“If we flank them, we may gain the advantage,” Cassandra advises me before sliding over the side of an embankment.

“Wha...” I mutter and watch her go. “Oh,” I say quickly as I realize what she wants me to do. I jog to the side and wait for their focus to be on her before I slide down. Getting behind the one left standing, I stab it in the back, thankfully killing it quickly. Cassandra watches me curiously for a moment and points at the sword almost as big as I am.
“Do you know how to use that?”

“You stab things with the pointy end?” I answer with a slight smirk and then shake my head when I see the annoyed expression on her face.

“Sorry, no I don’t know how to use it or any weapon for that matter.” There is a look of complete surprise on her face before she just nods her head at me and sheaths her sword.

Following her, I see the stairs that will lead to where they would meet up with the others, and I felt a tremor of nervousness in my stomach. It is the first of many rifts I am going to have to close. We get to the top of the stairs, and breathing heavy I see the scene.

“Hurry, we must help them,” Cassandra says quickly before jumping down from the short wall.

*That woman has way too much fucking energy.*

My eyes take in the scene for a moment before following her over the small two-foot drop. I stayed back from the main area of fighting and worked on the ones that strayed into my space. Hacking at a large one that has clawed me twice in the arm now, is when I feel a coolness embrace me while I keep swinging at the demon. I don’t even recognize that it should have hit me already and now it is suddenly frozen. Not wanting to look a gift horse in the mouth and with a large, grateful swing over my head, I shatter the demon.

Pleased that it was dead, my victory was short-lived when my left wrist was grasped and I was dragged forward by a cool hand a few feet where he held the marked hand up towards the rift.

“Quickly, before more come through!”

The abruptly spoken words came from beside me. The instant the mark connected, I felt like my arm was on fire. No sooner do I have this feeling it is quickly gone…thankfully. I glance up to see who had roughly grabbed me and recognize the tall, familiar elf.

*This is entirely your fault you son of a bitch!*

My face must have registered some of my feelings because he is now studying me peculiarly.

“What did you do?” I finally ask him, still unable to leave the accusing tone out of it.

“I *did* nothing. The credit is yours.”

I am now staring at him and I can’t stop thinking ‘Mother Fucking Heart-Ripping LIAR’. Taking a cleansing breath and focusing on my hand, I calm myself.

“You mean this,” I say holding up the marked hand.

He is looking at me closely and I can’t stop the small shiver that races up my spine by the blue gaze. *He is a lot better looking than my graphics gave him credit for, I’ll give him that but no more than that.*

“Whatever magic opened the Breach in the sky also placed that mark upon your hand. I theorized the mark might be able to close the rifts that have opened in the Breach’s wake – and it seems I was correct.”

I tear my eyes away from him and focus on the mark. *Nope…nope, nope.* I remind myself quickly, as Cassandra spoke up.
“Meaning it could also close the Breach itself.”

“Possibly, it seems you hold the key to our salvation.”

“Lucky me,” I mutter to myself refusing to look at him again.

“Good to know! Here I thought we’d be ass-deep in demons forever. Varric Tethras; rogue, storyteller, and occasionally unwelcome tagalong.”

I turn towards the voice and actually smile. Out of this whole fucked up mess, I am actually glad to see someone.

“Are you with the Chantry Varric?” I ask him. I know he isn’t but I always loved the dialog of this scene. I feel a small shiver run up my spine at the sound of the liar's laugh, but I still refuse to look at him as he speaks.

“Was that a serious question?”

Varric winks at me understanding that I was teasing.

“Technically I’m a prisoner, just like you.”

I smile at him glad that someone gets the joke when Cassandra speaks up.

“I brought you here to tell your story to the Divine. Clearly, that is no longer necessary.”

Varric looked at Cassandra and cross his arms with a smug grin.

“Yet, here I am. Lucky for you, considering current events.”

I hold my hand out to him.

“Well, we prisoners gotta stick together then. It’s a pleasure to meet you Varric.”

I hear Solas’ slight snort at my words, and I chance a brief look at him finally.

“You may reconsider that stance, in time.”

*He is such a smug bastard sometimes.* I let out a sigh of annoyance with him.

“Aww. I’m sure we’ll become great friends in the valley, Chuckles.”

Cassandra crosses her arms and glares at him.

“Absolutely not. Your help is appreciated, Varric, but…”

Varric stared at her with a smug look.

“Have you been in the valley lately, Seeker? Your soldiers aren’t in control anymore. You need me.”

I covered my mouth hastily when I start giggling at the sound of Cassandra’s disgusted noise. *That is absolutely perfect…I love it!*

“My name is Solas if there are to be introductions. I am pleased to see you still live.”

*Okay, don’t be rude.* I force myself to look up at him now and see that he is studying me oddly.
“He means, ‘I kept that mark from killing you while you slept.’” Varric says teasingly.

“Thank you,” I offer, trying to keep the sarcasm from my voice.

His head tilts slightly, and now he is looking at me closely again.

“Thank me if we manage to close the Breach without killing you in the process.”

He holds my gaze hostage and I am finding it difficult to look away or breathe for that matter. Finally, he releases me and looks to Cassandra, and I found that I could finally breathe again.

“Cassandra, you should know the magic involved here is unlike any I have ever seen. Your prisoner is a mage, but I find it difficult to imagine any mage having such power.”

Wait…what?!

Cassandra stares at me accusingly for not telling her.

“No I am not,” I tell her quickly, and glare at Solas angrily. “Take that back, and tell her you're wrong.”

He looks at me regretfully. “I cannot, for you are a mage. Did you not know da’len?” His expression told me that he had a hard time believing that I wouldn’t know.

Oh…no you don’t old man.

“Da’len? Sure, okay hahren. No, I did not know. I have never had magic before I got this damn thing on my hand.”

Taking a deep breath, I rub my face in frustration. I can feel the knots in my stomach tighten to threatening levels and now I want to be sick. This can’t be happening to me…do not panic…just wake up now stupid.

“Is it possible that something happened when she came out of the rift?” Cassandra asked.

“Possibly, but without further study, it would be hard to know for sure.” He replied simply, studying me while he spoke.

“Understood,” she says with a sigh. Turning towards the path, she motions for everyone to follow. “Come, we must get to the forward camp.”

I start to follow her and heard Varric mutter under his breath.

“Poor kid, she looks like she might be sick.”

I take another cleansing breath and push all the information to the back of my mind. I will worry about it later…after I wake up.

They ran along the river path to the next group of demons, and my stomach dropped at the sight of them. Oh, come on Bree, time to wake up now.

“Demons ahead,” Solas calls out quickly.

“Glad you brought me now Seeker?” Varric quips sarcastically.

I hang back with the guys just in case one comes towards them. I feel the cool blanket lay over me
again, and I shiver before I start stabbing a demon that was trying to attack Solas. With the demon finally dead, I look down at my clothing and sigh disgustedly at the sight of black blood all over me.

“You are Dalish, but clearly away from the rest of your clan. Did they send you here?”

I look at him for a moment ignoring the sudden drop in my stomach as his blue eyes pierce mine. 

*Come on Bree, stop gawking,* and I pull my gaze away nervously.

“I don’t remember,” I tell him honestly. I recognize that he is suspicious of me instantly, and I ignore him following Cassandra.

I stop suddenly to shake my sparking hand and breathe through the sudden pain.

“My magic cannot stop the mark from growing further. For your sake, I suggest we hurry.”

I couldn’t stop myself from the fierce glare I gave him at that moment. 

*I wouldn’t have this fucking thing on my hand if it weren’t for you!*

His look of surprise was enough to remind me what I was doing. *Fool!* I cast my eyes down quickly and just nod my head in understanding.

We start up the next long column of stairs, and I clench my jaw in determination. *Come on lazy ass; get up those steps,* I tell myself as motivation. When we crest the top there is the next little rift in front of the forward camp that makes my hand spark painfully.

“Another rift,” Cassandra calls out.

“We must seal it quickly,” Solas tells me as he throws a barrier around the group. I feel the cool blanket suddenly lay over me and I realize that it was his barrier I had been feeling. I follow Cassandra and take the demon off to the left attacking soldiers guarding the door. Looking around I notice all the demons are dead when Solas yells at me.

“Hurry! Use the mark!”

I hold my hand up and felt the instant connection. The sudden flash of fire took my breath away and almost knocked me to the ground. Bending over to catch my breath when it closed with a loud pop, I saw the end of his staff and his feet standing beside me.

“Does it pain you to use the mark?” He asked me curiously.

I stare at the ground and then snort as I stand back up.

“No Solas, it tickles,” I tell him with a cheeky grin.

He stares at me for a moment with a look of confusion. I hold my hand up and show it to him so he can see the angry red, burn marks running over my hand and spreading up my arm.

“I apologize for being rude; pain does that to a person. To answer your question, yes, it hurts.”

Solas studied my hand and forearm carefully as I held it up. It was obvious that he was trying to disguise his own look of surprise at the marks that now marred my pale flesh. Holding his hands out he looked at me with a gentleness in his gaze.

“May I?”
I feel completely caught in his blue eyes, as I slowly just nod my head in agreement. Pulling his eyes from mine he takes my arm.

*He is so gentle.*

The soothing balm of his cool magic tingled over my skin, it was sending little shivers up my spine and it felt very...intimate. Pushing that thought away, I realize he is obviously doing something because now my hand does not feel like it is being constantly gnawed on by a Pitbull.

“I will place a rune over the mark; it should give you some relief for the time being.”

I can feel his breath puff over my hand as he speaks, and it instantly makes my heart speed up. When he lifts his face to look at me, I know I am blushing, I can feel the heat on my face.

“Is that better?” He asks me, while still holding my hand.

Clearing my throat nervously, I slowly pull my hand back.

“Yes, thank you,” I croak out and internally cringe at the sound.

I watch as he smiles at me and then gestures to the entrance and my stomach dropped.

*Oh my God...walk away...just walk away already.*

I spot Cassandra waiting just inside for us, and I bee-line it right to her.
The Forward Camp

There are so many dead.

My eyes just glance around taking in all the bodies when I overhear Leliana.

“You made it. Chancellor Roderick, this is–”

“I know who she is. As Grand Chancellor of the Chantry, I hereby order you to take this criminal to Val Royeaux to face execution.”

I’m staring at him, I’m sure with an expression of ‘are you serious’ on my face. Shaking my head at him, I listen to Cassandra argue with him.

“Order me’? You are a glorified clerk. A bureaucrat!”

“And you are a thug, but a thug who supposedly serves the Chantry!” The Chancellor snaps back at her.

Leliana folds her arms angrily as she stares at him.

“We serve the Most Holy, Chancellor, as you well know.”

Chancellor Roderick throws his hands in the air in apparent frustration with them.

“Justinia is dead! We must elect her replacement, and obey her orders on the matter.”

“So you want to ignore the Breach, let it grow, kill everyone. That is your answer?” I snap at him wanting to reach out and slap the man.

“You brought this on us in the first place!”

“Whatever you believe I did Chancellor, standing there and ordering the execution of the only one who can close the Breach, makes you sound awfully suspicious.”

I caught the slight lift of Leliana’s lips as the Chancellor began to sputter.

“You heathen savage, how dare you,” he spat.

Asshole!

Taking a step towards him fully intending to slap him, only to be stopped at the hand that held my arm back gently. I look at the hand and then up to Solas, who appeared angry at the uttered words as well, but shook his head lightly ‘no’. Closing my eyes, I took a calming breath and felt him remove his hand from my arm when I gave him a small nod of understanding.

Yes, don’t slap the well deserving asshole...got it.

Roderick looked at me smugly before focusing on Cassandra.

“Call a retreat, Seeker. Our position here is hopeless.”

Cassandra’s eyes narrowed at him, and she shook her head no.

“We can stop this before it’s too late.”
“How? You won’t survive long enough to reach the temple, even with all your soldiers.”

“We must get to the temple. It’s the quickest route,” Cassandra stubbornly insisted.

“But not the safest. Our forces can charge as a distraction while we go through the mountains.” Leliana reminds her and Cassandra shakes her head in obvious disagreement with her.

“We lost contact with an entire squad on that path. It’s too risky,” Cassandra said quickly, slightly pacing in one spot.

“Listen to me. Abandon this now, before more lives are lost.” Roderick advises her, and I could see Cassandra’s back straightening at his words. Her determination clearly written on her face, she is actually a very attractive woman. The mark chose that moment to flare angrily and I stare at it a moment and wait for the excruciating pain, but this time I feel a little burning, but not as bad. I can tolerate that, smiling at Solas my thanks again. He nods his head at me, and my eyes fell to his sharp angular jaw. My attention is pulled away from his sharp jawline when Cassandra asked me a question.

“What?” I ask her to repeat herself, quickly blushing and feeling a fool for having been looking at him.

“How do you think we should proceed?”

“Mountain Path – I don’t think I have climbed nearly enough today,” I tell her. I also know that we can still save some of the squad that was lost up there.

Cassandra nods her head and looks back at Leliana.

“Bring everyone left in the valley. Everyone.”

We are walking away, and I hear the Chancellor’s final snidely spoken words directed at Cassandra.

“On your head be the consequences, Seeker.”

I stop and gaze at him. Smiling smugly I flip him the bird, “Oh blow it out your air hole, Chancellor.”

Varric starts laughing loudly as I continue walking after Cassandra.

“Come on chuckles, it won’t hurt you to laugh. I saw the beginning of a smile; you thought it was funny too.”

“I do not know what you are speaking of Master Tethras.” He replied evenly.

I gaze at Varric over my shoulder and gave him a playful wink.

“Don’t poke at the hahren, Varric. They get grumpy as they get older,” I tease and see the immediate expression of annoyance cross Solas’ features.

“I am not old,” he muttered in elven.

I laugh now, for it is truly funny that he is pouting at the joke.

Wait...how do I know what he said? I don’t speak elven...or I didn’t before anyway...shit, I just gotta go with it, this whole thing is seven shades of fucked up.
“I suppose you’re not, not really.” I try not to laugh at the surprised expression that changes his face from the pouting to puzzled.

“What? Did you think you were the only one who could speak elven?” I raised my eyebrow at him with my own haughty expression and felt a shiver of nerves as he continued to study me curiously. Looking away, I see the upcoming ladder, almost grateful for the diversion even if heights do scare the crap out of me.

Solas watched her climb and moved to follow after her. She is a strange one this…it suddenly occurred to him that he did not know her name. They reach the first platform, and he sees her grab the rung of the next ladder resolutely focused upward. She gazes at me in the most peculiar ways, yet I do not recall crossing paths with her or her clan.

“It occurs to me that I have not learned your name. You must be known as something other than ‘prisoner’.”

I grab the next rung of the ladder and pull myself up, focusing on my foot placement before answering him.

“Of course I am known by something other than ‘prisoner’, no one thought to ask for it until now,” I tell him as I reach the next platform. Looking up, I can see that Cassandra is already on the final platform. Don’t look down, I tell myself as I grab the next step. Up you can do buttercup…down is a frown remember, I make a small joke out of it to keep from curling up into a frozen ball of mess, and focus on the next rung in the ladder looking directly upward.

“And?” I hear Varric say from behind me.

“And what, Varric?” I say with annoyance.

One foot after the other and do not look down, I remind myself. I am almost to the top if these assholes would just shut up and quit distracting me.

“And, what is your name?” Varric replied.

Finally, I pull myself over the edge at the top, and I realize that my ‘name’ is quite…human.

Shit! What do I tell them my name is…do I even use the clan Lavellan name? Should I use my character’s name? Crap!

Varric has finally reached the platform looking at me expectantly, and I glance around and see that the conversation had everyone’s attention.

Well, here goes nothing…we go with what I made, and the clan they will all soon know.

“Fenlin Lavellan,” I tell them and walk towards the opening of the old mining complex ignoring Solas’ surprised expression. I caught his intently curious gazes while I stared at the opening of the mining complex.
“I think it’s a pretty name, would it mean something in elven?” Cassandra asked and I gave her a lopsided smile.

“It means wolfling,” Solas and I tell her in unison. She smiles at me, not understanding the true problems names like that would cause in a clan of Dalish and I hazard a glance at Solas who is watching me with a slight tilt of his head.

They fall quiet as they enter the old mining tunnel. Glancing around I appreciate that I can see much better in the dark than I use to.

*Well, this is cool, I hear things much clearer, and now I can see fairly well in the dark. I got super powers!* 

Joking with myself before I hear the small group of demons ahead. I tap Cassandra’s arm and point up a small staircase.

“Demons” is all I need to say.

Cassandra nods her head sharply and moves ahead of us up the stairs. Soon I feel Solas’ cool barrier surround me, and I follow after Cassandra. The small group was taken care of pretty quickly and I am pleased that I am not even out of breath.

*I am either getting better at this or this group just sucked.*

Following Cassandra out of the cave, we saw three bodies of some of the group Leliana had sent up, lying on the ground. Trying not to focus on them, I walk on.

Varric lets out a heavy sigh when he sees them. “Guess we found the soldiers.”

I keep walking and gaze down at them again, trying not to shiver at the sight of their frozen, dead bodies lying in the snow.

“That cannot be all of them.”

Cassandra nodded her agreement with me, “No, it cannot.”

Varric moved to follow, his tone hopeful.

“So the others could be holed up somewhere ahead?”

Solas glanced at him briefly, and I could hear his urgency when he spoke.

“Our priority must be the Breach. Unless we seal it soon, no one is safe.”

“I’m leaving that to our elven friend here.”

I turn and smile at him, before following Cassandra down the snowy path. The mark suddenly flashes sending a sharp pain up my arm and I look around for the next rift.

“There must be a rift nearby,” I tell them. We did not need to wait long as we round the next bend in the trail.

“I think we found the rest of the soldiers,” I mutter as I follow after Cassandra.

“Lady Cassandra!” one of the soldiers cries out gratefully as we approach.
“You’re alive!” Cassandra replies not masking her own surprise.

“Just barely,” the woman replies out of breath.

The rift flashes suddenly and two demons come out of the ground. Solas’ barrier slides over us and soon a demon is rushing me.

“Fuck!” I mutter as it swipes at me, and I stab at it with my sword.

_I am utterly useless_, I realize when the other demon teleports beneath me and knocks me on my ass. Rolling quickly to keep from being slashed to pieces, I swing the sword out and luckily knocked one of the demons off its feet, but that victory is short-lived with the other quickly moving in to loom over me.

Cassandra stabbed the one looming over me, and I was now completely covered in demon gore from head to toe. From where I lay on the ground, I sat up and held my hand up towards the rift. Gritting my teeth at the sharp pain, it finally closes with a loud crack and I lay back on the ground.

If you remove the Breach, the sky here is really beautiful.

I lay for a moment just staring at it until I see his bald head has blocked my view, and he is gazing down at me curiously with a lopsided smile.

“Are you well?” he asks me.

“Do you mean the immediate or long-term type of ‘well’?”

Solas smiled down at me and holds his arm out for me to grasp. Taking it, I feel the warmth of his hand in mine and let it go quickly. Averting my eyes from his, I walk to where Cassandra is talking with the soldiers.

“Thank the Maker you finally arrived when you did, Lady Cassandra. I don’t think we could have held out much longer.”

Cassandra gestured to where I stood and smiled at me. “Thank our prisoner, Lieutenant. She insisted we come this way.”

The female soldier looks at me with surprise. “The prisoner? Then you…?”

I give her a reassuring smile or try to anyway. Covered in all this demon goo, I probably present a gruesome picture.

“It was worth trying to save you if we could.”

“Then you have my sincere gratitude.” She says quickly, placing her arm on her chest.

“The way into the valley behind us is clear for the moment. Go, while you still can Lieutenant.” Cassandra informs her briefly, and the woman nods her head sharply.

“At once.” Glancing back at the other soldiers, “Quickly, let’s move!”

I watch them move as swiftly as they could with some of them injured when his smooth voice pulls my gaze to him.

“The path ahead appears to be clear of demons as well.”
“Then we should take advantage of that before it changes,” I reply quickly.

I have seriously got to stop that flutter feeling he causes, it will not end well.

“Down the ladder,” Cassandra says quickly.

“Down?” I yelp, my fear of heights rears its ugly head, and I am now beginning to break into a cold sweat as I swallow the sudden ball in my throat.

“Yes, down as opposed to up,” Varric jokes with me as he walks by.

I watch Cassandra swing herself over the edge and I swallow nervously again. Visions of plummeting to my death are teasing my mind, slowing my steps.

“You are uncomfortable with heights,” Solas says from beside me.

I nod my head automatically. Cold fear starts to fill me while Varric swings over, and I close my eyes suddenly. Clenching my fists, I take a few calming breaths or try to as they almost sound like I am beginning to hyperventilate. I get to the edge and look over hesitantly. Shaking my head, I back away swiftly and start to pace a bit.

I can do this…I will not fall…it is just a ladder.

“Are you two coming?” Varric yells from below. My stomach drops as I slowly walk closer towards the edge.

“Yeah, don’t get your panties in a twist,” I yell down at him.

“Come Fenlin, I will not let you fall,” he says to me calmly.

I glance at him for a moment realizing I am going to have to trust him. I watch him slip over the side and then gaze at me patiently.

“Come, slip between me and the ladder. I will guide you down safely.”

I am way too scared to really think this through, and I do exactly as he tells me to.

Fuck me; this was not the best idea.

I can now feel his entire warm body pressed against mine.

Focus…one foot after another; move your hands down one step at a time. Do not focus on the feeling of him against your back.

I feel his breath against my neck as he speaks softly. “We are almost there.”

The swift shiver that ran down my spine was electrical, and I knew I was blushing. Good Lord, this guy is dangerous. Finally, at the bottom, he steps away and I know my face is red with embarrassment.

“Sorry, I do not do heights well,” I tell them, hoping it explains my red face of embarrassment and Cassandra gives me a nod of understanding.

Thankfully, Solas is avoiding my gaze as well, and I turn quickly to follow after Cassandra and go back to ignoring the man following behind me.
“So… holes in the fade don’t just accidentally happen right?” Varric asks Solas curiously.

“If enough magic is brought to bear, it is possible,” Solas replies easily.

“Obviously,” I mutter and hear Cassandra’s snort of an agreement.

“But there are easier ways to make things explode,” Varric presses.

Solas looks at him with a lopsided smile, “That is true.”

“We will consider how this happened once the immediate danger is past,” Cassandra replies, clearly letting them know she didn’t want any more chatter.

We continue down the snowy path towards the destroyed temple, and I can’t stop the knots of apprehension from tightening in my stomach as we get closer.
The Breach

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Solas is looking around as was I at the utter devastation.

“The Temple of Sacred Ashes,” he spoke reverently.

“What’s left of it,” Varric said his tone full of sadness.

Cassandra pointed to an area and looked at me.

“That is where they say you walked out of the Fade, and our soldiers found you. They said a woman was in the rift behind you. No one knows who she was.”

I take a tentative step over the charred remains of a body as I walk forward, studying the area warily. Every step stirred up a dust of ash around my feet reminding me that it was most likely a mixture of rubble and remains of the people that came. We walked through a short, broken archway, and I hold my breath as the scent of burned flesh permeates the air heavily, twisting my stomach dangerously.

Please don’t let me vomit in front of everyone, I beg myself as my stomach lurches warningly. We start to walk past two burnt corpses, frozen in horror that was still on fire, exposing just their skeletal remains.

Nope, I can’t.

Shaking my head, I lean against the nearest wall and empty the contents of my stomach, loudly.

Solas moved to stand just behind me and held my hair out of the way, while I emptied my stomach. Varric kindly held out a handkerchief to me, and I smiled gratefully at him as I took it and wiped my mouth when I was finished.

“Ir abelas,” I said around the cloth.

Solas almost seemed reluctant to let my hair go and shook his head as he stepped back.

“Tel abelas lethal’lan,” he said quietly stepping away.

Cassandra gazed at me almost compassionately as they continued to walk to a stone railing that overlooked the unopened rift.

“The Breach sure is a long way up,” Varric said softly as he gazed upward.

I turn at the sounds of booted footsteps crunching over rock and saw Leliana, and a group of soldiers following tightly behind her.

“You’re here! Thank the Maker,” she said with a sigh of relief as she approached them.

Cassandra glanced at her and pointed to areas around the rubble as she spoke swiftly to her.

“Leliana, have your men take up positions around the Temple.”

Leliana nodded and turned to address the group she brought with her. I can’t stop looking upward as
Cassandra starts talking to me.

“This is your chance to end this, are you ready?”

I finally pull my gaze from the sky and look at Cassandra nodding.

“I’m willing to try Cassandra, but I don’t know if I can reach the damn thing. Let alone fucking close it,” I tell her nervously before looking back at it considering my options.

“You must try, this rift was the first and it is the key. Seal it, and perhaps we seal the Breach,” Solas said from beside me.

I nod my head and glance around the area and gesture forward.

“Well, there is no point standing around waiting to see if it will come to me. Let’s find a way down,” I say simply before walking away. Leliana moved to follow, and soon we all heard a booming voice echo around us. Stopping to look around, my eyes searching for where the voice was coming from as it spoke.

“Now is the hour of our victory. Bring forth the sacrifice.”

Cassandra looked around cautiously. “What are we hearing,” she whispered before following me.

Solas also studied the area before he answered her.

“At a guess; the person who created the Breach.”

Varric moved in next to him and muttered, “Not as if that isn’t creepy or anything.” Solas glanced down at him and nodded his head in agreement.

We passed a couple of Leliana’s archers when Varric spoke worriedly.

“You know this stuff is red lyrium, Seeker.”

Cassandra nodded her head, “I see it.”

“But what the hell is it doing here?” Varric said sounding anxious while looking around at the littered ground.

Looking at the shards of blood red that reeked of contamination, I felt a shiver of disgust run over my skin. I could hear a faint, disjointed song emanate from them as we passed over them making my skin crawl. Rubbing my arms briskly as I walk over them, I tried to shut the sound out.

“It’s evil. Whatever you do don’t touch it,” Varric warned quickly.

Passing a very large shard of lyrium the song was almost deafening and held my focus until we heard the voice echo around us again.

“Keep the sacrifice still.”

“Someone help me!” A woman’s voice rang out around them.

Cassandra stopped abruptly and looked back at Leliana.

“That is Divine Justinia’s voice!”
We came upon a small set of stone steps that would lead us to a small ledge where it would be easier to jump down from. Stepping off the landing, surprisingly making no sound as I land, the mark flashes angrily the closer I got to the closed rift. Staring at it for a moment, I try taking an easy breath as the pain in my hand was on the edge of unbearable again. My focus instantly diverted when I heard the woman’s call for help again.

“Someone help me!”

“What the hell are you doing to her?”

I heard my voice and looked around suddenly unsure of what the hell had really happened.

“That was your voice. Most Holy called out to you. But…” Cassandra started and suddenly there was a blinding flash of white light that only gave shadows of the bodies. I began backing up with Cassandra as a large dark figure loomed over us.

“What the hell are you doing to her?” I hear myself say again.

“Run while you can! Warn them!”

I could just barely make out that the woman speaking, the one Cassandra called the Divine, was suspended in the air, and she was the only vivid visual anyone could see.

“We have an intruder. Slay the elf,” the booming voice ordered.

I covered my eyes as the light became blinding again and felt Cassandra grab my shoulder and shake me slightly.

“You were there! Who attacked? And the Divine, is she…? Was this vision true? What are we seeing?”

“I don’t remember, damn it!” I answered her frustrated.

*Why can’t I remember this?*

“Echoes of what happened here. The Fade bleeds into this place.”

Solas offered as he held Cassandra’s suddenly wild gaze from what she had just experienced.

“This rift is not sealed, but it is closed… albeit temporarily. I believe with the mark, the rift can be opened and then sealed properly and safely. However, opening the rift will likely attract attention from the other side.”

“Demons,” Cassandra and I say in unison.

Leliana motioned for her archers to prepare while Cassandra held my gaze. I nod my head in understanding and hold my hand towards the unopened rift. The connection this time was beyond painful, and I gritted my teeth to keep from crying out. It felt as if the magic was being forced to go in reverse and suddenly the rift opened, throwing me backward. I roll along the ground and finally come to a stop on my side. Looking up from where I lay, there is a gargantuan-sized demon that drops out and my mouth fell open.

“Fuck,” I mutter before scrambling out of the way of its electrical whips that hit the ground where I had been lying.

“Disrupting the rift with the mark will weaken it,” Solas called out to me. With a sharp nod, I hold
my hand up quickly, uncaring that it hurt. I stayed close to Solas and Varric, as Cassandra stabbed it repeatedly.

_Fucking thing – just die already, _my mind begged.

“There are more coming through the rift,” Cassandra yelled out in warning.

I barely had time to get out of the way before I got caught by one on the arm. Solas summoned lightning quickly, stunning them long enough for Varric to slam a couple of arrows into their heads. Rolling promptly again out of the way of the larger demons electrical whips, I slip behind it and clenching my jaw I disrupted the rift again, dropping it to its knees.

Cassandra used the demons position to run and leap from the creatures bent knee, thrusting her sword into one of its eyes, to pierce its skull. It was like something out of an action movie as I watched her follow the backward momentum of the demon and roll away from it when it hit the ground. It startled me when she yelled at me.

“Now! Seal the rift!”

I held my hand up and felt the instant release of the magic this time, yet it was taking more than it had in the others. I can’t keep the scream of pain from releasing, as my arm is wrenched out of its socket and the feeling of burning flesh shoots straight up to just beneath my shoulder.

When it finally releases me I almost fall as I watch a ball of magic, shoot like a rocket towards the Breach and I hold my breath. Just as it hit the Breach right in the middle, I feel the mark in my hand blaze hotly, dropping me to my knees with crushing pain. Clenching my wrist, I feel the magic as it worked with the Breach within my hand.

“Oh my God,” I cry as I am suddenly yanked into the air by my hand. Just before the Breach calmed I am flying through the air and slammed against the rock wall.

_I just need to close my eyes...just five minutes._

Solas’ stomach twisted at the sound of her painful screams when he heard the pop of her shoulder from its joint. He watched helplessly as the magic picked her up from the ground and violently threw her against the Temple ruins, knocking her unconscious. Rushing towards her fallen body, he leaned down as everyone gathered behind him. He mentally cringed at the sight of the red web of burns that previously had only encompassed her hand and part of her forearm, were now encompassing most of her arm.

“Is she…” Cassandra asked him hesitantly.

He picked her up gently and turned towards her.

“No, but she is barely alive Seeker. We must get her to the healers immediately.”

“Then we must get her back to Haven as quickly as possible.” Cassandra ran with Leliana to find a wagon for Fenlin.
Ir abelas - I'm sorry
Tel abelas - Don't be sorry
Solas sat with her after the healers had done all they could for her. For now, they would have to wait for her to wake up. He studied the mark carefully, noticing that it was calm now with the Breach partially closed. He tried to remove the web of burns that raced up her arm and felt a deep sense of frustration. *Why won't they heal?* he thought irritated.

He squeezed water out of the cloth and replaced the one on her head. She mostly mumbled with this action, and would cry out occasionally, but nothing coherent. Not unlike when he observed her in the dungeon. Rubbing his face in frustration, he sat back in the chair. His plan had not worked the way it was meant to, and in his fumbling’s this strong woman had been sucked in. She had kept herself moving forward when it was apparent she would rather run. He admired the sheer determination that she exhibited with every encounter of demons, and then the rifts. Even though it hurt her to close them, she continued without complaint.

He glanced back at her sleeping form and recalled the way she had felt pressed against him as he guided her down the ladder. Her fear had been palatable when she stared at the ledge. He had not thought her closeness would cause that much of an effect. The heat of her body and her light scent of vanilla that teased him even now in memory made him rub his face.

He leaned over her studying her face and traced the Mythal vallis’lin that ran over her cheekbones, just under her eyes. In Arlathan there was only one that carried this vallis'lin. It was a sign of honor, not slavery, at least for the one who wore it, it wasn't. He sighed sadly, staring at it. He could feel the slightly raised skin and sighed heavily. He wished the people had not carried this fragment of their history. *I wonder why she chose Mythal, as her chosen God.* He was curious about this Dalish who acted like no Dalish he had ever encountered before. Her style of speech and mannerisms was enough of a curiosity to intrigue him.

*****

*What a hell of a dream that was.*

My eyes open slowly and I gaze around, as the realization that I was still stuck in Thedas settled in. My eyes took in the roughly hewn wooded ceiling when I heard the sound of a book closing, and my eyes dart to the sound at my right.

*Shit! Why is he here?*

“I am glad to see you have finally awakened,” he said moving to grab a cup of water for me.

I watch him cautiously, taking the offered water and drinking it down quickly.

“How do you feel?” He asks me curiously.

“Like I ran up the side of a mountain and was then thrown into a rock wall,” I comment dryly.

I feel a slight sizzle in the vicinity of my stomach as he chuckled at my comment.
“Yes, I suppose you do. You have done well, despite having suffered such trials. The Breach is stable for now, as is the mark. I should warn you, that they are calling you the Herald of Andraste and rumors are circulating that you are a blessed hero that has come to save us all.”

I listen to him talk and found that I was relaxing into the sound and could do that all day. Stiffening at the realization I rubbed my face.

*Okay, mental slap, don’t do that.*

“Sounds quite romantic…except for I arrived through a rift and fell on my face.”

He glances at me thoughtfully not helping the flutters in my stomach.

“Joke as you will Fenlin, posturing is necessary. I have journeyed deep into the Fade in ancient ruins and battlefields to see the dreams of lost civilizations. I have watched as hosts of spirits clash to reenact the bloody past in ancient wars both famous and forgotten. Every great war has its heroes; I am just curious what kind you will be.”

“So you really sleep in those places so you can see long-dead memories. Isn’t that dangerous?” I ask him curiously, because if I am honest with myself…which I would prefer not to be, but I still want to hear him talk.

He tilts his head slightly and gives me a curious expression.

“I do set wards, and if you leave food out for the giant spiders, they are usually content to live and let live.”

“I guess it would be interesting to see history replayed for you. I mean, all the things you could learn from the past would have some benefit for us today, I would think anyway.”

Solas stares at me now with obvious surprise.

“Does not your Dalish raising, frown on such pursuits?”

“I suppose they do, but that is why they repeat the same mistakes over and over. They prefer to cling to remnants of a past they don’t understand. I prefer to know how they screwed up so I can hopefully avoid it.”

“You truly believe that?” he studied me carefully as I spoke.

“Is that so hard to believe?” I ask him curiously.

“The Dalish I have encountered…” He began and stopped at my heavy sigh that sounded annoyed.

“Were obviously fools. Listen, I am not ‘The Dalish’, I am just me. What I believe, what I choose to believe has nothing to do with an entire race. You are an apostate…but not all apostates are willing to risk their lives for another, they are not all kind or generous. Some are real assholes, but you are you, not them.” I can tell by his expression, I might have just blown his mind.

“Thank you for staying with me, Solas. I am sure you have other things you would like to be doing.”

I know he heard the dismissal in my tone, but instead of leaving he took the empty cup from my hand and placed it on the side table.

“I did not mind, and I did not have anything that I could not do while watching over you.” He held up his book to show me.
He is not leaving…why is he not leaving? I am now looking at him a bit nervously and trying not to squirm under his gaze.

“I will stay then – at least until the breach is sealed.”

My heart jumped at the words I will stay then as my brain processed that he did not mean he was going to be staying in my room.

“Were you planning on leaving?”

He gazed at me seriously, with a narrowing of his eyes and slight wrinkle on his brow making his scar move lower down his forehead.

“As you just pointed out I am an Apostate. That is surrounded by Chantry forces and unlike you; I do not have a divine mark protecting me. Cassandra has been accommodating, but you understand my caution.”

“You came to help them Solas, I won’t let them turn on you.” I hear myself promise him, and realize it is not a lie. I would protect him if I had to even if he is a liar.

“How would you stop them?” He asked me with a tone that said he didn’t believe me.

I raise the marked hand and smile.

“However I had to, but I wouldn’t worry about that. I don’t see any other mages volunteering that are Fade experts.”

Solas stared at me intently for a moment before shaking his head.

“Thank you,” he says softly.

“No problem,” I say easily. I catch him watching me with those eyes of his and feel the return of the flutters in my stomach.

Oh, my God, I have got to get that under control as I feel my face redden at his scrutiny.

He kept his gaze steady, studying me curiously before folding his hands calmly in his lap.

“Are you uncomfortable in my company?” He asks me pointedly.

I hear the small, nervous laugh burst from me and then I groan at the pain it caused and rub my hand over my breastbone.

“Not entirely, but yes a bit,” I answer honestly, and I think it surprises him.

“You continue to surprise me; I did not think you would be so honest with me.”

I rub my face and finally stare at him.

“I’m full of surprises,” I tell him and feel his low, husky laughter dance over my skin like warm water.

Sweet baby Jesus, that man’s voice is potent.

“Of that, I have no doubt,” he replies with a smile.
I stare at the change in his features and feel my stomach tighten.

Okay – laugh and smile are both killers.

“But I deviate,” he says with a slight sigh. “I was curious as to how you ended up at the Conclave. You have no real fighting skill and yet you were there.”

“I really do not remember,” I tell him not lying.

A small sigh escapes him before picking up his book from the floor.

“Perhaps in time you will remember, for now, you are awake, and Cassandra will want to speak with you. When you are finished speaking with her, we should begin your magical training as soon as possible.”

Oh, that’s right…I have magic. Yay me…not.

“I will find you when they are done with me then; unless you have someone else in mind?”

Solas glanced at me quickly, and I could see he was contemplating the idea before shaking his head no.

“I believe that you will learn more from me, than any Circle Mage, lethal’lan.”

I chuckle as I slowly move to get out of the bed, feeling every muscle protest angrily at me as I set my feet on the floor.

“Oh that…I have no doubt Solas.”

He looks at me curiously and then nods his head before standing and holding his hand out to me. I stare at it a moment and then taking it, I feel the familiar rush of excitement at the warmth of his hand. I see that he too feels it, and is as surprised by it as I am. Letting his hand go quickly, I watch him turn to leave.

“Until later than,” he said before leaving and shutting the door quietly behind him.

“Fuck,” I say aloud at the closed door before grabbing the clean clothes that were laid out for me.

Opening the door to leave my small cabin, my mouth fell open and I gaped at all the people lining the walkway with a sudden sense of fear, and went back inside slamming the door. Heart pounding I lean back against it.

Nope…no way, fuck that shit.

Soon after, there is a knock at my door and I back away from it staring at it anxiously.

“Fenlin?” I hear Cassandra call out to me, before opening the door and letting herself in, and closing the door behind her.

“I’m sorry if they frightened you. They are just curious to meet the one who stopped the Breach from growing.”
I stare at her with fear I am sure is clearly written on my face.

“Those are the same people that spat at me, and called me ‘murderous knife-ear’. You’ll forgive me if I am not all that excited to walk out there and meet them.” I tell her with a quake in my voice I wish wasn’t there.

Cassandra gazed at me with eyes full of understanding at my fear.

“I can understand that, would it help if I walk with you?” she asks me, her gaze hopeful.

I look at her and with a sigh, I nod my head knowing I couldn’t stay hidden inside the cabin forever.

“Oh okay Cassandra, I would definitely feel…much better if you were beside me.”

Cassandra smiles at me and opens the door so that we could leave.

“There are others that I wish you to meet; they are waiting for us in the Chantry,” she says walking closely with me leading us towards the Chantry.

It suddenly dawns on me that she was going to introduce me to Josephine and Cullen. Sticking closely to her, I follow her towards the Chantry. My eyes glance at the people lining the walkway, and I want to shake my head at how fickle these people could be. I pass the one I remembered spitting at me, innocent before proven guilty asshole. We walked into the Chantry and I can’t keep my eyes from not glancing towards the door that led to the dungeon. Cassandra saw the small look and grimaced.

“I should apologize…” she began.

I stopped her quickly with a hand on her arm.

“I don’t blame you, Cassandra. I might have been the same way had I been where you were. You had just lost everyone you probably knew, and I was the only one to leave the wreckage.”

Cassandra gave me a grateful smile.

“You have proven your innocence Fenlin. You have my support,” she said quietly.

Grateful that they didn’t see me as a threat any longer, I follow her towards another door.

Fenlin…my name is now Fenlin. I Hope to Christ, I can remember that.

Cassandra started introductions as soon as they entered the room that held a large table with a map on it.

“You haven’t met Commander Cullen, leader of the Inquisition’s forces.”

Cullen smiled easily at me, “As small as they are currently. I’m pleased you survived.”

I couldn’t stop the small smirk and slightly nodded my head at him.

“So am I,” I tell him frankly, making him chuckle.

“This is Lady Josephine Montilyet, our ambassador, and chief diplomat.”

“Andaran Atish'an,” Josephine said with a slight bow to her head. I returned her polite bow and smiled back at her. “Savhalla,” I say in greeting.
“And of course you already met Sister Leliana. She is our Spymaster,” she said calmly.

Leliana looked at Cassandra with annoyance.

“Yes. Tactfully put, Cassandra.”

I smile at her and glanced around the room as Cassandra continued.

“I mentioned to them that your mark needs more power to close the Breach for good.”

Leliana nodded and made her plea quickly. “This means we need to approach the rebel mages for help.”

Cullen looked at her and snorted in disagreement. “And I still disagree. The Templars could serve just as well.”

Cassandra looked at them both and shook her head at the argument.

“We need the power Commander. Enough magic poured into her mark…”

“Could destroy us all,” he said evenly. “Templars could suppress the breach, weaken it so…”

“Pure speculation,” Leliana said almost mockingly to him.

I could see the Commander stiffen, and stand to his full height, which from my angle was very impressive but then again I was barely taller than Varric.

“Need I remind you that I was a Templar? I know what they are capable of.”

Josephine injected before they could get going again and looked at me. “Unfortunately, neither group will even speak to us yet. The Chantry has denounced the Inquisition – and you, specifically.”

I laughed and shake my head as she continued.

“Some are calling you – a Dalish Elf, ‘The Herald of Andraste’, and that frightens the Chantry.”

“Chancellor Roderick’s doing, no doubt” Cassandra commented.

“It limits our options at the moment. Neither the Templars or the mages will even talk with us.”

I rub my face and lean over the table. “Just how did I become the Herald of Andraste?”

“People saw what you did at the Temple, and how you stopped the Breach from growing. They have also heard about the woman seen in the rift when we first found you. They believe that was Andraste.” Cassandra said simply.

I couldn’t stop the snort that escaped as I look at her and shook my head.

“Even if we tried to stop that view from spreading–” Leliana began.

“Which we have not,” Cassandra finished for her, earning her another annoyed look before Leliana continued.

“The point is everyone is talking about you.”

“Wonderful…a few days ago they wanted to hang me. Now I’m some…fucking prophet,” I say chuckling humorlessly.
“It’s quite the title, isn’t it? How do you feel about that?” Cullen asked me. I could see his own mischievous gaze looking at me as he questioned me about the title.

Thank God someone was on the same page as I am.

“Honestly…I don’t like it. I am no Herald of Andraste. However, if this is something that brings people hope, and keeps them from tearing each other apart, for now, I will wear the damn title happily.”

Cassandra smiled at me grateful that I understood the situation.

“Well since we know I can’t leave, not with this on my hand,” I say holding the marked hand up. “Can we be attacked by the Chantry?”

Cullen chuckled and shook his head. “With what? They have only words at their disposal.”

I nod my head in understanding, while Josephine looked at him with annoyance. “And yet, they may bury us with them.”

Leliana smiled knowingly and looked at me. “There is something you can do. A Chantry Cleric by the name of Mother Giselle has asked to speak with you. She is not far, and knows those involved far better than I. Her assistance could be invaluable.”

“Oh, I’ll bite. Why would a Chantry Cleric offer us assistance when the Chantry has denounced our existence quite loudly?”

“I understand she is a reasonable sort. Perhaps she doesn’t agree with her sisters?” Leliana offered. “You’ll find Mother Giselle tending to the wounded in the Hinterlands near Redcliffe.”

I nod my head in agreement. “Then I will go meet her and see what we can do for each other. When would you like me to leave?”

Cassandra gazed at me and smiled easily.

“You won’t be going alone, or quite so soon Fenlin. We shall leave when you have had some training with Solas. You should still get some rest, and also get your bearings in the meantime. I will speak with Solas, and he will inform me when you are ready to leave.”

I am gladdened by her admission and smile at her before glancing around to see if they wanted anything else from me. I could see that they didn’t and bid them a good day.

“Fenlin,” Josephine said quickly chasing me down the hall of the Chantry.

I heard her call my name just as I reached the front doors and took a deep breath before turning to face her.

“It would be very helpful if we knew more about you, like your last name, family, where you lived, grew up…all of that. When you have time I would love to sit down with you and discuss where you are from…or anything really. The more people I can convince that you are here to help us and sent by Andraste, the better our chances are.”

I smiled at her gently thinking she was no different than my agent. Normally, I am quite private and prefer my own company. I don’t have that luxury anymore, I realize as I glance at Josephine who waited patiently.
There is not much to tell Josephine. My last name is Lavellan, I am Dalish, grew up in the Free Marches. I am a new mage according to Solas, and I am thirty-two years old."

Josephine wrote everything down quickly and smiled at me. I smile back, waiting to see if there was anything else she would need from me.

“Thank you, if I require anything else, I will let you know.”

I grasp the Chantry doors again and slip out as quickly as possible before she could change her mind. I turn my face up to the sky and let the sun wash over my face, while the brisk winter wind blew over my cheeks. Finally, I breathe, enjoying the fresh air on my skin.

Chapter End Notes

Andaran Atish'an - Formal greeting
Savhalla - informal greetings
Training Begins

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

I head towards the cabin Leliana said was Solas’ with a flutter of nerves jumping in my belly. I have got to get over this...he is nothing but trouble and heartache with a side of a migraine, I remind myself stopping in front of the cabin door.

“Enter”

I stare at the door in surprise and look around for a moment before grasping the door handle. Opening the door slowly, I watch him close a book he was reading, before turning towards me. Closing the door behind me, the soft click echoes and I look around uncomfortably.

The wolfs den it is then.

I look at him curiously and then back at the door, and point at it with my thumb.

“How did you know I was out there?” I ask him and he gives me a smug little smile.

“Your magical aura,” he replied easily.

“My…magical aura?” I ask him completely curiously now.

“Yes…it is a – signature of a kind. It is no different than a name or how you appear on the outside, it is just a magical appearance to those who can see it,” he replies easily moving from his chair to stand.

“Sit lethal’lan and I will show you how to recognize it,” he said calmly motioning me towards the other chair in the room.

I sit down and watch him pull his chair closer to me and barely refrain from rolling my eyes in frustration. Oh, sweet mother of pearl, this is going to prove difficult as I feel the heat radiate from where he sat in front of me.

“Close your eyes and focus on your heart beating within your chest. What does it look like when it beats, what does it sound like, can you see what it does inside your chest?”

I look at him with a moment of disbelief and see his raised eyebrow at me. Shaking my head slightly I close my eyes as he asked.

Well sure...why not.

Eyes closed I focus on my heartbeat. For a few moments, I see, feel or hear nothing.

“Take a deep breath and let it out slowly, you must relax Fenlin,” he reminds me gently.

His voice is gentle and warm – soothing.

Taking a deep breath I began seeing bursts of intermittent color that coincide with the beating of my heart. Slowly, I become aware of my blood rushing through arteries and then pushed through veins away from the small organ. The colors become stronger, brighter as I focus on the action. I start to feel something else…it is a tingling—all around me, and I am breathing it. The feeling fills the small
room to capacity…it is a cool feeling, like his barrier.

This is…him,

The sudden realization pulls me from looking internally at my own, to focus on the rainbow of colors flashing behind my closed eyes.

I wonder if they change with mood…like a mood ring.

Lifting my hand as if I can touch it, I hear his soft laughter from in front of me, and I have my answer. His aura suddenly pulses and somehow becomes even brighter – fuller, with his happiness.

“I see you found it,” he said calmly. His tone of voice contradicting the joy I could see in his aura around me.

“You see this all the time…around other mages?” I ask him knowing my tone is full of awe. I don’t want to open my eyes yet, I just want to enjoy…this kaleidoscope of colors.

“With some, yes,” he answers but it sounds to my ears as if it isn’t the full truth.

I finally open my eyes to gaze at him in astonishment.

“Your magical aura is…beautiful, Solas,” I say with a hushed breath and then wish I hadn’t.

Jesus – just jump into his lap and start petting him why don’t you.

Solas smiled at me with pleasure that my words brought him and even slightly blushed while he held my gaze.

“Yours is just as beautiful lethal’lan. Close your eyes again and I believe you will see it this time,” he prompted me gently.

Excited now, I close my eyes again like he tells me, curious to see if mine was just as colorful or bright as his.

Solas stared in surprise at how easily she was able to find his aura and see it. He felt her connection to her magic and the magic around her and smiled as her own lips smiled. Her words had brought him an instant pleasure at someone able to see him. She is a most curious creature he thought. She is nothing like her Dalish brothers and sisters…she was awake, alive, seeing. Could it be my magic that has given her this ability, he begins to question himself. It would be something he should study, to determine if it had indeed given her abilities she was not meant to have.

Slowly I open my eyes and smile at him excitedly.

“Okay, that is pretty amazing. Who taught you how to see this, Solas?”

He looks at me a little surprised, and then suspiciously.
“Why?”

“I just thought…it doesn’t matter never mind it’s no big deal forget I said anything so what do you want to teach me today?”

I want to slap myself on how fast I just spat out that whole word salad.

Yeah, that sounded so ‘no big deal’…I am such a dork. Best to keep my distance and keep this strictly a ‘Teacher/Student’ conversation, I remind myself strongly. I should never have asked him about himself that was just stupid. How many times am I going to have to remind myself I don’t care and just ignore him in that way?

“We should begin with what your magical affinity is. You will be able to expand to different magic’s as you grow, but there is always one element that you will feel closer to than others.”

I look at him nervously and then around his cabin. Worrying my lower lip at the idea of actually doing magic, I sit on my hands to keep them out of trouble.

“Do you really think it safe to do it indoors? I would feel very bad if I burnt your place down.”

Solas laughed at my sudden discomfort and shook his head.

“We shall continue your lesson outdoors,” he said calmly before standing. “I prefer to keep my bedding,” he teased me, before grabbing his staff.

I stare at him pleasantly surprised at his teasing. I did not think he would actually have a sense of humor, I realize as I stand.

“I would say hair…but since you don’t have any, we will settle on keeping your eyebrows.” I joke with him and see the large smile light his face. I cannot stop my stomach from falling to my toes. Christ on a cracker that is sexy.

Clearing my throat, I feel suddenly very awkward and walk out the door he is holding open. Letting the cold air clear my mind, I take a deep breath and see the puff of my breath as it leaves my mouth.

We walk in companionable silence down the hill towards Haven’s front gates, and I purposely keep my focus on the ground in front of me. I find that I am making some progress with ignoring the nonstop fluttering in my stomach at his closeness, but I found a whole new can of wiggles at the idea of doing magic.

“You have a place in mind I gather,” I state trying to alleviate the nervous jitters that were slowly taking over.

“Yes”

Great, I think walking beside him.

What if I set myself on fire…oh my God this is going to go very fucking badly.

“What if I set myself on fire?” somehow saying my fear aloud, intensified the scared feeling I was trying to stop.

“I will not allow you to cause yourself harm,” he tells me calmly.

Leading us past the training soldiers to a small empty field behind a lone cabin, I worried my lip.
Stopping he glances at me for a moment and then I shiver at the sudden cool feeling that went beneath my skin and stare at his eyes wide with surprise.

“What…was that you just did?”

Solas smiled at me and folded his arms behind his back as his face fell to the normal calm mask he sported.

“I was examining your magical aura for possibilities.”

“Well, what did it tell you,” I asked him curiously while rubbing my hands up and down my arms trying to get over what felt very – intimate.

He slightly laughed at me and shook his head.

“It is still a mystery…even to me, lethal’lan.”

I huff in annoyance and glance at him.

“Okay then, what am I supposed to do if you don’t know?”

Solas nodded his head pleased with my determination.

“Close your eyes and search yourself for what you can feel is different.”

_He is like fucking Yoda._ I close my eyes and try to do what he asks.

“And what should I be looking for exactly?” I ask him sounding a bit annoyed.

“You will know when you find it,” he answers me simply. I know he has to be smiling smugly at the slight frown of frustration that is forming on my forehead as I try to look for whatever is supposed to be there.

Pushing my frustration away I pull my focus in and I feel a sudden solidness to myself as I look inward. I can see my aura pulsing like my heartbeat, and then I see strands tugging on it, leading away from it. I tilt my head curiously as I study the strands.

_What are…those?_

“Hold your hand out and direct it away from you when you are ready,” he tells me calmly.

Holding my hand out away from me like he instructed, I let the heavy feeling move down my arm towards my hand, and magic pulsated through my fingers. My eyes flash open at the sound of the ground rumbling in front of me. The sound and the sudden movement of the ground stop as my eyes fly open, and I lose my focus.

“Did I just make a mini earthquake?” I ask him instantly.

Solas is standing with an expression of surprise while he stares at the ground where I had tried to manifest my magic. I stare at him questioningly, but he is still standing there silently staring at the ground. A few moments pass and I can't contain my curiosity any longer.

“Well?” I ask him my impatience obvious.

“You are a Fade mage,” he said quietly unable to mask his own surprised tone.
“What does that mean?” I ask him suddenly unsure at the look on his face.

Solas took a calming breath and held my gaze as his face slid into his unreadable mask again.

“It means lethal’lan, that you may call the Fade to your aid as you need and it will answer. This is…”

I gaze at him nervously as I wait for him to finish.

“Extraordinary,” he said quietly staring intently at me.

“Solas…you'll need to expand on that a little better than just ‘Extraordinary,” I tell him sounding more than a little irritated with him now.

“There has not been many Fade mages in recent history. I have not met any others like myself, until you. There were not many even during the time of Arlathan, and it is my understanding Fen’Harel was also one. Indeed, the gift is a rare one, lethal’lan,” he said with a calm tone.

Listening to him, I rub my face at my new dilemma.

I am cursed twice over…first with being a Dalish mage and now with having the same magic as him…I am fucking cursed, I realize sadly.

Taking a calming breath, I gaze at him and knowing who he is, I let out a heavy sigh.

“Well…can you help me then?”

Solas holds my gaze for a moment, and I could still see the excitement in his blue eyes while he was trying to hide it, and it made my stomach flutter in response.

“I can,” he says simply.

“Well then I guess I should count myself lucky,” I say jokingly trying to remove the flutters.

Solas looks at me, with a soft smile; blue eyes sparkling excitedly and the flutters in my stomach take off at warp speed.

“It is I, who is fortunate lethal’lan.”

Taking a deep breath I look at him for a moment and then look at the ground that had been rumbling a few moments ago.

“Well, I guess we should start then,” I said quietly.

After hours of learning how to correctly manifest my magic, we walked slowly back towards my cabin in silence.

If I am like him, how is this going to help me stay away from him? I wonder as I open my door.

It's not, I am going to have to suck it up.
Solas watched her walk to her cabin and couldn’t stop the small smile of excitement that spread over his features. He entered his cabin and let out a laugh of true joy. Since waking, he had endured one miscalculation after another, and to have this…truly beautiful spirit, brought forth to help him, was beyond anything he could have hoped for. He had been pleased when he found out the magic of his foci was on the hand of a mage. He had been less happy when he found that the mage was Dalish, but then he had met her and she had changed his opinion, at least of her.

When they had approached the Breach, he watched her combat her fears. But to have her also be a Sou'i've'an'thanelan, was surpassing everything he could have hoped for. She would indeed prove worthy to wield the mark she now bears.

Moving quickly to his desk, he began pulling the parchment out to write down a learning plan for her. He could teach her what he knew like he had with Assan. His thoughts halted, as memories of his loss rushed through him as it always did when he thought of her. Rubbing his eyes tiredly, he reminded himself that he could prepare Fenlin for what would come for her, much better than he did for Assan. He could never have prepared her for what happened. How could he when he wasn’t prepared for it himself. Shaking the thoughts of her away, he dipped his quill in the ink and began outlining a learning plan.

I couldn’t stop staring at myself in the mirror Josephine kindly got for me. Touching my face, I can feel the raised skin from the Dalish tattoo. I think this is for Mythal, I remind myself as I run my fingers over it again.

“If it weren’t for my eyes, I would barely recognize myself,” I mutter aloud.

Pulling my hair from its messy braid to see that it was indeed still the same black it was before, and it was still thick and curly. With a sigh of annoyance at the unruly hair, I slip a lock behind my ear and the sudden point of them mesmerizes me. Running my fingers over their shape, I feel the sensitivity in them.

Well…okay, these are kind of cool, I think as I tap the tips of both ears sending a shiver down my back that makes me giggle.

The sudden knock on my door pulls me from my inspection, and I move to open it. A young elven girl waits patiently and gives me a nervous smile as I gesture for her to enter.

“I am here to prepare a bath for you, your worship,” she says quickly.

The title she uses is unnerving and sends sparks of unease run down my spine.

I don’t know if I can handle that…not in here, not my private space.

“What is your name?” I ask her gently in the hopes of changing her mind.

“Nia, your worship,” she says quickly as she bows.

“I am Br...Fenlin; it is nice to meet you, Nia.”

Shit, I almost fucked up. Fenlin...my name is Fenlin.

“Yes your worship,” she says politely.
I shake my head now and see that I will need to be a little more direct.

“Nia, please just call me Fenlin.”

The young girl stares at me and then shakes her head.

“You are the Herald of Andraste; you deserve reverence your worship. I cannot call you by your given name, it would not be proper.”

I let my sigh of frustration escape as I shake my head at her.

“I am nobody Nia. Just someone who got stuck with this,” I tell her holding my hand up and showing her the mark.

Nia shakes her head in disagreement.

“You stopped the Breach from growing; you saved us your worship. Andraste sent you to save us,” she said simply before she moved to the fire and placed a large pot of water on it.

Okay, this is clearly not an argument that I am going to win apparently, and sit in the chair to watch her. Nia moved around my cabin with efficient actions, and soon the bath is prepared and steaming. Next, she lays out clean clothing and places a towel on the bed. She places the cleaning supplies next to the tub for me to use before moving to the basin on the table. Setting out a toothbrush (which I am thankful I recognize the tool), and a jar of some kind of paste next to it. *I hope that is Thedas' toothpaste,* I think silently looking at the jar. Once Nia is finished, she bows to me and leaves quickly without a word.

*Well, that's that then.*

Standing, I turn towards the bath excited to be clean and start peeling clothes quickly, letting them hit the floor without ceremony. Slipping into the steaming water, I let out a moan of pure pleasure before I start washing away my days’ worth of grime.

Chapter End Notes

Sou'i've'an'thanelan - Fade Mage
Varric catches me as I am leaving my cabin while on his way to the tavern, and waves me over to him while he waits.

“Hey, how you holding up?” He asks me with an easy smile on his face before continuing to walk.

I return his smile, falling into step with him and shake my head.

“About as good as it’s going to get I think.”

“So where are you off to then?” He asks me curiously. I look at him with a raised eyebrow.

“So many questions; you writing a book or something, Varric?”

Varric laughs and shakes his head.

“Even if I tried to write down everything that has happened, I don’t think anyone would believe it.”

I laughed and slip my hands into the pockets of my jacket to warm them against the cold.

“Actually, I was off to get another lesson in magic, what about you?”

Varric tightens his own jacket around him as the breeze picks up.

“The tavern, swing by and have a drink with me when you’re done. We can swap prisoner stories,” he joked grabbing the door handle.

“You got it,” I tell him as I walk backward towards Solas’ cabin giving him a salute before turning. I realize when I take the first step on the stairs that I can feel his magical aura. Shaking my head at the sensation, I stop just outside his door. Leaving my hands in my pockets for the heat I wait for him to answer. After a few moments of standing there, I hear him from the other side of the door.

“Why are you just standing out there?”

I smile suddenly and then wipe it off my face.

No…don’t do that.

“Just testing,” I reply and suddenly the door is opened and he is staring down at me.

“What are you testing?” He asks me curiously.

“To see how long it takes you to realize I am outside,” I reply with a cheeky grin.

Solas shakes his head at me while gesturing for me to come in.

“From the moment you stepped on the bottom step of the stairs, I knew you were on your way.”

“Impressive,” I tell him as I go stand in front of the fire warming myself.

“So what’s on the agenda for lessons today?” I ask him, studying the fire dancing in the hearth.
“Today we will continue to focus on meditation to strengthen your connection to your magic, and how you can enter the Fade at will by using this meditation. This will help refresh your energy, and also give you a solid connection to your abilities.”

I feel my heart stutter at the last part.

“So we will be entering the Fade…together?” I mentally cringe at the uneasy squeaky sound of my voice.

“Yes, until you learn how to do it yourself.”

“Right,” I reply quietly before taking a deep breath and turn towards him.

“So where you want me?”

Solas holds my gaze for a long moment before gesturing towards the chair. I move towards the chair, rolling my head, shaking my arms out preparing to relax.

*What the hell was that look for? Ugh…forget it and focus.*

If I keep telling myself that, I might actually do it. Reaching down towards the floor, I stretch out my back.

“What are you doing lethal’lan?” he asks me sounding curious as he watches me stretch.

“Preparing to meditate,” I answer him absently while I rotate my shoulders one at a time.

“And that…what you are doing, helps you?” He asks me now fully curious about my actions.

I look at him now and nod my head ‘yes’.

“This works the kinks out of my neck and shoulders. If you hadn’t noticed…I am not exactly a ‘sit and focus’ type of gal,” I joke. At least not with him, that part I keep to myself.

He raises an eyebrow at me, “I had noticed.”

I give him a large smile before finally sitting down and closing my eyes, I focus on clearing my mind of everything. This I could do, and do quite well really. I loved the dark silence that I could pull around me when I needed everything to just shut up and go away.

Solas felt his stomach clench and then drop with the sparkle in her eyes as she smiled at him. He watched her close her eyes and moved to stand behind her, with his arms folded behind his back. He listened to her steady breathing and inspected the ebb and flow of her aura while she surrounded herself with it. He felt the way it caressed his skin and closed his eyes for a moment to enjoy it. *It has been a very long time since I have felt this,* he realizes as he takes a deep breath focusing on the way it felt to him.

Her aura slid over and against his, it was quite calming. He suppresses a small sigh at the pleasurable feeling it gave him. His smiles when he feels her aura poke at him teasingly, *so much like her personality when she is speaking.* He walked around her and sat down, pleased that she kept her focus inward. He sent his aura to poke back and caught the slight smile form on her lips at the action like his own had. *I should not have done that,* he thought after he had. It is a distraction either can ill
afford, he reminds himself pulling his aura back to tightly cover him again.

Once her meditation practice is complete, he waited for her eyes to slowly open and look at him.

“You will use that level of focus when slipping into the Fade. I am confident that once you feel how I accomplish it, you will be able to do it yourself.”

I nod in agreement, and I feel him take my hands gently to establish the connection. Shivering slightly at the touch, I push my focus on following his aura.

*I have to memorize this, or we are going to be sitting here holding hands all day…not good, not good at all.*

I feel the way his aura moves forward through the connection of our hands. Focusing on the feeling for only a few moments before he has taken us to the Fade, and I am suddenly standing outside his cabin. Looking around I notice there is no one around but them, and his voice pulls my focus back to him.

“Were you able to follow the flow of my aura, or shall we do it again?” He asks me sounding very calm.

I stare at him a moment trying to quell the soft flutter in my stomach at his gaze.

“I think I was able to follow, may I try to do it myself?”

“I will wait here for you,” he says calmly.

I pull myself back to the waking world and I can suddenly feel his warm hands in mine. Staring at them for a moment I shake my head and close my eyes.

*Focus idiot and stop staring at his hands.*

Shaking my head and pulling my focus back to me, I take a cleansing breath and then recognize the path he had taken. Soon I find myself standing next to him in the Fade again. Smiling brightly I laugh.

“Very good,” he says evenly.

“So this is what you do when you visit those old ruins,” I ask him while looking around us.

“Yes,” he says and I can feel through his aura that he is enjoying that he could share this with me.

*I feel him here stronger than in the waking world.*

“As a Fade Mage, you can change the scenery, right? I mean like shape it to show something that you remember?” *That could be fun,* I think to myself as I wait for him to answer.

“Yes, you can. You have the ability to mold the fade to show you memories you have seen as easily as memories you have not.”

He watches me pleasantly pleased that I would question him about my newly acquired abilities.
“So how do you do it?” I finally ask him feeling kind of excited at the idea.

“You would close your eyes, and focus on the memory. You must compile every small detail and it must be a strong memory. Once you have accomplished that, you open your eyes and your memory should have a shape here in the Fade.”

Hmm…I really want to try this, but this could backfire badly.

After a few moments of indecision, I give a mental shrug and decide.

Fuck it; you only live once, right?

Closing my eyes I focus on the lake next to my cabin back in upstate New York. I picture the water and the way it looked at night with the moon shining brightly on the surface. The gentle summer breeze as it blows over my face. The smell of the pine trees in the air, the sound of the owls in the trees and the moist dirt beneath my feet as I would walk the forest.

Solas watched her interestedly as she closed her eyes. His instinct told him that she would not be able to effectively change the Fade around them on her first try. His breath halted as Haven faded around them. Slowly breathing again he was suddenly surrounded by a dark forest, with a very large body of water quickly forming in front of him, with a silver-colored moon reflecting on its surface. A smile spread across his features as he felt a warm breeze suddenly caress his skin and he could smell the damp earth around him. When her amber eyes slowly opened to take in her surroundings, he felt warmth settle within him at her accomplishment. It was difficult to bring forth a strong memory with such detail. She would indeed be a strong Sou'i've'an'thanelan.

I look up at the night sky with pleasure at my success.

“I did it,” I said in breathless wonderment before letting my eyes settle on him.

“It would appear so lethal’lan, I am pleased you were able to accomplish this on your first try. Will you share with me where you have brought me?” He asks me curiously.

I walk towards the water’s edge and crouch down to run my fingers in the cool water. I could actually feel it. This is amazing, I thought silently before answering him.

“My home,” I tell him softly before walking towards the forest.

Maybe this is stupid of me to show him this.

I glance through the canopy of pines towards the large silver moon appreciating its beauty and realized I wanted to share this with him. God, I’m a fool, I think as I take the path leading towards my cabin.
Solas glanced around now studying the area carefully.

*Her home?*

He noticed the sudden change in her as she walked from him. He could feel that she missed her home deeply, but there was something to her aura that was almost melancholy. Looking around at the tranquility of the area, he thought he would miss something so peaceful as well.

*Where are her people, the aravels?*

He looked around curiously now searching for signs of them and realized that there were none. His insatiable curiosity was one he never could control and now he found himself following after her, curious to where she would be going and stopped next to her when he saw a cabin that faced the water.

“Lethal’lan, where are your people?” he questions me quietly.

*I knew better than to do this with him, he is too observant and curious. I am not as good at hiding shit as he is. Jesus, I am such a fool!*

“Wake up,” I say to him and he is suddenly gone from beside me. I let out a soft breath of relief that it had worked before pulling myself back to waking, and when I open my eyes, he is staring at me with surprised annoyance.

“I will practice what you taught me,” I promise him while pulling my hands quickly out of his. Grabbing my jacket from the back of the chair I bolted for the door before he could ask me any questions. Closing it behind me I take a shaky breath as I slip my jacket on before quickly heading towards my cabin. *Sorry Varric, some other time,* I think as I pass the tavern.

Solas sat staring at the door for a long while mulling over what had happened. He felt the fading of her aura as she quickly moved away from him. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he analyzed what she had shown him. He had never been in a place like that before. It was very peaceful and very secluded.

*Had she left her clan before coming to Haven?*

He let out a breath of frustration as he studied what she had shown him. There was something about it that was bothering him, and he couldn’t put his finger on it…yet. He still felt an annoyance at how easily she had awoken him. It had been a swift, warm breeze of her power and he was instantly awake. Shaking his head he realized that Fenlin was proving to be a curiosity that he was swiftly finding difficult to ignore.
Sou'i've'an'thanelan - Fade Mage
Battle Training

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Its already been three weeks since I came to Haven and began my training with Solas, and I don’t think I have progressed anywhere close enough to leave the safety of its walls. I knew Cassandra had already questioned Solas about it, but he wasn’t saying anything to me. Maybe he didn’t want me to feel pressured, who knew with that enigmatic elf. I feel the sweat running down my back as I continue to focus on my barrier while he throws one magical ice ball at me after another. I know he is purposely working away at my barrier slowly, wanting to see how long I could hold it. I feel my feet slide back with the next hit, and I close my eyes, pulling the Fade closer to me, trying to keep his attacks out. Three...four...five...shit

THWACK!

I land on my back breathing heavily, recovering from a hundred mile an hour snowball to the chest, or that is what it felt like anyway. Rubbing the spot where it hit, I can already feel that there is going to be a huge bruise just barely above my right breast.

“Try again,” he told me calmly waiting for me to get up.

Fuck that hurt!

He hides his smile at the rude gesture directed at him before she dropped her hand to her stomach tiredly. Walking slowly towards her, he observed her closed eyes and quick pants of breath. Now that he was close enough, he noticed the sweat that dotted her brow and the black hair stuck to her cheek that had come loose from her braid. She is breathtaking; he thought and pushed it away quickly. I will not allow myself to think such things, he reminded himself for the tenth time that day as he slipped his staff onto his back.

Crouching down, he knelt beside her observing her non-movement and shook his head deciding that a break was indeed needed.

“Let’s take our afternoon meal,” he says gently from beside me.

I open one of my eyes to look at him.

“You’re not just saying that so I will get up are you?” I ask him, ignoring the small rock pocking me in the back.

Solas chuckled, and shook his head. Standing up he held a hand down to me.

“No lethal’lan, we may resume practice after we eat.”

I stare at his offered hand for a moment and let out a sigh. Grasping his hand, I prepare for the instant
rush I will feel at the heat of his hand in mine. Dusting off my butt I look at him from the corner of my eye.

“Why do I get the impression you are thoroughly enjoying yourself while torturing me?” I ask him teasingly and caught the slight twitch of his lips at the ribbing.

“That would be counterproductive if that were the case,” he said simply folding his arms behind him and schooling his features to appear indifferent.

“Yes it would be…but that doesn’t mean you’re not enjoying this,” I tell him with a small smirk rubbing the spot over my breast again.

Solas gazed down at me for a moment and then focused on the gates of Haven.

“I assure you Fenlin, I am not torturing you,” he said evenly.

“Ah…but you didn’t say you weren’t enjoying it,” I point out and start walking towards the tavern.

I saw him slightly shake his head at me and letting a smile escape before masking it and followed behind me, soon falling into step next to me.

“I enjoy imparting my knowledge to you. You have shown a curiosity to learn it, and strive for perfection in yourself, it is most admirable.”

I glance at him for a moment surprised that he would give any praise, he so rarely did. It made me feel giddy with a sense of pride in myself that I forgot my own tongue.

“Why did you choose to study the Fade, Solas?” as soon as the question left my mouth I wanted to suck it back in.

He doesn’t like talking about himself, and I shouldn’t care I remind myself…again.

“Where I grew up there was little to interest a young man, especially one gifted with magic. But when I slept, spirits of the Fade would show me glimpses of wonders I could never have imagined. I treasured my dreams; being awake, out of the Fade, became troublesome.” I could hear and feel his honesty, and I am sure he could see the surprise on my features at his answer.

I couldn’t believe he had answered me and I fell silent as we entered the tavern. I noticed Varric was absent and was actually glad he was because I had more questions if Mr. Mysterious was feeling inclined to actually talk. I chose a table close to a window, away from the main host of people and sat down. Flissa came to their table and placed a couple of ales in front of them and told them that their lunch would be out shortly. Thanking her, I watched him take a small drink of his ale and chewed my lip nervously before plunging head-first into more questions.

“Are Spirits really just waiting to tempt a weak dreamer as soon as they get there like Cassandra would like me to believe?”

Solas smiled and shook his head, he looked so relaxed sitting back in his chair.

“No more than an apple asks you to eat it. I learned how to defend myself against the more...aggressive Spirits, and how to interact safely with the others. I learned how to control my dreams with full consciousness. There was so much I wanted to explore – learn.” He said before taking another drink of his ale.

I saw the reflective expression he had while he spoke, and his aura exuded his pleasure in sharing
this with me. It was beautiful to watch the change in his aura as he spoke.

“I gather you didn’t spend your entire life dreaming then,” I say before taking a drink of my own ale, gently prodding him to continue.

Solas chuckled and shook his head. “No, eventually I was unable to find new areas in the Fade.”

I felt his laugh tickle my senses and make my heart speed up with the sound. Taking a nervous drink of my ale I stare into the mug for a moment and then lifted my head to thank Flissa as she delivered their bowls of hearty ram stew. I watched him take a bite and felt a little mesmerized at the action of him just putting food in his mouth.

*Focus for fuck's sake you idiot,* I remind myself.

“Why did you run out of places to search? Isn’t the Fade infinite?” I ask him before taking a bite of my own stew finding it easier to focus if I was chewing.

Solas held my gaze for a moment before looking away and focusing on my question.

*Why does he keep looking at me like that? Ugh!*

“Well, …two reasons really. First, the Fade reflects the world around it. Unless I traveled, I would never find anything new. Second, the Fade reflects and is limited by our imaginations. To find interesting areas, one needs to be interesting.”

I watch him take another bite of his meal and thought about his words carefully while I chewed on the piece of potato in my mouth. Finally looking at him I smile and point my spoon at him.

“Is this why you’re here? I mean with the Inquisition?”

I watched him shake his head for a moment and then place his spoon into his bowl before holding my gaze hostage.

“I joined the Inquisition because we were all in terrible danger. If our enemies destroy the world, then I would have nowhere to lay my head while dreaming of the Fade. *That is* why I joined, *not* why I chose to stay.”

I hold his gaze for a moment longer before he finally releases me, and I take a bite of my stew and chew thoughtfully. Swallowing, I chose to ignore asking him *why* he had chosen to stay having a good idea as to the answer having something to do with the anchor on my hand. Instead, I smile at him, “I guess if that works for you, and it makes you happy, then good luck.”

Solas considers me for a moment, his surprise written clearly on his face at my easy acceptance for his reasoning and sits back in his chair holding his ale.

“Thank you. In truth, I have enjoyed experiencing more of life to find more of the Fade.”

I swallow my food and gaze at him suddenly nervous where this conversation could possibly be going.

“Really, how so?”

“You train your will to control magic you don’t yet completely understand. You resist possession from aggressive Spirits, even as a fledgling. Your indomitable focus is an enjoyable side benefit. You have chosen a path whose steps you do not dislike because it leads you to a destination you enjoy.
As have I,” he said honestly.

*There is no way he is actually going to flirt with me.*

I look at him for a moment and shake my head laughing. “Indomitable focus Solas, seriously?”

He smiled at me and my stomach fell to the floor. The sound of his voice thickened and grew deeper, wrapping around me like silk sheets sliding over hyper-sensitive skin.

“Presumably…I have yet to see it dominated. I imagine that the sight would be – fascinating.”

*Oh Christ on a cracker, he is…flirting with me.*

Staring suddenly at my bowl of stew I cram another bite into my mouth quickly as I feel the traitorous blush suddenly rush over my cheeks and heat the tips of my ears. Finishing the rest of their meal in silence, I catch him looking at me with a much different expression, and now I am unsure what I should do.

*He is a liar…he will say whatever he needs to,* I remind myself, yet, I am finding it hard to not enjoy the warm feeling he had given me with his words. Clearing my throat I push my bowl away and drain the last of my ale.

“Well let’s hope that focus keeps me from landing on my ass again. Are you ready?” I ask him.

Solas gave me an easy smile at my sudden nervousness and nods his head in agreement.

“I am lethal’lan; let’s continue with our work on your barrier.”

After our training is done, I knew Solas was pleased with my progress and I felt a marginal sense of accomplishment as we walk back towards Haven.

“Tomorrow we will continue with offensive magic. Your progress is impressive, so much so that we should be able to leave for the Crossroads by the end of the week.”

I stop walking and look at him with surprise.

“You really think so?”

Solas nods his head ‘yes’ and I resume walking next to him.

“I do, you have exceeded what I thought you capable of. Your strong focus on getting prepared is commendable; I have confidence that you are ready. We shall continue our lessons while we travel, but I believe that putting what you have learned into practice will help.”

I walk next to him and feel my stomach tighten at his words.

*I will have to kill people…living people…that are going to try to kill me.*

“I've never been forced to kill anyone before,” I admit to him quietly.

Solas placed his hand on my arm, stopping me. The sight of my expression, the fear, and sorrow he must have felt radiate from me, obviously hurt him. I knew he could see that I did not want to do this…did not want that responsibility of life or death on my hands.
“I will not lie to you lethal’lan, it is not an easy thing to do. We all find our own path to manage it, and accept what must be done. I will not say that you will not hesitate…for you most surely might. I can only offer my support, and let you know that if you need me, I will be there for you.”

I can’t tear my eyes from him, not in this one, singular moment. In this one moment, I can forget what his plan is, that the only reason he is friendly with me is that he needs me to fix this mess. For one moment I can believe he actually cares about me and my feelings. I turn towards him and hold his gaze for a long moment letting his words wash over me and my nervousness and even my fears of what was expected of me. I knew I could not hug him…not physically, but I needed him to know…understand that his words meant everything to me. I closed my eyes and focused on my aura, once I had it just right, I pushed it outward to envelop him.

Solas stood in stunned surprise at the feel of her aura suddenly surrounding him. He immediately realized what she was doing and felt a soft glow of warmth as he let his own aura embrace her. He felt her admiration for him in the small gesture and it surprised him. He did not deserve such a feeling…not from someone so – pure of spirit. He could not, however, push away her kindhearted affection as it soothed his sudden loathing of himself and what she would have to endure because of him. He studied her for a long moment and all too soon he watched her amber colored eyes slowly open to look at him.

“Thank you,” I say softly and turn for the path leading back to my cabin.

I can’t stay focused on this right now, I realize as I found myself reading the same sentence twice. Glancing out my small window I see the snow is still falling. We leave tomorrow, and I have got the jitters. I lay my book down on my chest and stare up at my wooden ceiling, my fingers tapping against the cover in quick staccato sounds.

“I gotta get outta here,” I say aloud and push the book off of me as I roll off my bed. Grabbing my jacket and sliding my arms into the sleeves, I swing open my cabin door and head towards the tavern. Varric has got to be in there, I tell myself, walking faster trying to escape the cold. Pulling the tavern door open quickly so I can get into the warm room, I spot Varric sitting in the far corner. Bless his heart he is next to the fireplace, I notice as I wave at him when he looks up.

I get closer to his table, and he gestures for me to sit before he starts shuffling papers around in front of him.

“What’s all this?” I ask him curiously.

“A book I was working on before all this shit happened,” he said.

Flissa approached the table and I asked her for a couple of ales after I slip her a few coppers. Glancing back at Varric busily shuffling his paper and I see one with a drawing on it. Tapping at it
with my finger I look at him, “may I?”

“Sure,” he tells me and I pull the drawing out of the quick shuffling of papers. It was a simple drawing of a sword lying on a shield.

“Did you draw this?”

Varric laughed and shook his head.

“Hell no, I write I am no artist,” he says to me quickly before taking a drink of his ale.

I smile and shake my head at him.

“Writing is a wonderful form of artistry Varric. You guide your readers to draw a mental picture. Sometimes that is more important than a physical one.” I look back down at the drawing, “although I think it would look much better if they were propped against a wall, not just lying flat like that. It needs dimension, a way for it to stand out.”

Varric looked at me curiously now, “I didn’t know you could draw?”

I smile before taking a sip of my ale. “It is what I did before, as you said, ‘all this shit happened’.”

“I suppose you wouldn’t want to show me,” he said teasingly.

I look at him steadily for a moment before shrugging my shoulders.

“Sure, why not? I can pretty much draw anything, so what do you want?”

“I’m not picky, go for it,” he says while sitting back against the wall.

I pull a piece of his paper towards me and grab one of his quills. Varric slides a bottle of ink towards me and I smile at him gratefully. I glance at him for a moment and I let my eyes close, cementing the picture of Varric leaning against the wall. Opening my eyes, I began drawing.

Solas was headed towards the tavern in search of some lunch when he felt her aura as he stepped from the last step of the stairs. Glancing around curiously, he found it to be too cold outside for her to possibly be out and felt her aura strengthen as he drew closer to the tavern doors. Entering quickly into the warm room, he observed she was in the back corner with Varric with her back towards him. From where he stood it looked to be that Master Tethras was napping against the wall, and as he approached he felt her aura slide against his warmly.

“Savhalla, Solas,” I say as I continue drawing.

He walked closer and peered over my shoulder, clearly surprised at the detailed drawing of Master Tethras I was working on.

“I was not aware you were an artist lethal’lan,” he said as he sat next to me.
I blew on the ink, careful to not smudge it before grabbing for my mug of ale. Varric opened his eyes and glanced at me.

“Can I look at it yet?”

I smile at him and hand the paper over. Varric stared at it in surprise, letting out a low whistle of appreciation as he finally looked up at me.

“You mind if I keep this?”

“Your paper, your ink Varric – enjoy,” I tell him with a large smile. I was just glad to get out of my cabin and do something. Finally looking at Solas who was sitting closer to me than I thought necessary.

“Do you draw Solas?” I ask him even though I know the answer while trying to ignore the slight tingles that rushed over my skin where our knees touched.

“Some,” he said evasively as he lathered honey over a thick slice of bread. I could see the barely held back smile at the flare of my annoyance in my aura as he took a bite.

I look away from him in irritation.

_Some?! Okay turkey, if that is how you want it then two can play that game._

I grab another sheet of Varric’s paper and start drawing a medieval shield propped against a wall like I had described earlier. I will ignore the completely frustrating elf next to me and draw.

I finish with the rough drawing of the sword and shield and blow on it to dry the ink before I hand it over to Varric.

“That was what I meant earlier.”

Varric looked at it and nodded his head in understanding.

“I see what you mean now; it makes more of a statement.”

“Exactly,” I say giving him a smile as I put the cork back on his ink pot. Downing the last of my ale I picked up my jacket from beside me, and stand slipping it on.

“Thanks for the company Varric, I will see you later.”

Chapter End Notes

Savhalla - Greetings
On the Road

Leaving Haven with a nervous knot in my stomach, I twirled the horse's mane with my fingers absently while staring off at the scenery. The Frostbacks were breathtaking, if not downright freezing. From the moment I was introduced to my horse this morning, I promptly named her ‘Etta’. Such a sweet and blessedly, docile creature, with a lovely white star on her roan forehead that I found she liked scratched. I knew she and I were going to become great friends, and she continued to prove it while I rode along behind Cassandra. I was trying to keep quiet unless spoken to and was grateful for Varric’s constant chatter. My close proximity to Mr. Mysterious was going to prove difficult, and I knew it, but having Varric to focus on was definitely helping. I could feel his aura occasionally touching mine and mine reached out to his before I could pull it closer to me. *Distance is key*, I reminded myself as my horse plodded along.

Solas felt her withdrawal from him like a solid slap.

He didn't understand this abrupt change in her towards him, and in some way, he knew that he should appreciate it, but he could not. He had purposely held her at arm’s length, and he was the one proving to have difficulty with this distance. He analyzed this discomfort and his eyes suddenly widen with understanding. Fenlin was the first person he found intriguing, and what surprised him most was that he truly wanted to get to know her. She was intelligent, she had a quick wit, and she made him realize that not all the elves were lost with the casting of the veil. He shouldn't want such a friendship, not when his path was already laid out before him, and it did not have room for companionship.

Her soft laughter at whatever Master Tethras was saying pulled his attention. He envied the dwarf his ability to make her laugh so easily, he did not possess such an ability. He studied her profile while she spoke, and examined the angle of her jaw, the soft slope to her nose that slowly tipped up at the end. The way she tilted her head back, exposing the slender column of her neck while laughing and her whole body expressed her joy. It was a sight to see her so...relaxed and not nervous as she was generally around him. Perhaps this change has something to do with her anxiety around him. He would need to try to alleviate her anxiety with him, perhaps with time, she will see him as a friend.

*I will talk with her once we have made camp*, he decided against his better judgment while staring at her back.

My hand sparked suddenly, alerting me to a rift that was close and I held up my hand.

“We have a rift somewhere nearby,” I tell them getting off my horse. Stretching my back out before grabbing my staff every muscle in my body protested at the change of positions. Groaning I pulled my staff out of the harness on the saddle and carried it loosely in my hand as I approached Cassandra. Everyone dismounted and followed my lead by grabbing their weapons after tying the horses up. The pulses in my hand grew stronger as we got closer. Cassandra took the lead and I followed behind her closely into a small clearing when I heard the loud sound of thunder cracking overhead.
“Sounds like we found it,” I mutter as I throw a barrier over us before Cassandra charges towards the first demon that came through the rift.

Staying towards the back with Solas until it was time for me to close it, was much easier than swinging a sword. This is much nicer than my first go around, I thought as I took out a Shade demon. With the many demons gone, I held my hand towards the rift and felt the sudden connection. It felt smoother than it had when I was running up the mountain after the Breach. The only bright side to this is that my arm doesn't feel like it is on fire anymore and that was a good thing. Tightening my hand into a fist, I severed the connection as the rift closed with a loud pop and turned back towards where we left our horses.

"How much further till we stop, Cassandra?"

Cassandra slid her shield onto her back. "Perhaps an hour, maybe two. We shall reach it before dark."

I didn't say anything just nodded my head in understanding and followed her out of the small clearing. My whole body felt like I had been run over by a truck with all the riding I had done already. His aura slid against mine and with a sigh I pulled mine tighter around me, refusing to look at him.

He is going to make sure I don't forget he is here...like that could ever happen with my constant butterflies and fucking blushing. Ugh!

Solas watched the burns on her arm glow with the green of the anchor as she used it to close the rift. Shock rushed through him when he recognized the pattern of the burns that trailed over her hand and up her arm. He would never have believed it possible had he not witnessed it himself, yet the evidence was right there on her arm. They were the patterns of his foci, he realized with a tremor of fear at the concept of what that could mean for him.

They moved back through the woods towards their mounts in silence, and he could not stop thinking about the patterns. He hoped he was wrong, and sent his aura out to hers testing his theory, but found she was still blocking him. He stopped the sudden sigh of frustration from escaping and consoled himself with finding out later.

When Cassandra finally chose our campsite, I was grateful. I couldn’t feel my legs, they were too busy throbbing, and my back was killing me. I had not ridden a horse since I was a little girl, and my body reminded me that I was no longer that young. Sliding from Etta, I held onto the saddle horn as my feet finally met the ground with a groan. Letting go, I begin rubbing my throbbing thighs while Cassandra softly laughed at me and my obvious discomfort.

“Are you not used to riding Fenlin?” she asked me.

I shook my head and continued rubbing. “No, but I am sure I will get used to it soon enough,” I tell her resigned to just hurt for a while. Cassandra snorted her agreement and moved to unsaddle her mount.
Solas walked up to me while I continued to rub my thighs and finally moved to my lower back.

“Perhaps you would allow me to help you? I can relieve you of some of your discomforts.”

_The last thing I need is your hands on my thighs_, I think to myself as I shake my head at him in self-preservation.

“No thank you, I am sure with some moving around it will ease up,” I tell him before turning to remove the tack from Etta’s back ignoring the sudden twinges of protest my body gave with the action.

I felt Solas’ stare at my back for a moment before he turned away, and let out a small breath of relief and continued removing the tack from Etta.

Varric pulled the tents out and walked towards me holding one out towards me.

“You want me to help you with this?” He offered. Smiling gratefully, I took the tent.

“Thank you Varric, I would appreciate that. I am embarrassed to say I don’t know how to set one up,” I tell him easily.

Varric smiled, “well that is easy Sketch, come on I’ll show you.”

I can’t help my smile at the nickname. “Sketch is it,” I joke with him.

He nodded his head as he rolled out the tent canvas. “Yup, I think it works.”

“Well it could be worse I suppose.”

Solas did not miss the easy interaction between the two and clenched his jaw. He had no idea why her sudden dismissal bothered him so much, but it did. Finished setting up his own tent, he was about to prepare the wards for the evening and chose to turn it into an easy lesson for her, unwilling to admit to himself that he wanted to spend time with her. Walking towards her again, he saw the slight stiffening of her shoulders before she turned towards him and refrained from stiffening himself at her reaction.

“I am going to set up the wards for around the camp. Would you like to learn how this is done?” he offered calmly instead.

I nod my head and fall into step with him.

“Probably couldn’t hurt for me to know,” I try to say with an easy tone and pat Varric’s shoulder as I stand to follow after him.

*I can’t completely block him out, I need him to teach me how this magic shit works_, I remind myself as I feel the normal tingles of his aura brushing against mine. _Jesus, focus you daft bitch_, I mentally slap myself trying to focus on what he was doing.
I observe him draw a ward on the ground with interest, visually following the path he drew so fluidly. The ward was a soft yellow in color as he drew it, and when it was activated on the ground it disappeared. It was simple in construction, yet each line or curve was for a specific purpose to the ward.

“This ward is designed to correlate with a rune to give you a soft zap of electrical energy if your ward is stepped on or when put next to another like this, the zap will be made if walked between them,” he explains easily.

“You try the next one,” he tells me and folds his arms behind him.

“Okay,” I answer and we go to the next spot while I try to draw it out on the ground. The color was off, and that told me that I drew it wrong. Solas gazed at it for a moment.

“It is a good first try. You only made a few mistakes give me your hand,” he says evenly waiting for me to comply.

Great, I can’t help thinking as I place my hand on his and my heart instantly begins to race at the contact. I feel the heat of his skin and the small rush of awareness that runs up my arm at the simple touch of his aura with mine. He directs my hand, carefully drawing the ward slowly so that I could try it again myself. I can’t stop the flush of heat that rushes up my neck and tints the tips of my ears as I become aware of how close he was.

Christ on a cracker! I have got to figure out how to turn this off.

Once the ward is in place, he finally releases my hand so that I can try the next one on my own, and I can suddenly breathe normally again.

Taking a calming breath, I place the next one grateful that I did it correctly so that he wouldn’t have to hold my hand again, and we moved on to finish the perimeter. Finally finished, I turn to walk back towards the camp and hear the sound of him clearing his throat to get my attention.

“Have I upset you in some way, lethal’lan?” he says to my back.

I stop and let a sigh escape before I shake my head.

“No Solas, you have done nothing wrong. I just don’t want to become annoying. I know you like your privacy and time alone, as do I. We already spend a lot of time together; I didn’t want you to find me clingy.”

I tell him this thinking it sounds plausible and takes another step away, believing the conversation was over.

“I appreciate your thoughtfulness on my behalf lethal’lan, but you have never been bothersome to me. I enjoy our conversations and our time training together.”

I can hear the honesty in his words and I feel a small lift at the corners of my mouth before I can control them.

“That is because I am trying to not become annoying…see it’s working,” I tease him as I glance at him over my shoulder.

I do not know what that look is he is giving me, and right now I am unwilling to find out.

“I should get back and help with making dinner,” I tell him. Thankfully he said nothing else to me,
and I tried to walk away not looking like I was in a hurry.

Solas watched her leave and felt his stomach tighten at what he had confirmed. She had indeed become his orb, and he was unsure if he could ever remove it from her harmlessly.

After dinner, and clean up, I tried escaping his physical presence by going to my tent. I, of course, could still feel his aura and knew that I would continue to feel it all night long since his tent was next to mine. Letting out a sigh of frustration, I rub my face resigned to just deal with it. *I wonder if what he showed me about the fade if I could practice there too.*

Preparing myself for bed, and I overhear Cassandra talking with Solas about me out by the fire, and I lean a bit closer to the tent opening so I could listen better.

“We should begin to run into resistance tomorrow, do you believe she is prepared Solas?”

“As prepared as one can be that has never been placed in such a position, Seeker” she heard Solas reply.

“Then make sure she stays close to you,” she advises him.

I shake my head at her words and feel a sudden urge to leave my tent and tell her I didn’t need a babysitter. Taking a calming breath, I sigh heavily plopping down on my bedroll.

*I can’t blame her for wanting to keep me safe. I am not a fighter, not yet anyway, and this thing on my hand is needed to close the rifts.*

Falling back on the bedroll, I close my eyes trying to calm my anger and my nerves.

*How the hell did I end up the one to turn a shit sandwich into a delicious fucking salad in this scenario?*

Taking another deep breath, I draw the soothing calm of darkness around my thoughts and focus on the meditation Solas taught me to connect with the Fade.
Glancing around at the blank image that is the Fade, I smile excitedly at the invigorating feeling that is suddenly rushing through my veins.

*This – is drawing on a much larger canvas,* I think excitedly.

Closing my eyes, I brought the memory of a camping area I went to as a child with my parents into my mind. I focus on everything I can remember. The vivid colors of the flowers, the smell of the warm earth, and the feeling of heat as the sun graced my face. When I open my eyes, I see the sun-filled field of wildflowers and felt the warmth of the sun on my face. Taking a deep breath of the earthy scents that were on the air, I feel myself begin to relax.

“Yes,” I say aloud pleased with myself, and twirl around excitedly.

“You have done well child,” turning quickly at the familiar sounding, smoky accented voice.

“You,” I say in surprise at the Elven woman I thought was a dream. There she stood with long white hair, wearing gilded armor walking towards me across the flower-filled area. I gaze at her with caution as I held my breath. Last time I saw this woman, I ended up in the virtual shit storm known as Thedas.

“Yes,” she said to me with a large smile on her face, tilting her head slightly to the side studying me as if she could hear my thoughts.

“You…brought me here.” I know I sound accusing, but I felt justified.

“I did,” she replied simply, folding her arms, looking very satisfied with her actions.

“Why?” I ask her suddenly feeling like a lost child in a crowded mall.

She smiled at me gently and slid one of the ever-present stray locks of hair behind my ear.

“Because you can help the people,” she said simply before taking my marked hand and gazing at it curiously.

For a moment I was stunned speechless with her answer before an angry burst of laughter escaped. Pulling my hand from hers and throwing my arms up in frustration I paced away from her.

“Am I supposed to die, to accomplish this…so-called favor of yours?” I ask her angrily.

The woman stared at me for a long moment, and now I am thinking I should have reined in my tongue when she finally broke the pregnant silence.

“Am I supposed to die, to accomplish this…so-called favor of yours?” I ask her angrily.

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“No, I cannot have him repeat my mistake again.” She answered me calmly.

I study her cautiously while she walks around me, my head and eyes following her slow path as she circles.

“I should apologize for not giving that part of you back before. Your powers were almost equal to his at one time with his training. It will take you time to rebuild what you once were,” she said to me
puzzlingly.

“Whose powers?” letting a heavy sigh of frustration escape, I held the cool yellow, cat-like gaze. “What the hell are you even talking about?” I question her with complete confusion. She softly smiles at me and my frustrated questions taking her time to glance around before she answers.

“There is much I cannot explain to you…yet. I wish there was another way; however, I cannot allow you to die…not this time, so this I can do for you.” She said just as cryptically to me as she had been in the first meeting, and laid her hand on my forehead.

There was a sudden painful rush of information that assaulted me. Hitting my knees as she kept her hand in place, I suddenly understood things about magic I previously did not know. Specifically, information about my own magic was flooding my brain now. When she was done, I was sweating and panting heavily as if I had just run a 5k marathon. She knelt in front of me, and we were eye level as she held my face tenderly…like a mother would her own child while I tried to catch my breath.

“There now, that will help and I am sorry for such pain, it was never my intent. You can save our people lethal’lan and him if you try. You are the only one who can make him listen.”

“Solas,” I say with quiet understanding holding her cat yellow gaze, and see her slow nod at me. Hanging my head knowing he would never allow it, I tell her quietly. “He will not let me.” I hear her laughter echoing around us at my words, and my head snapped up to look at her in confused surprise.

“He will, just not willingly. My most stubborn brother, that one,” she said gently, her tone full of laughter. I watched as she stood and felt her pull me with her. Grasping my face, she kissed both of my cheeks and then pulled away with a gentle smile on her face. “I will owe you much if you succeed,” she tells me before walking away without so much as a goodbye, kiss my ass or anything.

Watching her leave my field of wildflowers, I suddenly rub my face as confused as the first time I spoke with her. Well if I wasn’t fucked before…I am now, I thought suddenly before turning away from the empty place she used to be standing in to practice.

The sudden zapping of the alarms into my hip had me sitting upright on my bedroll, pulling me roughly from the fade.

“Fucking shit,” I growl chucking the rune away from me in my surprise towards the tent wall. The dull thud of connection made me realize what that shocking actually meant, and I slam my feet into my boots and grab my staff hurriedly. Exiting my tent with my stomach in knots of fear I notice that across from me Cassandra was wearing a nightshirt and leggings, holding her sword and shield at the ready. Next to me was a shirtless Varric in Thedas’ version of boxers, with Bianca cocked and loaded. On my other side was a shirtless Solas in leggings, holding his staff scanning the area quickly.

Damn, he is really hot…okay, focus. Am I the only one that fell asleep in real clothing?

I joke with myself while looking down at my fully dressed self. My ears twitch at a sound to the left of Cassandra, and pulling the fade quickly to me, I set a barrier around her just as a metal geared man plowed through the bushes beside her, with his sword raised.
“Asshole,” I breathed angrily watching Cassandra put her shield up quickly and block the downward stroke of his blade. It was nothing but complete chaos, as more men flooded into our camp shouting. Varric yelled his own level of angry obscenities at their intrusion and started pulling the trigger on Bianca as rapidly as he could load. I pull on the Fade again and grab for meteors of fire that Solas had just taught me. Casting them over the intruders he had just placed an electrical cage over. Casting a quick freezing spell at another that was a few feet from Varric, and he shot a barrage of arrows into the frozen form, shattering it. Everything was crazy, and the rush of adrenaline was high as I cast spell after spell.

Swiveling my head towards the sound of heavy footsteps to my right, a man was running towards me. Shield up, sword raised, green eyes focused on me. Panting heavily with fear, a spell I definitely didn’t know before my nocturnal visitor came to my fingertips, and I thrust my arm out quickly. The spell sent an extended version of my fist flying at his chest in rock form. When it shattered against him, he fell to the ground in stunned surprise. Running quickly towards him, I thrust the blade end of my staff through his throat angrily before he could even get up.

Turning towards the remaining sounds of the intruders, I see that what was left of them were scattered through the trees running away. Everything just seemed so unreal to me while glancing around at everyone. Cassandra’s night clothes are covered in blood splatter as is her blade and shield. Varric is also covered in spatter across his bare chest and arms as he stood calmly wiping his dagger off with a piece of cloth. I glance towards Solas, and he is angrily wiping at his own chest with a cloth. I feel an instant sense of relief that we made it out whole.

*Those wards really do work, and I didn’t hesitate,* my adrenaline-addled brain tells me. Glancing down at myself, I see that I too have blood on my clothes, and my vision suddenly tunnels in on the sight of it.

*How did that happen?*

My mind questions stupidly, and then everything rushes back to me and what happened, what I had done. I just killed a man, who tried to kill me. My eyes swiftly find him on the ground, and my world suddenly becomes hyper-focused on his prone form. I look at Solas in horror before absently dropping my staff and forcing myself to walk towards the still body on the ground – reality came crashing in on me. I stare into his lifeless green eyes, and it hits me that I did that…I killed this man.

*That is…I just…oh my God,* my mind replays the gruesome images behind my wide eyes like a movie and I feel suddenly too weak to stand up any longer, and my knees began to buckle.

Solas observed her carefully as he recognized her sudden comprehension of what had happened. He watched as she dropped her staff, and walk towards the man that she had killed. Her sudden paleness and shaking made him fade step towards her quickly when he realized she was going to fall.

Strong arms grabbed me around the waist and kept me from falling to the ground. The thick, heavily accented voice, *I love listening to him,* I thought disconnectedly as he spoke soothingly next to my ear.
“I got you lethal’lan,” he said gently from behind me.

“I…he is…” I cannot complete my thoughts they are a jumble and let my head fall forward as tears stream down my now very pale cheeks at the reality of what I had done.

“Shh…” he said to me turning me around and into him. I know I should not take his comfort; that I should be stronger, yet I cannot stop myself from gripping him tightly around his narrow waist and hold on for dear life. Closing my eyes firmly, the sobbing of what I did was torn from my throat in ragged gasps.

Solas rubbed his hands over her back soothingly, speaking gentle words of comfort in elven against her head as he held her. He knew that her gentle spirit would fragment at the realization of what had happened. He was proud of her that in the moment of truly being tested, she had not hesitated, even a second. Sharing a glance with Cassandra, he saw the small nod of understanding as she nudged Varric to help her remove the carnage from the camp.

Oblivious to the bodies being removed, I keep my face buried in his chest and just held on. In this moment he was my sanctuary…my constant in a world that was spinning out of control. I never wanted this. I focus on the heat of his skin against my cheek, the way his aura soothingly ran over mine silently trying to calm me. I am a killer now; I shudder with revulsion at myself as the cold settled deep into my bones at the startling revelation.

I felt him move us towards the fire and sit me down, gently pulling me from him. I stare at the fire suddenly unable to look at anything else, and I hear his muffled voice talking to me as if through a narrow, mud-filled tunnel.

Holding her shoulders trying to pull her gaze to him, he watches her worriedly recognizing that she was in complete shock.

“I must reset the wards lethal’lan, I will return as quickly as possible.” He tells her quickly.

Realizing that she was not going to answer him, he moved hurriedly to get it done so he could return to her quickly.

I nod absently at the sound of his voice. I know he is telling me something, but I cannot hear anything past the roaring of my own words running through my mind.

Murderer...killer...MURDERER...KILLER...MURDERER...KILLER

Staring into the fire a bone deep chill took root, one I was sure would never leave. I don’t recall
Solas leaving, but it was not long before I felt his presence again beside me, pulling me towards him. My teeth rattled together, and my body felt ice cold. Though I felt the sensation of his hands rubbing over my arms, I could not feel the heat of them, I was numb.

“Come with me lethal’lan, let me help you sleep,” he said to me calmly. Keeping me still close to his side as he escorted me to his tent and helped me lay down.

Solas pulled out a clean tunic and slid hers off, replacing it with one of his own. He did not want her to wake up with the reminder of what had transpired this evening. Slipping her boots and leathers off quickly, he was bothered by her vacant expression, and lack of color in her aura. It unnerved him the way she stared through him unseeing. He quickly changed out of his own ruined leggings for another pair and slid beside her on his bedroll.

"Come here lethal'lan," he gently said pulling her to him.

He jolted with shock at how cold she felt and rubbed his hands over her back and arms trying to warm her.

Everything in me was frozen and when he lay next to me, pulling the covers over us both, I curled up on him and held him tightly shivering. I could not shut out the man’s dead gaze from behind my closed eyes. The green eyes stared at me…mocking me. In my mind, I could hear the whispered words ‘killer’ echoing endlessly from his dead lips.

“Please, make it stop,” I whisper against him with a voice full of anguish and fear of what I had done.

I felt his hand on my head, “era” he said to me gently and my eyes closed to a blissfully, dreamless sleep.

Solas let his hands run over her back for a long time after he knew she was sleeping. He breathed a relieved sigh when he felt that her skin was starting to warm up. He had known that she would fall apart as soon as she realized what she had done. Her spirit was gentle, curious, intellectual, but not violent. Tonight’s attack was violent, and she had answered in kind going against her nature, and though she was in shock she had performed perfectly.

He was curious as to the magic she had used that he had yet to show her. He would not argue that the sight of her long black hair haloing around her body, while she moved gracefully had stirred him in a way he had not felt in a long time. She had been beautifully deadly with her intent. It was the sight of her broken, horror-filled amber gaze that met his in the aftermath that had pierced his heart and would haunt him, and he felt the heavy weight of responsibility for it being there. He slipped a stray lock of her soft dark hair behind one of her delicate ears and caressed her cheek gently before allowing himself to finally sleep.
Chapter End Notes

era - sleep
Groaning as I woke, my eyes flash open in sudden remembrance of the horrors from the night before, and I look around alarmed. The soft smell of Solas on the blanket I held tightly brought a small breath of relief at the familiarity. Eyes searching the area, my face flushed with humiliation at the realization that I was indeed not in my own tent, but his. Rubbing my face roughly, I tried to ignore my current situation.

Fragments of memories rushed through my mind in a jumble. He brought me here.  

_Oh great…I have a moment of crisis…on him, and here I am…wonderful._

Sitting up now, I glance around for a second before I realize that I am indeed alone in the tent, but I can feel that he is close by. Breathing a bit easier, I notice the clothes laid out for me to change into, and I am abruptly aware of the clothing I am wearing now. Glancing down I yank the blanket away from me, the shirt I wore was one of his, and I blush to the roots of my hair.

_I'm not wearing any pants._

'Sweet baby Jesus,’ I mutter at the realization that he must have changed me out of my clothes. Sluggishly my memory slowly comes back to me that my shirt I wore last night was covered in blood. My heart sped up at the thought of the blood and I swallowed the bile back down that rose rebelliously in my throat.

_No…I will be stronger,_ I tell myself pushing that memory to the far reaches of my mind.

_Great…just fucking fabulous,_ I think hurriedly as I pull his shirt off. _Well at least my bra is still on,_ I remind myself gratefully as I slip on my own shirt.

_I took his clothes, and his bed…awesome. I am batting a thousand and this is only the first night on the road._

I hurriedly push my feet into my boots and fold his long shirt carefully. Fingering the soft material, I pick the shirt back up and briefly smell it again. Allowing myself a small sigh of pleasure before placing it back down on his bed.

_Come on girlie…time to face the music._

Mentally preparing myself, I take a deep breath and push the flap of the tent aside. Solas sat on a log at the fire, stirring a pot alone, and I breathed a little sigh of relief at it just being him. Squaring my shoulder I walk out, letting the tent slide closed behind me, and saw his ear flicker at the soft noise.

“Breakfast is prepared lethal’lan,” he states calmly not turning towards me. I walk to where he sat and took the bowl of morning porridge he offered and sat next to him.

“I…thank you for the borrowed clothing and for letting me take your bed, Solas,” I tell him quietly.
before taking a bite of my meal.

Solas gazed at me with an unreadable expression and it makes me want to fidget in my place on the log unsure of what the look meant.

Was he disappointed in how I reacted?

“Do not concern yourself, I only awoke twenty minutes ago myself,” he replied easily ignoring my startled expression.

“I thought…so we shared the bedroll?” I barely squeak out as I feel the traitorous heat suffuse my face at the idea of lying next to him.

Solas looked at me and smiled gently at my embarrassment.

“Yes, it would not have been wise to allow you to try and rest alone,” he clarified and I almost choked on my food.

“Oh,” is all I can manage and stare into my bowl mortified.

I sleep next to the hottest guy I have ever imagined and I don’t even remember it…that is just...shitty.

“I did promise to be there for you if you required it, lethal’lan,” he reminded me calmly.

I suddenly move my gaze from my bowl to him and study his profile carefully, while he ate, and swallowed the large ball of discomfort before I spoke.

“Thank you for that too then,” I finally say after a long moment of silence.

He finally glanced up from his bowl to look at me for a moment his eyes full of mischief. “It was my pleasure,” he said easily, sending the fire in my face to flame even hotter.

Smug bastard!

They sat eating in silence for a long while, and I couldn’t take it anymore.

“I hope I didn’t hog your blankets,” I finally joked trying to push away the intimacy of the moment I wished I could remember.

Solas shook his head and gave me a wicked grin. “No, I had no need of them. You kept me quite warm,” he said cheekily. I could see that he took great pleasure in my obvious embarrassment.

My stomach dropped to my toes at the sight of his smile, and the obvious twinkle of playfulness in his blue eyes. I stare at him for a moment and then laughed at his obvious flirting.

“You are a wicked, wicked man,” I tell him with a soft laugh and shake my head. Solas laughed at my comment and dipped his spoon back into his bowl.

“Perhaps,” he said simply before taking a bite.

Thankfully Cassandra decided to leave her tent at that moment because I had no idea how to answer that or him.

“Are you okay Fenlin,” she asked me carefully.

With everything that had happened last night and my embarrassment of having no memory sleeping
next to Solas, I am okay and smile at her.

“Yes Cassandra, I think I will be.”

Cassandra nodded her head and glanced at me pleased before taking the bowl of porridge I offered her silently.

Varric is the last to emerge from his tent looking at everyone and then his gaze fell on me with gentle concern.

“You good Sketch?” He asks me taking the offered bowl from Cassandra before sitting down.

I nod my head at him and smile at the nickname.

“I’m good Varric,” I reply before taking another bite of my own breakfast.

Cassandra and Solas look from Varric to me in curiosity.

“Sketch?” Cassandra asked me curiously.

“I can draw a little,” I say to her and hear both Varric and Solas snort at my words. It was Varric who spoke first, pointing his dripping spoon of porridge at me.

“A little? Seeker, the woman drew me napping in the tavern. The image made me think she had somehow be-spelled me onto the paper with how real it looked.”

I laugh at him and shaking my head, as I argue. “It was not that real looking Varric. It was almost like a caricature,” I tell them with a laugh.

Solas bumped my arm with his and shook his head at me. “It was very lifelike, lethal’lan.”

I feel myself blush again with his words and clear my throat. “It was just a silly drawing,” I tell them with a laugh uncomfortable with the attention…especially his.

“One I am going to get put on the back of my books,” Varric said quickly.

I look at him in shock and shook my head fast. “No…let me do a better one Varric. That was just me screwing around.”

He stared at me for a quick moment and then laughed.

“Sketch…if that was just screwing around, I am almost afraid of what you will do when you aren’t,” he said with a smile.

I shake my head and go to wash my now empty bowl. “You are too much Sir,” I tell him as I move away from them hearing his following laughter.

“Will show you Seeker…it is scary good. She even gave me what she called a ‘rough drawing’ of my cover for the next Swords and Shields. It is really good” he tells her ignoring my snort of laughter.

Cassandra perked at the name and stared at him. “You are…writing another?” she asked him trying not to sound too interested.

Varric shrugged and took a bite of his porridge. Swallowing before he finally answered her. “Aveline is expecting it, and that is not a woman I want to piss off.”
The fighting increased the closer they got to the Crossroads. Every fight, every person I was forced to kill and protect myself from, I could feel them taking pieces of my soul. I was floundering, and I knew it. My morning after that first night, where I thought I would be okay and could deal with all this, was rapidly proving me wrong. I caught the concerned look from Solas as I walked past him, and shook my head silently telling him not now.

I couldn’t seem to stop thinking of myself as a murderer, some kind of a killer with every life I was forced to take. The last man I killed I tried begging him to stop – think. He didn’t, and I was forced to kill him before he could run me through with his blade. By the fifth night in camp, only one day from the Crossroads, and I was living in a personal hell. I was silent, withdrawn, and could not stomach the idea of eating, and I did not know what to do to overcome my own guilt at what I was sure I was becoming.

Solas noticed that I was prepared to retreat to my tent without dinner again, and shook his head angrily.

“You need to eat,” he told me with a touch of anger in his tone.

I stare at him for a moment and continue towards my tent anyway, ignoring his objections. “I am not hungry,” I tell him simply.

“Your actions are of a child,” he growled at me in elven.

I turn on him angrily. “Yes, because children are required to kill to survive now too. Take your opinions and shove them up your ass!” I growl back at him.

Solas was pleased to see the spike of color in her aura, even if it was anger and currently directed at him. This was progress in the right direction. He had watched her rapidly retreat into herself, her spirit was suffocating, suffering and he knew he had to do something.

Cassandra and Varric sat off to the side watching the argument, understanding nothing of what they were saying since it was in elven. Cassandra watched the interaction and was only too grateful for Solas’ interference at this point because she was worried for Fenlin. She would not talk to anyone about it, and maybe Solas could get through to her.

“You do not see how many you save with your actions…no matter how much you detest them.” He countered me adamantly.

I stare at him coolly and wonder if he realized how his words could apply to him as well. Solas ignored my look and stood, grabbing his staff.
“Come with me, and bring your staff,” he said with a tone that brooked no argument as he passed by me.

I stared at him a moment before grabbing my staff angrily and following after him. Solas led them to a cleared area next to the river and stopped turning towards me.

“Sit,” he gestured towards the ground for me to just do as he commanded.

I cross my arms and stare at him stubbornly. “You can't just…”

“Sit…down, Fenlin,” he said again strongly without raising his voice.

Something about the tone of his voice urged me to comply and I plopped on the ground. Focusing on the flowing water ignoring him, or trying to until he sat down next to me.

“When is the last time you entered the Fade, lethal'lan?” I heard him ask gently from beside me.

I shook my head and continued to stare at the water stubbornly not wanting to hear the caring tone of his voice.

“Why?” he asked sounding surprised.

Closing my eyes, I finally explained myself knowing he won’t leave me alone until I do.

“I tried…I…” I couldn't continue past the large emotional lump in my throat. Swallowing a couple of times, I twisted my fingers anxiously. “I saw them, calling me a murderer – taunting me. I realized quickly they were demons, but they were right. I am a murderer,” I finally admit quietly.

“You believe that by protecting yourself from those willing to bring harm to you makes you a murderer?”

I nod my head yes, unwilling to look at him.

He must think me weak, most definitely pathetic anyway.

“I can only tell you what I know Fenlin, and that is you are no murderer. Every Templar, Mage, bandit that has attacked us were doing so with a singular purpose, and that was to kill us. You protected yourself and us with your actions. I have not once seen you actively looking for someone to attack. You have reacted accordingly lethal’lan, nothing more than that. You are no murderer,” he said finally looking at me.

If anyone could get me through this, it would probably be him. He thought he had killed his entire race with his actions, I remind myself silently. I finally look at him, unable to keep the tears from falling any longer.

“Then how do I deal with this?” I ask him finally, uncaring anymore if he thought me weak.

Solas couldn’t stop himself from wanting to give her comfort. Reaching out to her, he gave her a gentle smile before wiping away a tear from her cheek.

She is such a gentle spirit.
Letting his hand slide away from her face, he held her watery amber gaze and wished for one moment that he could take this all away for her and that he had never let his orb be taken.

“There is no pleasure in what we must do to accomplish our goal, lethal’lan. The fact that you do not like having to do it is what makes you extraordinary. You grieve the loss of taking their life, and for that, you should not be ashamed of yourself. Do not ignore your pain, it only builds.”

For a while, we sat in silence next to the river listening to its gentle movement over the rocks. Laying my head on his shoulder for a moment grateful for his understanding and his friendship.
The Crossroads

Chapter Notes

Thank you to those who have not been shy in giving me helpful guidance to writing this story better. I had not imagined it would be so difficult, but I am determined to get comfortable with this style of writing. For those who are reading my story, I hope you are enjoying it and thank you so much for giving it a go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We entered the Inquisition camp that overlooked the King's Road, and the Crossroads and a Dwarven woman walked towards us slipping her bow over her shoulder and holding out her hand in greeting.

“Herald of Andraste, I’ve heard the stories. Everyone has; we know what you did at the Breach. Everyone’s a little nervous around mages right now and some find it hard to believe that a Dalish elf would even care, but you’ll get no back talk from me that is a promise. Inquisition Scout Harding at your service. I…all of us here will do whatever we can to help.”

Varric stepped forward to stand next to Cassandra, studying the woman.

“Harding hu…ever been to Kirkwall’s, Hightown,” Varric asked giving her a wink.

Harding looked at him oddly and shook her head.

“I can’t say as I have, why?”

Varric laughed his eyes full of mischief. “You’d be Harding in…no, never mind.”

"Ugh,” Cassandra shoved him back with a disgusted noise before turning back to Harding. Laughing a little at Varric’s way of trying to ease the tension, I smile at Harding.

“It is good to meet you, please just call me Fenlin. All this ‘your worship and herald’ stuff is making me nauseous.”

Harding’s smile lit her face.

“Sounds good to me, please just call me Lace. I know you guys didn’t come all this way for fun, so let me tell you what is going on around here. We came here to secure horses from Redcliff’s old horse master. I grew up here, and people always said that Dennett’s herds were the strongest, and the fastest this side of the Frostbacks. But with the Mage, Templar fighting getting worse we couldn’t get to Dennett. Maker only knows if he’s even still alive. Mother Giselle is at the Crossroads helping the refugees and the wounded. Our latest reports say the war has spread to there too. Corporal Vale and our men are doing what they can to protect the people, but they won’t be able to hold out very long.”

After our meeting with Lace, I grasp Cassandra’s shoulder and look at her with obvious apprehension at what was to come when they descended the hill.

“So we are going to have to fight our way into the town, am I correct?”
Cassandra nodded her head with a grimace on her face. “I do not enjoy this any more than you,” she said sounding unhappy.

Cassandra squeezed my shoulder slightly and then led them down the hill from their camp towards the small town. They were immediately attacked by Mages and Templars, leaving us no choice but to cut them down as if they were all rabid animals. As one Templar saw the quick dispatch of one of his men, he threw a smite at me that dropped me to my knees, rendering my magic useless and me without breath. I had never experienced one before and I clutched my stomach in pain.

*God damn that fucking hurts.*

Panting on the ground trying to catch my breath, Varric ran towards me quickly after seeing me fall. Taking advantage of Solas’ barrage of cold spells on the smiting templar slowed him down just long enough for Cassandra to intercept him before he could reach us. Varric stood over me giving me cover while I tried to get my legs beneath me during the small moment of reprieve.

Solas caught a glimpse of a templar archer hiding in a tree, and saw him let his arrow loose before he could get a barrier around me and yelled his warning.

“**ARCHER**”

I turn just in time and the arrow glances off my arm, instead of going through my chest. Slapping my hand over the cut hissing with the instant pain, I feel the coolness of his barrier fall over us.

“Son of a bitch,” Varric growls turning to shoot at the archer before he could get another arrow off. Downing a lirium potion quickly, I felt my magic return to me in a diminished capacity but enough that I could cast a barrier around Cassandra and began casting my own ice magic at another archer.

After fighting through multiple groups of Templars and Mages that lead up to the actual town, we were tired. Glancing around the small town there injured from the fighting laying on pallets or leaning against buildings. I was so focused on taking in the war-torn town that I never saw Solas move towards me, so I was started when he grabbed my arm to look at the wound. Smiling up at him and his obvious concern, I shake my head at him.

“Don't worry about it, it's just a scratch, Solas,” I tell him calmly.

His look of concern was nice and I catch his slow breath of relief as he gazed at it and nodded in agreement before he began healing it. Cassandra approached us with a look of annoyance on her strong features, while Solas healed the cut on my arm.

“Mother Giselle has insisted you meet with her immediately, Fenlin.”

*Of course, she has.*

Nodding my head in understanding, I look at the cut that should be on my arm, and I see a small scar in place of the wound it once was. I look up at Solas with a tired smile noticing that he looked as tired as I felt.

“Ma serannas ma falon,” I tell him gently before rolling the sleeve of my ruined shirt back down and walk in the direction Cassandra pointed at.
“Mother Giselle?” I question walking towards the woman who was bent at the side of a wounded man.

“I am, and you must be the one they are calling the ‘Herald of Andraste’” she commented as she stood and walked towards me.

“Not because I want them too, that is for sure,” I say easily. Mother Giselle chuckled and nodded her head in understanding.

“We seldom have much say in our fate, I am sad to say.”

Chuckling myself now, I gaze at the woman knowingly.

“That’s the truth,” I mutter as I move to walk beside the tall Chantry sister.

“I know of the Chantry’s denouncement, and I am familiar to those behind it. I won’t lie to you; some of them are grandstanding hoping to increase their chances of becoming the new divine. Some are simply terrified, so many good people senselessly taken from us.”

“But don’t you stand with the rest of the Chantry?” I ask with a sense of confusion as to why she would choose to help them.

“With no Divine we each are left with our own conscience, and mine tells me that you must go to them. Convince the remaining clerics that you are no demon to be feared. They have heard only frightful tales of you; give them something else to believe.”

“Appeal to them…you do understand that they would prefer to lock me up for the murder of the Divine.”

Mother Giselle looked at me with understanding, “Yes, I know, but if I thought you were incapable I would not have suggested it.”

*Oh this woman is a kick;* I realize laughing softly and shrugging my tired shoulders. “Well then I will see if they will even listen. Perhaps there will be others like you that are guided by their own conscience as well.”

Mother Giselle smiled at me pleased, “I will go to Haven. I may be of help to Sister Leliana in acquiring a meeting with the clerics.”

With our discussion over, I give my thanks and leave the cleric for Solas and Varric where they stood across from the healing area waiting for me.

“She says she will help Leliana with names of clerics that might be willing to help the Inquisition.”

“That will help, we should meet up with Cassandra who is with Corporal Vale. I am sure there is a lot they need done to make the area safe.”

I nod my head in agreement with Varric and follow him up the short hill with Solas walking beside me.
Later that evening after meeting with almost every person in the town we sat around the fire with a long list of things that needed to be accomplished to stabilize the area. Solas had left to gather supplies for dinner, and I look down at myself seeing the blood splatter that littered my light leather armor and the skin on my arms. Suppressing a shiver of revulsion, I stood glancing at Cassandra.

“I am going to take advantage of the lake to clean up Cassandra, I’ll be back.”

Cassandra only grunted her reply as she busily scrubbed her armor. Opening my tent I grabbed my pack of fresh clothes and cleaning supplies, and set out for the water, looking forward to the falls that I had seen earlier.

Solas returned to the camp and noticed that Fenlin was not around the fire with the others where he had last seen her. He reached out searching for her aura and found that it was not far from their camp, and followed it. Since there night sitting along the river, he found himself concerned about her more than was wise. Walking the narrow moonlit path he reached the lake hidden behind a wall of rock and trees. Stepping from behind the last tree, he watched Fenlin slowly emerged from the water. Dark, wet hair plastered down her back sending little streams of water snaking over her pale skin. Desire twisted through him with a force of a punch in the stomach at its intensity, stealing his breath. He had not thought that she would be bathing, and turned hastily away from her moonlit skin.

Felasil! He chastising himself at his stupidity while he retreated back towards the camp as quickly as possible.

After my bath and cleaning up my armor, I felt a hundred percent better in clean clothes. Walking back towards camp, Cassandra was still sitting where I had left her about an hour ago, but now her armor was very shiny and she had moved on to her sword.

*The woman is OCD about her armor.*

Varric looked up from his oiling of Bianca and smiled at me.

“Feel better Sketch?”

“Yes, much,” I reply moving to hang my freshly laundered clothes on a low lying tree limb. I mentally reminded myself to sew up my tunic sleeve the archer ruined before taking the mug of ale Varric held out towards me. Smiling at him gratefully, I sat next to him on the small bench and took a healthy drink.

Solas sat in his tent rubbing his face, unable to remove the site of her skin bathed in the moonlight from his mind.
How could I be so oblivious?

He chastised himself angrily. His mind replayed vividly the way the water ran over her skin. How the light from the moon made her wet skin glow. Her arms reaching back to wring the water from her black hair, the soft curve of her waist and the small indents just above the swell of her…

Fen’edhis!

He cursed at himself feeling the arousal rushing through his blood like a wildfire with his own mental torment. He heard her husky laughter from outside and clenched his fists at the sound.

I have to get out of here.

He grabbed his own bathing pack deciding the cool water should also help cool his sudden ardor, and slipped from his tent quickly without a backward glance.

I watched Solas leave his tent without a word, and mentally shrugged.

He must feel as dirty as I did.

Not thinking anything of his sudden retreat, I look over towards Cassandra who was now sharpening her blade.

“So what is on our list of things we need to do?” I ask her before tucking my hair behind my ear and taking a drink of my ale. Listening to the long list of odd jobs and so far the largest ones were removing the rogue mages and templars from where they had established camps, I sighed.

“Can we get help removing those groups once we have their location? I mean…there are only four of us and I am still learning,” I point out quickly.

Cassandra nodded in agreement. “I have already sent word to Cullen to send us assistance. From what I understand there is also a possible bandit hideout hidden here somewhere as well. After today, we are going to need the help if we are to help this area and its people.”

“Well that’s just flipping lovely,” I comment sarcastically and earn a snort from her.

“Agreed,” she replied as she propped her sword against the bench she sat on and pulled out bowls for the stew, passing them around. I had just taken a bite of my meal when Solas returned from bathing and I made him a bowl. Holding it out to him as he approached the fire, I give him a friendly smile and saw that he would not even look at me.

Jesus he is hot and cold.

“Ma serannas,” he says politely taking the bowl from me. Picking my bowl back up I turn back to Cassandra choosing to ignore his ‘Sybil’ type behavior.

“Well maybe we should focus on some of the easier things first, like the hunting. While we are out we can close any rifts that we come across, kinda kill two birds with one stone.”

Cassandra chewed her food thoughtfully, answering after she swallowed.

“I think that is the best choice, we should try and get an early start then.” She stood and moved away
from the campfire taking her bowl to rinse it out.

I took another bite of my stew and glance over towards Solas who sat staring into his bowl with his jaw clenched tightly. I close my eyes and focus on his aura. His colors were predominantly red and purple, not its usual balanced rainbow.

*Something must be bothering him.*

I open my eyes and see that he is now looking at me closely, and I return his gaze with a questioning one of my own. I felt his auras withdrawal from mine, and stared at him with confusion.

*What the fuck?*

Unsure of what I had done, I watched him retreat to his tent quickly after he had cleaned out his own bowl. *Well okay then,* I thought before I moved to wash my own bowl out and return it to our pack of supplies. I wave at Varric and move towards my own tent refusing to think about his weird behavior.

Solas walked into the garden where Wisdom would be found. He was in need of her guidance, and she greeted him with a smile as he approached.

“You are very troubled this evening,” she said simply as she motioned for him to sit beside her.

“I am…I am unsure of how I should proceed, my friend.”

Wisdom watched his emotional behavior change as he spoke about the Herald. He was still guarded with what he would tell her, but she could see what he was trying desperately to keep hidden from her.

“She does not sound like any Dalish you have come into contact with before,” she said calmly while watching him struggle.

Solas shook his head slowly, a slight frown of frustration lining his brow.

“No, she has proven to be opposite of the Dalish’s nature, and...a challenge. I thought myself fortunate that she had been chosen to bare the mark, but now I am unsure.” He said with a heavy sigh, rubbing his face.

“What has changed that you now don’t believe her to be helpful?” she questioned gently.

“She has awoken pieces in me, I long thought dead. I believed I had given up those parts when I chose my path.”

“Hmm,” she hummed understanding his dilemma. The young one had caught his attention and he was unsure what to do with it. She caught sight of Hope, hiding within her shrubbery watching him carefully, and smiled at him knowingly. She was quite curious to meet this young one that could make him question his path.

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They walked up a large hill towards an area that was reported to be good for hunting in silence. He had been unable to push the memory of her out of his mind, and he still thought of it as they walked
silently. Wisdom had listened to him, but she had no real answers to give him, only insight. When they rounded a small rocky outcropping, he felt elven magic.

*The wards...they are still here.*

He looked at Fenlin for the first time all morning and he saw that she too sensed the energy by the sudden scanning of her amber eyes around the area and his heart suddenly beat with excitement.

“I sense an artifact that the ancient elves set up in the area. They could help strengthen the area against tears; we should activate it if we can find it.”

She studied him for a moment and he caught a brief glimpse of annoyance in her eyes before she masked it.

“Good idea,” she replies with a slight smile.

Solas gave her a grateful smile and led them in the direction of the artifact.

She is very sensitive if she can feel the faint traces of my magic on the air, he thought with a small amount of pleasure. Cresting the small hill, they came upon a young Dalish woman fighting a demon, with June’s vallis’lin. With quick work, they dispatched the hunger demon, and he watched Fenlin approached the woman cautiously.

“Aneth ara, I am Fenlin,” I greet her cautiously.

“Ma serannas, my name is Mihris, of Clan Virnehn. I see you, and your friends come geared for battle. I was told that there might be elven artifacts that could help strengthen the veil somewhere around here. However, I did not expect to run into so many demons. Could you help me find it?”

“Yes, we would be happy to help. How is it you are not with your clan Mihris?”

The Dalish woman looked ashamed, and not willing to meet my eye as she answered.

“All of my clan were killed by a demon my keeper was foolish enough to summon. I am the last living of Clan Virnehn. I was searching for another clan when the veil tore open.”

“I am sorry to hear that, it is hard to find yourself suddenly alone.” I could empathize with her sudden loss of friends and family, experiencing something of that myself. Turning towards the covered opening to the old ruin, the rocks covered the opening completely. I listened to Mihris speak to Solas in a very cold tone full of contempt.

“It will take focused magical energy to get by. You, flat ear, can you manage it?”

Turning quickly I snarl at the woman angrily with her comment not giving Solas the chance to answer her.

“You asked for our help, and you would insult them first? Your insignificant prejudice that any elf without a vallis’lin is unworthy, is unacceptable. I want to help you Mihris, but the Dalish do not know everything.”

Mihris turned red with her shame, and embarrassment.
“Ir abelas Fenlin, that was – unworthy of me.”

Cassandra and Varric shared a knowing look to why I was so upset, and I blushed realizing that it had nothing to do with what the elf had said, but to whom she had spoken it too. Solas bowed his head towards me slightly as he hid a small smile from my obviously fierce protectiveness over him only making my blush grow.

“Thank you lethal’lan, and to answer your question da’len” he said to Mihris, “I can manage it.” I watched him walk towards the obstructed doorway, and move his hand to remove the blocking rocks, and place the doorway back the way it should be. His actions caused two wisps, and a shade demon to come at them through the newly opened doorway. I wrap the fade around us quickly with a barrier, as the wisps shot out spirit magic at us, and thankfully my barrier deflected the shots away from us.

With the demons dead, I walk through the opening towards the small brazier on the wall. Lighting it, it was a mixture of mint green and water blue. My eyes went wide and I glanced at Solas hoping I was correct in thinking it was Veil Fire.

“Is this Veil Fire?”

Solas nodded his head smiling at me, pleased that I knew what it was, while Cassandra spoke up curiously from behind me while I studied the flame.

“That is not a normal kind of fire, Solas. What is this ‘Veil Fire’?”

“It is a form of sympathetic magic that forms where the veil is thin. Think of it like a memory of flame Seeker,” he said plainly as Cassandra nodded in understanding.

I could feel the elven energy grow as we descended the small stairway to the underground room of the small ruin. Looking around, my mouth fell open at the multiple hand drawn, and hand painted pictures on the walls of different scenes. Gazing at each picture with respect, I was lost in their beauty running my hands gently over the markings. Studying the careful brush strokes, I knew they were his.

Lost in my own thought, I was startled from the sudden hand on my shoulder, pulling my gaze from the beautiful paintings. Looking at him questioningly, he drew my attention towards the small orb sitting on a stone table a few feet away. Walking forward I hear Mihris talking softly next to me, almost reverently.

“There, if we activate that, it should help strengthen the veil.”

I look at it uncertain how to actually do that, and glance at Solas obviously puzzled, and he smiled, moving towards me.

“You have but to push your magic into it,” he said softly.

I move my hand towards the small orb, and allow a small burst of magical energy to leave my hand. The small sphere became alive with a bright green glow, similar to what was also imbedded in my hand. I felt the soft coolness of the magic radiating from the small object. The feeling of the magic as it spread through the area confirmed that it was indeed his, and I glance up at him as Mihris spoke.

“There that should do it,” Mihris said happily turning away from them to leave.

I move towards her, and spoke kindly unwilling to allow her to just fend for herself. With everything going on in the region, it was unsafe to travel alone, especially for a mage.
“Mihris, I know you said you were searching for another clan. Maybe in the meantime, if you wanted, you could go to Haven, and stay as my guest with the Inquisition. It is not much, but it is safe until the breach is closed. We have a camp close by that you could leave with, they will be returning in a few days.”

Mihris gazed at me with surprise that I would offer her a place to stay after her horrible behavior towards my companions.

“I…I…ma serannas. I would appreciate that,” she said quickly.

I give her an easy smile and place my hand on her shoulder. I knew what it was like to suddenly be alone in the world, and I wanted to help her.

“Great, head to our camp and tell them I sent you. When you reach Haven, speak with Commander Cullen. I will send a raven ahead letting him know you’re coming. If you have any skill with healing, please see Adan. He is an alchemist that is playing healer right now…miserably.”

I watched while Mihris got directions to the camp from Cassandra and moved to study the art on the walls again. I felt him come to stand next to me as I studied the brush strokes.

“It is an ancient technique that is all but lost to the Dalish,” he commented quietly.

“That’s too bad, I would love to learn,” I tell him honestly. I know he knows how to paint like this, and I hope he will offer to show me. Biting the inside of my lip, I return my gaze to the wall and hear his soft sigh, and I suddenly feel giddy in knowing he is going to show me how to do this.

“Perhaps you will allow me to teach you. I have studied such techniques in the Fade,” he offered quietly.

Yeah…in the Fade, sure you did you old goat. I glance at him excitedly with the offer.

“I would really like that,” I say enjoying the small smile he gives me before turning away.

Chapter End Notes

Ma serannas ma falon - My thanks my friend
Felasil - fool
Fen'edhis - wolf dick (a nice universal type of curse word)
Aneth ara - my safe place my friend
Ir abelas - I am sorry
da'len - a young one
Master Dennet and the Wolves

Master Dennet’s farm was mostly empty with all the fighting that was happening around them. I saw the run-down shack of a house, with a broken fence around it and felt that that was where we would find another of Solas’ elven relics. As I led them in the direction of the building a small pack of wolves came out from the surrounding forest.

“That is not normal,” I say as they continued towards us unconcerned with it being daylight or that we were living beings that would or could hunt them.

“A demon might be in control of the pack,” Solas comments as he pulls his staff from his back.

I hated the idea that we were going to have to kill them, but if I remembered correctly the pack was being controlled by a demon as Solas said, and they would not be shy or friendly. The animals were killed swiftly and I quickly set the bodies on fire quickly ignoring the surprised looks of everyone.

Cassandra stared at me in shock at my quick spell. “Their pelts could have been used Fenlin,” she said to me with a tone of disapproval.

Shaking my head at her, I walk past her, sorry for their needless deaths.

“No wolf pelts Cassandra, it is…a personal reason.” I ignore the confused looks from everyone as I move past them and continue towards the dilapidated house to activate the relic.

How can I explain to them that I loved wolves…always had. I can’t wear one, even if it is for warmth.

Solas watched her walk away curious about why she would not allow the wolves to be used in such a manner. When Varric spoke, it startled him from his own thoughts.

“It could have something to do with her name meaning ‘Wolfling’, Seeker.”

Cassandra gazed at him for a moment and then glanced back to Fenlin walking towards a cabin in bad need of repair.

“Possibly,” she finally agreed with him and moved to follow after her.

Opening the door, I walk in and saw the relic lying on its side amongst the rotting floorboards. Righting it, I pick it up and place it on a dusty wooden table before activating it. I felt his presence before he spoke, but the sound of his voice still sent little shivers over my skin.

“You are becoming quite proficient at finding them,” he said.

“Once you know what you’re looking for, it is easy to find them,” I tell him before turning around to look at him ignoring the way my body reacted to his voice. I saw his questioning look and laughed.
“The magic Solas, now that I have felt it, it is easier for me to feel it around me.”

He gave me a pleased smile as he followed me out of the house.

“It is good that you are sensitive enough to feel it.”

“That’s me…little miss sensitive,” I joke with him before looking at everyone standing outside.

“Well let’s go meet this horse master,” I say walking towards the main farmhouse on a small hill.

Knocking on the door, there is a deep voice from within that answers before opening.

“Are you Master Dennet?” I ask the heavily tanned and weathered looking older man that stood in front of me.

“Whose asking,” he replied evasively.

Smiling at him, I answer his question. “I am Fenlin, and we are with the Inquisition,” I tell him as I gesture to the others behind me.

“Ah, come in, I’ve been expecting you, folks.”

Following his gesture, I walked into the large barn styled home.

“I was told you would be expecting us, so you know why we are here.”

He nodded his head, “You are looking for mounts. I never thought it would a halla rider that would try to stop all this craziness.” Master Dennet rubbed his neck in a slightly frustrated motion. “Listen, I want to help you guys out, but I can’t just send a herd of horses down the road with the way things are right now.”

I smile at him reassuringly and fold my arms behind my back waiting for his terms.

“I understand completely, how can we help make it safer for the animals to travel to Haven?”

I saw his appreciative smile at my understanding of his plight.

“Speak with my wife, Elaina, she is the garden and Brann man in charge of security in the house just down the path on the left. They have all the information.”

“Thank you Master Dennet, we will do that.”

Leaving his home I walk towards the garden where a white-haired older woman knelt weeding and I turned to look at Cassandra.

“Will you speak with Brann and see what he wants us to do, while I speak with Mistress Dennet?” I ask her and see her nod of agreement before turning down the path with Varric, leaving Solas with me. I approach the older woman as she rose from her knelt position on the ground.

“I heard what my man said. Our farmers are scared to return to their farms and not just because of bandits. We have wolves attacking our farmers like they have the water sickness. You take care of the wolves, and I will tell my husband what you have done.”

I nod my head in agreement, “we will do that for you. By any chance, have you noticed any rifts on your farm Mistress Dennet?”
She pointed to an area behind her, “the apple orchard up there has one and there is also another
down by the river.”

“Thank you,” I tell her before turning to go find Cassandra.

“You really can seal the rifts then?” she asked me before I could take another step.

I raise my marked hand smiling at her and wiggle my fingers. “Yes ma’am, I can seal the sudden
tears in the sky.”

Mistress Dennet smiled at me and nodded her head sharply before kneeling back to the ground, and
continuing with her weeding.

Solas and I left the garden walking next to each other down the path towards Brann’s cabin. I glance
at him out of the corner of my eye, catching his ever-present passive expression. Focusing my aura to
poke at his playfully, I enjoy the surprised look on his face before he covers it up with his normally
composed look as his eyes dart towards me knowingly. With a bright, teasing smile, I stop in the
middle of the path as Cassandra and Varric walk towards us up the narrow path to tell us what she
has found out.

“Brann has asked that we build watchtowers, I have the areas marked on a map,” she said holding a
map in her hand.

“Okay, well I guess that is something else we can get Cullen’s men to help with. Mistress Dennet
spoke of a pack of wolves that is terrorizing their farmers, and she happily informed us that there are
two rifts that she knows of on the property. One is in the orchard and the other down on the river.”

Cassandra folded the map and slipped it into the pack on her shoulder. “Shall we remove the rifts
before we make camp this evening?” she questioned.

“Sounds good to me,” I tell her as I point towards the apple orchard. “Let’s hit that one first since it is
closer.”

Cassandra nodded at me her agreement and we all move towards the orchard when my hand sparked
letting me know we were close. Slipping the pack from my shoulders, I lay it next to a tree while
everyone else did the same.

“Time to get to work,” I mutter and walk towards the clearing.

Solas and I walked around the perimeter of the camp setting the wards, and he spoke of staff
practices he wanted me to learn.

“The exercise is meant to help you keep your center of gravity, and give you balance” he explained
as he drew a rune on the ground.

“Okay, will you show me after dinner?”

I watched as he nodded his head in agreement before placing my own ward on the ground. He had
been very odd acting around me lately. I started thinking about it and realized he had been odd acting
towards me since they were at the Crossroads. Thinking about what the woman had told me in the
Fade, I made a quick secretive glance at him as he placed the next ward.
Shaking my head with a feeling of confusion, I place the last ward and follow him towards the camp.

With dinner complete, and their dishes cleaned, I grab my staff and look at Solas somewhat expectantly. I was kind of looking forward to the practice since he had kept quite a distance from me and walked towards him with almost a puppy dog’s level of excitement.

“You ready to teach me some of your smooth moves lethal’lin?” I tease him.

Cassandra and Varric watched from across the fire at them and Varric laughed.

“You hear that Seeker? She thinks Chuckles is smooth,” he joked and I hear Cassandra’s snort of disgust at Varric’s joke while Solas slightly blushed at the comment.

I give Varric a teasing wink as Solas reaches for his staff and leads away from the camp towards the opening in a small circle of trees just a little ways beyond. I could still see the glow of the fire from where I stood and glanced at Solas as he started speaking in a controlled tone.

“It is like a dance, I will show you first and then you will practice,” he said simply.

I stood back and leaned on my staff watching him. He was harmony in motion, and it was breathtaking to watch – I was completely mesmerized. He slowly moved his staff around his body in a fluid motion, and I held my breath while I felt my pulse speed up.

*It is not fair that he has this effect on me.*

When he stopped, I must have been staring at him like some love-struck goon, because he was gazing at me questioningly. Shaking myself physically and mentally, I walked towards him with my staff.

“I wanna know how to do that, it looked…beautiful,” I said sounding a little breathless and could have slapped myself.

He moved behind me with no expression on his face from my words and began to direct me in how to hold my staff. His chest pressed against my back, and his arms held out next to mine holding my staff showing me the proper way to hold it. This was making it quite difficult to concentrate. When he spoke next to my ear, and I felt his breath puff over the skin of my neck as he spoke, I knew instantly this wasn’t going to work.

“Lethal’lan, you are not concentrating,” he chastised me pulling me back to the moment when I fumbled with the slight movement.

“Oh I am, just not on what I’m doing,” I mutter unintelligibly and let a sigh of frustration with myself escape as I feel my face redden with embarrassment at my misspoken muttering.

“Excuse me?” He questioned me quickly.

“Nothing…nothing, sorry,” I say clearer and start to follow the slow moves he was showing me while trying to ignore the heat of his body against my back.

After an hour I had the dance down and still couldn’t stop the flush of red that colored my face from
all his touching to correct my posture or stance.

“Thank you for teaching me Solas,” I tell him before moving towards the camp. He bowed his head to me moving to walk next to me.

“I am pleased that you enjoyed it,” he said using his staff like a walking stick as he walked next to me.

When we entered the camp I moved swiftly towards my tent needing to get away from him and glance around at everyone. “Good night everyone,” I say quickly and enter my tent.

I change into some comfier clothing for bed and unbraided my hair, brushing it out before crawling under my covers. Studying my reactions to him, I rub my face in frustration. ‘Fool’, I mutter aloud before throwing my arm over my eyes seeking the Fade.

My Fade canvas was blank, and I focus on the woods that surrounded my cabin in Upstate New York. The shimmer of the water’s surface by moonlight, the smell of the air as it blew over the water. I wanted to smell the pine in the air from the surrounding forest and to hear the sounds of owls in the canopy of limbs overhead. When I opened my eyes I smiled pleased at myself for the accomplishment. I looked around half expecting the Elven woman to come waltzing up at any moment and when she didn’t, I felt a small measure of relief and started for one of the lake paths that followed along the tree line.

There are small wisps dancing in the trees and wondered if Spirits liked my forest too. Smiling at the thought, I glance around thinking I might possibly see one and felt the air shift around me, like a vibration or the strumming of a guitar string…something has changed. I look around nervously and froze at the sound of a twig snapping in the forest to the right of me.

No…no demons, not tonight I need a fucking break.

The red eyes that stared at me from under the cover of darkness made my heart stop and I froze in place. I watched with a sense of fear and then a quick unexpected understanding of who would be stalking me in my forest and visibly relaxed as the seven-eyed wolf slowly left the cover of the trees.

Sweet baby Jesus, he is fucking huge, no wonder the Dalish are scared of him.

“I wondered when you would find me,” I offered calmly keeping my voice neutral and my posture relaxed while holding his gaze. The eyes watched me carefully as he approached and I stood stock still.

“Are you not afraid of me?” The deep growling voice asked as it echoed through me, sending shivers over my skin.

“Should I be afraid of you, Fen’Harel?” I ask him cautiously watching him take another step closer to me and stop to watch me.

“Your kind usually is,” he growled his answer watching me for my reaction.

I laugh softly and shrug my shoulders deciding boldness was what I needed to be, and took a step towards him.
“And what would my kind be?” I ask him noticing his hesitance at my step closer.

I heard his deep laughter echo around me and I watched him curiously.

“Not so daring,” he said deeply before taking a step closer to see if I would back up. It was a silent challenge, and I smiled at him mischievously as I took another step closer accepting the unspoken challenge.

“I see,” I say with composure as the wolf took another step towards me and we were now less than three feet apart.

“Why?” the wolf growled at me, watching me now curiously.

“Why what?” I ask him coyly.

I hear his soft rumble of laughter again and tilt my head hearing just the barest strains of his voice intermixed and smile at him.

“Why are you not frightened of me, da’len?” He questioned his growling tone curiously.

I shake my head and take another step towards him, and notice his posture stiffen as I drew closer.

“Because you are not one I am scared of,” I answer simply keeping my hands loosely at my sides. When he took another step closer I smiled pleased at his own lack of caution and tilted my head to gaze up at him.

“That is not an answer,” he says with a growl of annoyance that makes me smile and I take the last step closer to him and feel the cool magical aura that is Solas. It was heavier...powerful, and so much more. I was surprised at how well he could mask it in his God form.

“If I answered all your questions you would stop visiting me,” I tell him teasingly.

The wolf’s large head moved, and his eyes gaze down at me. Suddenly I feel like I am the size of a small child next to him and try to still the sudden apprehension I feel bubbling in my stomach. When he lowered his head to sniff at my hair, I smiled softly at the feeling of his breath on my ear, calming my nerves before I glance up at him.

“Is that an invitation?” he questions me. The soft rumble of his voice around me reflects an almost hopeful tone.

“Yes,” I say simply and can see the simple answer surprises him. I watch as the wolf shakes his head slightly and holds my gaze intently and his ears actually move more towards my direction.

“Your people would be very disappointed in you da’len,” he growls close to my face. I laugh and shake my head not shying away from the closeness of our faces.

“Do us both a courtesy, and stop comparing me to the Dalish, Fen’Harel. I am not my people.” I respond holding his red gaze steadily as we stood almost nose to nose and see him nod his head in final agreement.

“No, you are not” he agreed softly, and I could really hear his voice then.

I watch him take a step back and bow his large, regal head to me.

“I shall return then,” he promised before moving to walk away. As he slowly retreats back towards the forest, I bite my tongue when I felt the urge to call him back.
Let him go, he will come back.

Glancing over the darkened forest, I felt the air shift telling me that he had left and I let a small sigh of relief leave me.

I might be able to help him yet.
Val Royeaux

After the Templars and Mages had been removed from their small strongholds, we received the notice of invitation to Val Royeaux. Sighing as I listen to Cassandra read it, I rub my hands together in nervousness, not missing Cassandra’s look of understanding.

“We should go,” she said simply and I nod my head in agreement with her. *The Lord Seeker is an Envy demon, and the Chantry is going to flambé me over an open stove…yes, this sounds lovely.*

“You do not look so certain Fenlin,” Cassandra commented over their nightly fire. I smile at her and shake my head.

“It is just nerves that is all,” I reply simply and see her nod of agreement.

“I will protect you, as will we all,” she said trying to sound reassuring. I was not worried really about the whole meeting; *I just hated that part of the game at how they spoke to my Inquisitor.* I smile at her and hope it is with a sense of assurance.

“I know you will Cassandra…just don’t pin all your hopes on this meeting or the Chantry,” I tell her unable to stop myself. I saw that she now gazed at me like I had some sense impending knowledge.

“You believe it is a trap,” she said calmly.

I shook my head and gaze into the fire. “It will just not be what we are hoping for is all I am feeling,” I tell her finally looking at her.

*****

I gaze up at all the gilded spirals as we cross the boardwalk after disembarking from the small commuter ship. I stare at all the regally dressed nobles as we slowly walk towards the town and swallow a ball of nervousness. I felt his cool, soothing aura suddenly touch mine and glance at him smiling. Their nightly meetings were becoming a habit, and with them, I noticed that he was not as distant. He would seek me out, subtly, but it was a good step forward. I watch as some of the people walking by us softly shriek at their presence and I hide my smile.

“I think they know who we are,” Varric commented calmly before nodding at the next couple that flinched back from them and moved quickly towards the boats.

“Your powers of observation never stop amazing me, Varric,” Cassandra said with annoyance.

My stomach tightened as one of Leliana’s agents ran forward to greet them. *Soon it will be show time.*

“My lady Herald, the Chantry mothers await you, but so do a great many Templars.”

Cassandra stared at the agent in surprise.

“There are Templars here?” she said quickly while the woman knelt in front of us. Shaking my head, I gesture for her to rise.

“Yes, my lady. People seem to think that they will protect them from…from the Inquisition. They are gathered on the other side of the market. I think that is where the Templars think to meet you.”

Cassandra nodded her head in understanding and started to walk forward.
“Only one thing to do then,” she said as she walked towards the main square a determined look on her face while the rest of us followed.

I could see the Chantry sisters standing on a small dais, and walked with Cassandra silently. Here is where I will get roasted in front of a crowd…lovely. As they approached one of the sisters moved forward and gestured towards the people.

“Good people of Val Royeaux, hear me. Together we mourn our Divine. Her naïve and beautiful heart silenced by treachery. You wonder what will become of her murderer. Well, wonder no more. Behold, the so-called Herald of Andraste! Claiming to rise where our beloved fell. We say, ‘this is a false prophet!’ The Maker would send no elf in our hour of need!”

I shook my head at her clear words of scorn and crossed my arms.

“No, he wouldn’t. He would send whoever was handy,” I replied loudly enough for everyone to hear. Holding the sister’s blank stare, I smile at her with a cool gaze.

“Elf, Human, Dwarf – we all are in danger. The fact that you think your Maker only looks at humans is narrow-minded of you Sister,” I snap at her angrily. “I did not come all this way for you to insult me; I came here to discuss the real threat that affects us all.”

Cassandra moved next to me in agreement. “It is true. The Inquisition seeks only to end the madness before it is too late.”

The Chantry sister stared at them with disgust. “It is already too late. The Templars have returned to the Chantry. They will face this Inquisition, and the people will be safe once more.” She spat at them scornfully.

I observed the Templars walk onto the dais and held my breath knowing what was about to happen. Before the subordinate Templar could hit the sister, I threw a barrier over her impeding the blow. The look of surprise on his face at the lack of connection and hers with surprise that he was trying to hit her was worth the effort.

Lucius gazed suddenly at me knowingly and shook his head at my action, holding his hand up to Sir Baris.

“Ignore this, she is beneath us – they all are beneath us,” he said with quiet disgust.

I give him a cheeky smile that I can see unnerves him, and fold my arms.

“Was there a point in such an action against an obviously harmless woman Lord Seeker?” I ask him.

“The point would be that I do not care what you question,” he said simply walking across the small platform.

Cassandra gazed at him in surprise, before schooling her features.

“Lord Seeker Lucius, it is imperative that we speak with…”

Lucius gazed at her with annoyance. “You will not address me,” he said cutting her off quickly.

Cassandra’s steps faltered as she looked on with stunned confusion. “Lord Seeker?” She said with obvious confusion lacing her tone.

“Creating a heretical movement, rising up a puppet as Andraste’s prophet. You should be ashamed.
You should all be ashamed,” he said looking at our small group. “The Templars failed no one when they left the Chantry to purge the mages – like her.” He said with disgust while pointing at me.

“You are the ones who have failed. You who would leash our righteous swords with doubt and fear.”

I start shaking my head at him and glance around at the other Templars seeing that they were listening to his every word…except a few.

“If you came to appeal to the Chantry, you are too late. The only destiny here that demands respect is mine.”

“Your ego and self-importance amaze me Lord Seeker,” I quip at him angrily. “YOU do not deserve respect after that shameful display.”

Lucius laughed at me and crossed his arms. “Like I care what you think. You have no influence, no power, and certainly no holy influence. I would sooner believe a toad as my savior, before thinking you could be Andraste’s Herald.”

Baris walked up to him quickly not looking as certain as some of the others. “But Lord Seeker. What if she really was sent by the Maker…what if…” he stopped speaking as another young Templar walked forward to cut him off.

“You are called to a higher purpose, do not question.”

Baris suddenly quieted but stared at me intently trying to convey to me that he did not agree.

Lucius gazed at him and then laid his hand on his shoulder. “I will make the Templar order a power that stands alone against the void. We deserve recognition, independence.” Turning towards me his blue gaze narrowed menacingly.

“You have shown me nothing, and the Inquisition…less than nothing.” Glancing around at the Templars, he spoke loudly.

“Templars! Val Royeaux is unworthy of our protection, we march.”

We watch as they all march out of the main gate and I finally breathe a sigh of relief as Varric walked towards me.

“Charming fellow isn’t he,” he joked turning his gaze to watch them leave.

“Has Lord Seeker Lucius gone mad?” Cassandra said with a touch of anger.

“I guess you didn’t know him as well as you thought,” I said calmly thankful the Templars were leaving. I felt Solas’ aura brush against mine and turned my gaze to him slightly smiling in reassurance and seeing his small smile in return. *These little constant aura touches are comforting.*

“He took over the Seekers of Truth two years ago, after Seeker Lambert’s death. He was always a decent man, never given to ambition and grandstanding. This is very bizarre.”

I knew what his problem was and wished I could just say it but bit my tongue.

“Maybe he will be reasoned with later,” I tell her trying to reassure her.

Cassandra gave me a slight smile before nodding her head and walking away. I take a step forward
and saw the arrow suddenly plunge into the ground and smiled. Sera

Cassandra blustered over the sudden threat, but I leaned down and grabbed the note reading it carefully before looking at everyone else.

“There will be more notes,” I tell them and start running in the direction I think will be where the open-aired tavern is.

Later we had gathered all the notes from Sera, and I stared at the invitation from Madam De’Fer. I had never really liked her character or her beliefs and that made it difficult for my character and her to get along. Laying the invitation on the table, I continue to gaze at it as if it were a snake about to strike when Cassandra interrupted my thoughts.

“We will need to find you a dress,” Cassandra said forking in a bite of her lunch.

Lunch was something like a shepherd’s pie, but with ram. The dish in itself I found tasted pretty damn good with the creamy mashed potatoes on top and roasted veggies mixed in with the meat.

“Is that really necessary.” I question before taking a bite of my own lunch. It was not surprising that while Cassandra and I spoke of things I thought unnecessary, Varric and Solas ate their lunch and listened silently from the sides.

Cassandra gazed at me with a knowing look and I cannot stop the sigh of annoyance that escapes. *She is going to make me wear a fucking dress.*

“Yes, it is necessary Fenlin. You are representing the Inquisition, and though I don’t appreciate these over-stuffed flops, they can help further our endeavors.”

I gaze at her for a moment and take another bite of my lunch gazing back down at the invitation of thick white cardstock, and silver scripted writing. *Two more days in Val Royeaux…ugh.*

“It does say that ‘me and a guest’ are invited to attend this thing…so who is going to be my guest?” I look at them and saw everyone cringe at the idea.

“Seriously? Free food, wine…come on. One of you is going with me or I am not going at all. I will not attend this thing alone.”

Varric glanced at her a moment and shook his head. I look from one to another and see that they are all trying hard to avoid looking at me, and I let a sigh of annoyance escape.

“Well, first we must find a place to stay for a couple of days. Once that is done, and if you haven’t decided amongst yourselves who is going with me by dinner, then I will just choose one of you.”

I held back the laugh that bubbled in my throat at their sudden look of discomfort running over their faces, and smirk as I forked another delicious bite of food into my mouth.

Finding lodging was a bit more difficult than I would have thought just because there were two elves in the group, and I found myself getting angrier after the fifth refusal.

“The alienage it is then,” I say to everyone throwing my arms up angrily, and Cassandra looked at me in surprise.
“You think they will…”

“Someone has to Cassandra, or one of us is going to have to start showing some skin just to get a fucking room in this shithole of a town.”

Cassandra stared at me with a look of ‘you’re kidding’, and I shook my head at her.

“We have been turned away from all of them Cassandra just because of myself and Solas. So let’s go where are damn ears aren’t a problem and see if they have the same problem with yours.”

Varric glanced at me with a look of apology, and I smile at him as I lay a hand on his shoulder.

“It’s that or we are splitting up…what do we do?” I ask her waiting for her answer.

Cassandra let out a disgusted noise and shook her head adamantly at the idea.

“No, we will not do that.”

“Okay, then the alienage it is,” I say with a long exhale of breath and glance at Solas who had kept silent during the whole thing.

We enter the alienage and found the first accommodations we could and I walked towards the keeper of the establishment.

“We require rooms,” I tell him.

The elven innkeeper stared at them all equally and pointed to her and Solas.

“Will you two be sharing a room?”

I look at the man in surprise, is he fucking serious? I caught Solas’ step forward from the corner of my eye.

“No,” we both say together quickly. I saw him let out a silent breath and poked him with my aura teasingly and felt his poke back. What the hell do you have to be nervous about; you’re not the one that stops thinking every time you touch my stupid hand.

The innkeeper shook his head, his face full of regret.

“I only have three rooms lethal’len,” he said plainly speaking to both of us now.

I grab my coin purse and smile at him happily. Thank fucking God; I don’t care if I am sleeping on a fucking floor at this point.

“That is perfectly fine; we will take them and figure out who is sharing with whom.”

Cassandra let a small smile of relief fill her face while I hand the coin over to him.

“We can share the room Fenlin,” she said quickly, and I smile at her thankfully. Varric is a loud damn snorer.

Taking the coin from her he glanced at them and nodded his head in understanding.

“The first three rooms at the top of the stairs, and my wife serves dinner at seven.”

Smiling brightly at him, we move towards the staircase, and I am thankful for finally getting a room
in this racist town. We looked at the rooms, and they were not much in luxury, but it had everything we required; a bed, a bathtub, a small desk that held a mirror, and a chair. We looked at each room and we were given the largest of the three since Cassandra and I was sharing.

Sitting on the bed, I do a couple of test bounces and glance around the room and it’s roughly hewed wooden walls as Cassandra closes the door.

“So should I set us up a couple baths?”

Cassandra looked at me gratefully as she slid her chest plate off.

“I would appreciate that greatly,” she answered opening her pack. I move towards the corner that has a large water pump and bucket. Using the pumping lever, I get the water flowing. Filling the bucket I carry it towards the copper tub and dump, pleased to see that the tub had a lever built into it that would allow for water to drain into a hole in the floor. Thedas’ indoor plumbing may leave something to be desired, but they do make some pretty damn big bathtubs.

Seven bucketful’s of water later, the tub was full and with a simple rune, I inscribed on the tub, the water heated to a nice steamy heat. I poured in some of the elfroot and embrium oil that Solas taught her how to make that would help with easing tired muscles.

“It’s ready Cassandra, come scrape the mold off” I tease her, and she lets a soft chuckle escape as she walks towards the tub. I pull the small partition out so she has privacy and move to sit on the bed.

Dinner was unlike anything I had eaten since getting to Thedas. There was freshly caught, grilled fish that resembled salmon that was flaky and moist on the tongue. With deliciously roasted and seasoned to perfection vegetables, a fennel salad, freshly baked bread that I thought had a hint of garlic, and a cold mint tea. I was in food heaven, and the sounds that I made with each bite made everyone look at me like I had lost my mind.

“Are you enjoying your dinner Sketch?” Varric teased me with a large, toothy grin.

I realize I must resemble a chipmunk with the amount of food in my mouth and start blushing. Oh, my God, I must have sounded like a starved woman with each bite, and I tuck my head down and stare at my half-eaten plate of food while trying to chew and swallow what is in my mouth.

“Forgive me everyone for such horrible table manners. I have not had anything this good since I got here,” I mumble towards my plate and fork in another bite restraining the happy sounds that wanted to escape as the food gave my tongue an orgasm.

Everyone seemed to tuck into their dinner and thankfully refrained from focusing on my embarrassment. Finishing my second helping of fish and salad, I sat back in my chair and had to rub my belly it was so full. I saw that Solas was watching me and then smiled shaking his head at me and my silliness. I send my aura towards him, and give him a teasing prod, and see the slight smirk on his face just before I felt it back. I was glad that he was relaxing, and letting me in a little bit at a time.

I see that everyone was done with their meal, and I glance to Cassandra who was taking a drink of her ale.

“So have you spoken with the others to see who drew the short stick, and is coming with me to the soiree tomorrow night?”

Glancing around the small table I get the idea that they had not come to a decision. Well okay then.
“I can tell by the expressions and darting eyes, that ‘no’ would be the answer.”

“Well, Fenlin we really…” Cassandra began and stopped when I held up my hand.

“I would like you to go with me Cassandra,” I say evenly and enjoy the slight rounding of her eyes.

“Me…but why? Wouldn’t it be better if you took Solas with you?” She argued quickly.

My eyebrow rose at the question, and leaning back in my chair, folding my arms I smile at her mischievously.

“Why so they can assume that we are both servants? No thanks, it would be better if you accompany me. You are Nevarran royalty, Right Hand to the former Divine and a Seeker. You, they will not mess with,” I tell her evenly and watch as understanding came to her gaze.

“You are right, I am sorry. I should have seen that, especially after just trying to find lodgings today.”

I give her a bright smile and pick up my cold tea. “Great, we will go dress shopping together then.”

Cassandra’s face fell at the realization of having to wear a dress, and I smile at her smugly completely understanding the feeling.
Shopping Should Not Be This Difficult!

Chapter Notes

Just an FYI for everyone - I will be going back to my earlier chapters and hopefully fixing some of my most obvious mistakes. I hope everyone is enjoying the way the story is moving, and I love all feed back so don't be shy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So Seeker, have you already an idea of what you will wear tomorrow night.”

Cassandra gazed at him as she took a drink of her ale, and I listened absently taking a sip of my tea.

“I will purchase something tomorrow with Fenlin,” she said trying to ignore him.

Varric shook his head ignoring her dismissal of the subject, and took another drink of his ale focusing on the inside of his mug.

“You should find something in red,” he said frankly continuing to study the bottom of his mug.

There was a stunned surprise on Cassandra’s face as her cheeks flush with Varric’s input. It was quite interesting to watch the normally strong, larger than life woman stares intently into her mug with embarrassment. Oh, this could be interesting.

“I will keep that in mind, dwarf,” she said finally gazing at him with an expression of patient annoyance.

Varric smiled at her as he held his own glass up towards her in a silent toast.

“I…I do hope you will, Seeker…really,” he said as he looked at her completely from head to toe making her blush again. I had to slap my hand over my mouth to stop the urge to largely smile, and giggle at Varric’s curious behavior.

Cassandra’s eyes snap towards me with a promise of swift retribution if I uttered one word, and I held my hand up in silent surrender smiling behind the safety of my hand. She gave me a sharp head nod standing quickly, and left for our room, while I just shook my head in surprise.

The Fade was such a wondrous place full of possibilities, I decided as I gathered my focus on the forest that surrounded my home in Upstate New York. Spirits and wisps also found it soothing as I notice that there was more gathering through the pines than previously. I felt the subtle shift of the air around me, making me instantly smile. It was no surprise when I heard the sound of the growling voice from behind me in a matter of moments.

“Do you not like this place in the daytime da’len?”

Turning towards him, my smile still visible, I watch as he walks slowly towards me from the cover of the darkened surrounding woods. The sheer size of him never ceases to amaze me.
“I love daytime here; I just always felt a connection with the night more,” I tell him simply, before sitting on a fallen log. “I used to sit at the water’s edge and draw whatever I saw or thought. It was always peaceful; do you not find it peaceful for you?”

Fen’Harel studies me carefully before answering, and I wish I could read his thoughts when he would just stare at me like that.

“I find the company is what makes the place peaceful, not the scenery,” he commented finally.

I laugh and look out towards the water.

“You must be tired hahren to say such pretty words to me,” I tease him enjoying the wordplay they shared. His low growling laughter set my stomach to flutter, and I kept my eyes averted.

“If you bring this place forward to find peace, then are you feeling troubled da’len?”

His question was not surprising knowing who he was and that there wasn’t a snowball's chance in hell getting anything past him. Letting out a soft sigh of regret, I wished I could tell him everything. How I got here, what I know…everything. I finally glance at him and see that he is again studying me carefully.

“I am, but I do not wish to discuss it with you hahren. You are much too intuitive, and I am not that good at subterfuge.”

I could almost feel his curiosity bubbling from him as he stepped towards me.

“You either give me too much credit da’len or you too little.”

His words sent a shiver of apprehension up my spine and I cock my head just slightly. It is my turn now to watch him carefully.

“Okay then, let me ask you this then; why do you care whether I am troubled or not?”

My question stopped his movement towards me, and for the first time in all their nightly meetings, he looked away from me. His silence was deafening, and I gave him a soft smile before standing.

“I will let you think on that for a while hahren,” I say quietly moving around his large form. I could feel his gaze on my back drilling questioning holes into me as I left him in the forest.

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“On dhea, Fenlin” Solas said with a small smile before sitting beside me.

“Ar’an dy itha,” I tell him easily.

Turning from his smile with butterflies fluttering in my stomach, I focus on my breakfast instead. *It is not fair, that he can do that to me with just a simple smile.* Sighing heavily, I took another bite of my breakfast trying to dampen the fluttering. *Man constantly reduces me to an internal fluttering mess making me want to run like some scared rabbit.* The sound of Cassandra’s voice snapped me from my constant thoughts of him.

“We should get the shopping done early in case there are any alterations that will need to be done.”

Varric glanced up from his own breakfast and gazed at them.

“Good, I need to pick up some more paper and ink while you to ladies find your gowns for the
evening.”

Solas looked up from his own meal and glanced across the table towards Varric.

“I would like to go with you if you would not mind, Master Tethras.”

Varric nodded his head in agreement, “Sure Chuckles.”

I glance towards Cassandra and saw that she focused on her food. It was difficult to not burst into laughter at the expression of obvious dread on her face. Taking a bite of porridge with fresh berries on top, I wished we didn’t have to go to the stupid event.

We left directly after our breakfast for the tailor shop. When we reached the shop doors, we split up and promised to meet back there in a couple of hours. I could tell that Cassandra hated the idea of looking for something to wear to Madame De’Fer’s soiree as much as I did. It was obvious with the way she walked into the shop as if she were engaged in battle. Her shoulders squared, back ramrod straight, and her face a mask of detachment. I rounded a cloth mannequin and spotted a red gown that would hug the body closely. *That would be perfect for her.* Holding it up to Cassandra for her to look at, I laugh at the sudden redness that overtook her face.

“You seriously don’t believe I will wear that,” she said to me with a nervous laugh.

“It would look lovely on you with your skin color, Varric was not wrong Cassandra. You have a nice body, don’t be ashamed to show it off in something other than armor.”

She walked towards me, and held a finger out, touching the fabric softly. Holding my gaze, she sighed and turned quickly at the sound of the woman dressmaker behind us.

“She is not wrong Mademoiselle, c’est beau. Come; let us see what it will look like on, oui?” She told her, swiftly ushering Cassandra to a room to change before she could begin to argue.

A few moments passed when she came from the small room. I saw the flush of embarrassment and pleasure across her face at wearing the obviously very feminine dress.

“You look so beautiful Cassandra – and it fits perfectly, no alterations required.”

“I don’t know about this Fenlin,” she said hesitantly turning sideways and showing me the scooped backline of the dress.

“Nonsense, it was obviously made for you.” Moving towards the tailor, I tell her before Cassandra could change her mind. “Mademoiselle, she will take this one. Do you have matching shoes for the gown?”

The woman nodded her head yes and knelt down to measure Cassandra’s foot before she left the room. I ignored Cassandra’s rumbling objections as the woman returned with the matching embroidered soft leather slippers, and smiled at me pleased.

“C’est le destin Mademoiselle.”

Cassandra looked at me nervously shaking her head before turning towards the tailor.

“We will also require one for her as well Mademoiselle,” she said.

The Tailor looked at me and then Cassandra with horror.
“Oh, non, non, non. I cannot – she is a …an elf.”

Cassandra’s smile slid from her face, and the earlier glow of girly embarrassment was now replaced with anger. Before she could start ranting at the woman, I cut in quickly.

“She would lose her livelihood if she sold to me, Cassandra. I noticed a shop in the Alienage not far from where we are staying; that I am sure would be happy to help me. Thank you, Mademoiselle, please box these up for Lady Pentaghast.”

The tailor looked at me thankful for my understanding, though Cassandra did not seem so thankful. Cassandra turned to me sharply, “you are the Herald of Andraste. First, the inns wouldn’t accommodate you and now this, it is absurd.” She stated with utter surprise at how I could just accept it.

Giving her an understanding smile, I grasp her arm trying to calm her anger.

“Not today Cassandra, I am just another elf in Val Royeaux. Now hurry along and get that off so we can go purchase my gown. Pray that we get lucky and find one that doesn’t need alterations.”

Cassandra grabbed her purchases with a glare at the shop owner as they left, and I almost felt sorry for the woman.

Varric and Solas stood outside unable to miss the thunderous look on Cassandra’s face as she stepped out before me. I walk towards them slowly disregarding the angry sputtering coming from Cassandra and spoke calmly.

“She is angry that they would not sell a dress to an elf.”

Solas gave me a look of understanding, and then he glanced at Varric.

“Varric, why don’t you take the Seeker back to her room and I will escort Fenlin to the tailor in the Alienage.”

Cassandra let Varric take her purchases from her and lead her away while she continued mumbling angrily. “She is the Herald of Andraste and they are focused on a pair of damn ears,” she muttered angrily turning slightly to go back towards the shop.

Varric nodded quickly, not missing the determined look on the Seeker’s face. It would not surprise anyone if Cassandra didn’t storm back into the tailor’s shop to yell at the owner.

“Come on Seeker, I will buy you a drink.”

Solas walked with his arms folded behind him as he led me towards the tailors that I had seen earlier. I found it interesting that as an elf in Thedas, you were not even seen as a living being but more like a creature. What a fucked up place this is.

“She was upset over their unwillingness to sell to you?” He questioned me quietly.

I chuckle letting him pull my focus from my wayward thoughts and nod my head.

“I never expected shopping to be so difficult in Val Royeaux, and from her reaction, I would guess neither did she.”
I saw that he held a curious look on his face as he glanced at me.

“It did not bother you that they would not sell to you?”

I look at him for a moment and shake my head no continuing to take in the many people partaking in the pavilion’s market.

“After yesterday’s complete goat fuck trying to find rooms, it did not surprise me.”

His soft laughter set my constant butterflies around him to fly at warp speed in my stomach.

“Your use of vocabulary is always enlightening lethal’lan,” he commented with a slight smile on his lips.

“I do try to be entertaining if I can be nothing else,” I tell him smiling cheekily up at him. I watched as his expression of mirth from moments before changed to something more serious. His eyes held mine with an intensity that I had not felt from him outside of the Fade, and my stomach dropped. He broke the moment and opened the door to the shop for me, and something about the short moment nagged at me to study it more...later; much later.

Slightly giddy with excitement, I slip the soft plum silk clothed gown on, sighing at the soft texture. I gently ran my hands over the delicate material, letting a sigh of pleasure escape me at the silky feel of it over my skin. The dress was made to show the shoulders and a low scooped back. Pulling the sleeves down lightly, I try to make sure that the scars that ran from the anchor up my arm were properly covered. Turning towards the mirror, I make sure that my makeup hasn’t smeared any and begin brushing my hair. “Simple braid should do,” I tell my image and turn towards the knock at my door. That should be Cassandra, I thought opening the door laughing.

“Good you’re back, you can help me with my ha…” I started to say hair and stopped abruptly seeing it was Solas standing in my doorway.

His intent stare at me set my stomach into fluttering chaos, and a blush of embarrassment flushed over my skin. Gesturing him inside, I close the door softly behind him trying not to fidget under his unreadable blue gaze.

“You look very beautiful,” he finally said breaking the awkward silence.

I smile at him shyly with the praise and turn back to the small mirror to start braiding my hair.

“Thank you.”

Stepping up behind me, he took the wide-toothed comb from my fingers and gave me a smile through the reflection of the mirror that made my toes curl.

“May I?”

Swallowing hard, I could do nothing but just nod my head yes.

He began by making delicate braids in different areas on my head and then wound them together into a beautiful artwork of interweaving braids that settled into one large braid at the back of my head. It laid the length of the rest of my hair that he left free to run down my back. His intricate weaving had pulled the hair from my face away, accentuating the tapered point of my ears, and the largeness of my amber eyes. I stared at his work in amazement at how well he knew how to braid. Using the
reflection of the mirror I look at him curiously as he was busy making sure that he had secured the
braids in place.

“Who would have thought a bald man knew how to braid hair so well.” I tease him and saw him
glance up from his work and give me a lop-sided smile that sent my heart to stutter in my chest.

“I was not always bald, lethal’lan,” he said with a slight laugh.

I laugh at his answer and when he was done, I turn towards him and stand.

“Will you tell me why you shave it off?” I asked unable to contain my curiosity.

“Simplicity,” he said plainly, but I could see that there was more to it than that by the slight
tightening around his eyes.

“Ah, yes I have thought a time or two about cutting mine since getting here myself.”

He looked at me abruptly with my statement, his face conveying his displeasure at the idea.

“Promise me that you will not do that.”

He is staring at me intently again like he had in the pavilion courtyard. I can’t help but poke him into
answering me fully, and not the half-answers he normally gave when it obviously held a personal
meaning for him.

“It is just hair Solas.” I see that my answer affects him in some manner as his eyes study my face as if
he is memorizing it or looking for something.

“It is…beautiful,” he finally admits to me, and I feel like I just ran for a ninety-yard touchdown to
win the game. Smiling cheekily at him, I fold my arms behind my back.

“So hair is what gets you going, good to know,” I tease him and my smile froze in place as he took a
step closer to me with a roguish tilt to his lips.

“No, it is not the only thing but one of many things,” he said with a very seductive growl.

Unable to suppress the shiver that ran along my skin with his words, I stood in stunned surprise
staring into his suddenly dark grey-blue eyes as they held mine.

“There is more?” There is a soft tremor in my voice as I find myself in very unfamiliar territory with
him. I have no idea what I am doing baiting him like this. I watch in avid fascination as he bent his
head towards me. My whole body was slightly shaking in anticipation as he leaned closer. Running
his nose just barely along the surface of my neck, and my eyes slide shut with the most intimate
sensation I have ever experienced.

He placed a gentle kiss to the skin just behind my ear, and the rush of desire for him ran through my
veins in a flash of heat with the soft contact of his lips pressed gently against my skin. I felt lightning
dance along my skin, and I watch it flash against the darkness of my closed eyes. He always smells
of parchment, old books, elf root, and frosty mountain peaks.

He pulled his head back slightly, holding my gaze as if to ask for my permission before he angled
closer towards my lips and I felt his breath on my face just as I heard the knock at the door
interrupting us. The sudden sound made us both jump apart in stunned surprise, and staring at each
other realizing what had almost happened. Later…think about this later.
Hopefully gathering what little composure I have left, and sending a quick prayer to whatever God would listen that I wasn’t blushing as badly as I thought, I reached for the door. When I opened it, I saw Cassandra smoothing the front of her red dress. The long tapered sleeves with the scooped neckline and tapered waistline that flared gently over her hips is gorgeous on her. Her makeup skillfully applied with a smoky outline, and her short black hair that normally had a single braid wrapped around the crown, split into two braids so that they met in the back of her head. Her olive colored skin glowed against the bright color, setting a small aura of mystery around her. She looked stunning.

“Lady Cassandra, let me say you are a vision,” he said from behind me and Cassandra blushed at the compliment.

“Thank you Solas, it was Fenlin’s choice,” she said sounding slightly uncomfortable and still smoothing the sides of her gown.

He bowed slightly towards us, “she chose well. Shall you permit me to escort you both downstairs?”

Cassandra visibly relaxed and smiled at him, nodding her head in agreement.

“Thank you, Solas that would be most kind of you.”

We walked towards the stairs, and I caught Cassandra’s look of apprehension and gave her a reassuring smile. They descending the stairs and saw that Varric was sitting at the bar waiting for them. Reaching the landing, Solas caught Varric’s attention by inquiring about the carriage and Varric placed his ale on the counter before turning slowly towards them.

“Yes Chuckles, I got the…” his voice trailed off as he stared at Cassandra’s beautiful form encased in the delicate red dress that hugged her every curve. Solas and I shared a knowing look and tried to not laugh at Varric’s expression. Unable to stop myself, I whisper loudly behind my hand to him.

“This is the part where you compliment her Varric.”

Varric physically straightened his shoulders and move from his stool towards them clearing his throat.

“Yes – you’re right Sketch,” he said without looking at me unable to remove his gaze from Cassandra’s.

Stopping in front of her, he bowed slightly.

“You look very beautiful, Lady Cassandra,” he said kindly.

Cassandra’s face reddened with the compliment, and took the arm he offered before she said quietly, “thank you, Varric.”

Chapter End Notes

da'len - young one
hahren - elder/teacher
On dhea - Good morning
Ar'an dy itha - we shall see
c'est beau - it's beautiful
oui - yes
C'est le destin - It is fate
Solas stepped from the carriage and held his hand out, helping me out, while holding the door for Cassandra. I watched Varric help Cassandra still unable to stop his obvious staring. Cassandra slapped his arm playfully pulling him from his quiet studying.

“Are you okay? You have been staring at me since we left our lodgings.”

I suppressed the giggle that wanted to bubble out as Varric gave Cassandra a roguish smile and leaned towards her. Cassandra bent slightly for him to whisper something to her that made her blush slightly.

She then glanced at him curiously and nodded her head in agreement to whatever he had said to her and watched him walk away from her. Solas similarly brought me to stand with Cassandra.

“We shall wait for your return, stay safe.”

I nod my head and watch him walk to stand with Varric, still unable to forget their almost kiss.

Later…much, much later.

Pulling my eyes away from his back, I take a nervous breath as the door quickly opened to them. Well, this should be fun.

Handing the man at the door my invitation, he looks at me curiously but said nothing. Turning towards the room of guests he introduced us.

“Introducing, Lady Cassandra Pentaghast, and Lady Fenlin Lavellan, representing the Inquisition.”

Moving forward together, Cassandra grabbed a couple of glasses of sweet wine from a passing tray and handed me one. Both of us stood sipping on our wine while observing the group gathered in the salon. It did not take long for people to begin curiously, coming up to speak with them. All wanted to speak with the famous one that survived the Conclave and fell from a rift. It did not take me long to see that I was the only elf in the room not serving drinks or hors d’oeuvre’s. After hearing ‘Herald of Andraste’, over fifty times in less than an hour, my face was starting to hurt from fake smiling.

“Stories of your heroic endeavors have entertained a many awake on cold nights. There isn’t anyone in attendance that doesn’t know who you are, Herald of Andraste.”

I keep my smile in place and barely kept my nose from wrinkling at the title. Cassandra took another breath to stop her inevitable snort of disgust with the large amount of ass kissing from beside her.

“Thank you, my lady, I am sure some of those stories are stretched a bit” I try to warn her pleasantly.

“Only for the best effects I am sure,” she responded quickly.

“The Inquisition – what a load of pig shit. It’s nothing but crazed seekers, chantry cast-offs, and social climbers. We all know what this – Inquisition really is.” The Marquis said from the top of the grand staircase.

Cassandra’s gaze narrowed on the Marquis as he played to the whole gallery while descending the long staircase. I follow the man’s descent with my eyes, taking in the slimming silk dress pants, the overly poufy sleeved undershirt and tight-fitting vest over his thin form. With his last step from the curved staircase, it showed the rapier type sword on his back when his body turned just slightly.

I forgot about this idiot.

“We are trying to stop the chaos that is currently sweeping unchecked across Thedas, Marquis; it is in fact not a ‘load of pig shit’, as you called it,” I tell him calmly before taking another sip of my
sweet wine wishing I was anywhere but here. The Marquis' eyes narrowed behind his hideous mask, and his lips sneered at me.

“Yes, coming to save Thedas – with an army. The Maker would never send a knife-ear to save us all. If you were an honorable woman, you would follow me outside.” He said taking a slight step backward, pitching his voice so that everyone looking at them from around the room could hear his spoken challenge.

I make a quick glance at Cassandra noticing her body was rigid with the slur and the challenge. Turning my attention back to the Marquis, he is either incredibly stupid or he is hoping he will have support amongst some of the other nobles.

“I’m sorry Marquis, I do not think you worthy of ruining my dress for, nor do you have the talent to best this…knife-ear.” I tell him with a small cold smile holding my glass aloft so the light would reflect through the deep red wine. I wanted the Marquis to believe I thought him insignificant, and the indignation my words cause was clear. My plan was indeed working. Cassandra let out a small snort of laughter at my insult and nodded her head in agreement, never taking her eyes off the Marquis.

As he reached back to grab his rapier, I slapped a frost spell on him and froze him just as Cassandra pulled a dagger from beneath the confines of her gown, holding it to his throat with surprising speed. Stupid then...oh well. I tried not to laugh at the surprised look on his face as he stood encased in my frost spell, his hand paralyzed over his head just barely on the hilt of his sword and Cassandra’s dagger at his throat.

“That was obviously not your best idea Marquis,” I tell him clicking my tongue behind my teeth as I walk towards him. “I see by the surprised look on your face, that you did not know I was a mage or that my companion to such a wonderful party is none other than Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast, Right Hand of The Divine.” I hold his gaze for a long moment as I saw understanding suddenly dawn in his blue gaze. I walk slowly around him simulating what Cassandra had done to me when I was chained to the Chantry floor as a prisoner. I thought it was certainly intimidating. I wish I was as tall as she was instead of the short skinny elf, but I think it might still be threatening enough. Leaning in close behind him so he could hear me, I spoke softly and slightly menacingly.

“I trust you now are completely aware of your current predicament. Now that you have insulted us both, there is not one person in this room, including its owner, who would blink an eye if I or Lady Pentaghast were to kill you this instant.” Arriving back in front of him I saw the fear apparent in his eyes and I glared at him coldly. “This is what we shall do Marquis since we did not come to shed blood this evening. You will take this opportunity to thank Andraste for your life and leave quickly. If you don’t, Lady Pentaghast and I will take turns making you bleed, do you understand?”

“Y…y…es my lady, my deepest apologies.”

Snapping my fingers, I released the spell and watch the Marquis bow quickly and leave the salon. I glance over to Cassandra who had a smirk on her face as she replaced her dagger when we unexpectedly heard Madame De’Fer speaking from the top of the grand stairs.

“Ladies, well done; I do so appreciate not having to direct the help to remove a body from my dancing area.”

I watch the obviously staged entrance of Madam De’Fer as she gracefully moved down the curved staircase. Cassandra took a sip of her sweet wine watching the First Enchanter make her grand entrance with the same expression I had – what a fake. My thoughts instantly went to thinking about whether or not Vivienne had planned for the altercation between them and the Marquis. My eyes
follow her cautiously with her descent, and I take a sip of my wine as she made her way towards us.

“I have so looked forward to meeting you my dear; please follow me to my study where we may discuss in private.”

Madam Vivienne turned away from me and led us down a long hallway. Glancing over at Cassandra, I cross my eyes at her and stick my tongue slightly out. Cassandra covered her mouth to keep a laugh from escaping, and shaking her head she glanced back at me and mimicked the action making me smile brightly at the moment of silliness while we followed the enchanter. Entering a slightly darkened room with floor to ceiling windows, I take in the splendor of the impressive room while Vivienne introduces herself to us.

“All me to introduce myself. I am Vivienne, First Enchanter of Montsimmard and Enchantress to the Imperial Court.”

“Please accept our sincerest apologies about the Marquis; I do hope he will not pose a problem for you,” I tell her, finally pulling my gaze from the lovely artwork next to where I stood near the large window.

Vivienne smiled coolly as she gazed out the window at the grounds below. Crossing her arms delicately, she then glanced back to me.

“His Aunt is the Vicomtesse of Mont-de-Glace. Not a powerful family but well respected…and very devout. Alphonse will be disowned for this. It’s not the first time he’s brought his Aunt disgrace. But I am sure it will be the last. After such a public humiliation, I expect he will run off to the Dales to join the Empresses’ war effort. Either to make a good end or to win back a modicum of self-respect.”

“But I didn’t invite you here for pleasantries. With Divine Justinia dead, and the Chantry in shambles, only the Inquisition might restore sanity and order to our frightened people. As the leader of the last loyal mages of Thedas, I feel it only right that I lend my assistance to your cause.”

Studying her carefully while Cassandra stood behind me listening cautiously, I take a sip of my wine.

“You say you led the last of the loyal mages – loyal to whom?” I ask her curiously.

Vivienne smiled at me with an air of superiority and tolerance to my question, instantly irritating me.

“To the people of Thedas of course; we have not forgotten the commandment, as some have, that magic exists to serve man. I support any effort to restore such order.”

My eyes narrow slightly as I turn the long stem of the glass in my hand. I want to be precise in my wording so my intentions are clear.

“Lady Vivienne, I am an elvhen apostate. What makes you think that I would support reinstating the circles? There are Templars that have gone off the deep end, Rebel Mages that have moved beyond just drunk on their own powers, and all of this is due to a Chantry allowed to have too much power over both of them. The Crossroads in the Hinterlands exposed such corrupt behavior. I am willing to support the fundamental fact that the Chantry serves a purpose religiously, and I will help however I can for them to rebuild. Having said all that, I do not, nor have I ever supported circles.”

I saw the narrowing of her dark grey-blue eyes with each word. 

“She must have known that I would never support something that resembles mage enslavement and can make you tranquil, or kill you if you don’t pass the Harrowing which who the fuck needs a damn Harrowing, to begin with.

“Ah, my dear such naïve viewpoints, but understandable for someone who does not know the
Circles or the Chantry. Growing up where you have does give one very limited understanding.”

I kept my polite smile in place though internally I found the woman pompous and rude. *Limited! I’ll show you limited you social-climbing bimbo.*

“I do appreciate your invitation to such a wonderful gathering Lady Vivienne. Please allow us some time to think over your offer of assistance. I will have my Ambassador send a message to you with our decision after I have spoken with everyone.”

Madame Vivienne gave me a pleasantly fake smile with my words and moved to leave the study.

“Of course Herald, I will look forward to hearing from your Ambassador soon.”

Once we reached the main salon we thanked our hostess again and moved to leave the soirée quickly. Neither of us said one word until we could safely talk within the safety of our carriage without prying, noisy nobles listening in.
Walking out the ornate front doors of the estate, my eyes found his calm blue ones waiting for me. Taking the arm he held out for me, the flutters in my stomach intensified as soon as I touched his arm. Someday…obviously not today, but someday I am going to get this under control. Once inside Cassandra and I both let out a pent-up breath that made both men raise their eyebrows in surprise at each other.

“It was that bad?” Varric finally asked us curiously.

I let my head fall back against the seat and gaze at Varric while Cassandra let out a disgusted noise.

“Ugh…that woman is…” searching for the word, I finished her sentence for her, “a Viper.”

Cassandra held my gaze from across the carriage and pointed at me, “exactly.”

With a heavy sigh, I look at Cassandra, biting my lower lip with frustration knowing that the ‘viper’ had its uses.

“Viper she may be Cassandra, but the woman does have connections that might help Josephine. We should talk with them about it and come to a mutual decision. I can tell you this right now though; I am not traveling with that woman – anywhere, including to the privy. I don’t have the patience for such a prig.”

Varric shook his head laughing as well as Cassandra, and I even heard Solas’ soft laughter from beside me. I knew Cassandra understood what I meant; she had gotten a taste of the woman’s arrogance first hand. Solas and Varric had no idea of how vicious Madam Vivienne could be. If they were going to have her around, it was not something I would celebrate anytime soon.

‘Ah, my dear such naïve viewpoints, but understandable for someone who does not know the Circles or the Chantry. Growing up where you have does give one very limited viewpoints’, Cassandra mimicked with a perfect impersonation of Madame Vivienne’s condescending Orlesian tone.

Cassandra covered her mouth at the giggle escaping and Solas slightly tensed next to me.

“She stated that to you?” he questioned with a tone of disbelief.

I gaze over at him from where my head lulled against the back of the seat. Why does he have to be so damn handsome, and that jaw…oops focus, answer the question.

“Oh and so much more…ugh” I replied with a disgusted groan.

“I thought you handled her very well, and the Marquis.”

I smiled at the compliment and covered a small tired yawn.

Solas glanced at Cassandra curiously.

“What Marquis?”

Cassandra laughed and looked at Solas with humor dancing in her chocolate brown eyes as she
began to recant the story for them while trying to keep her laughter under control.

“There’s some pompous Marquis made his grand entrance saying not such nice things about the Inquisition. Not a big thing really, we expected this.” Cassandra was trying to catch her breath as she laughed again about the frozen Marquis.

“He then gets the bright idea to challenge Fenlin, and unintentionally myself, to a duel for honor. She told him she liked her dress more, and that he wasn’t worth dirtying herself for. This fool reaches back for his sword and she froze him to the floor. She then proceeds to tell him, in a very convincing tone, that no one in the hall would save him…the man looked to about wet himself.”

Varric watched with an absorbed expression as Cassandra continued laughing while trying to retell the encounter.

“And then?” Varric prodded for her to continue.

“And then she tells him, he could thank Andraste for his life, but if he chose to pursue his choices that we would take turns making him bleed.”

Laughing myself now, I pointed out quickly for everyone.

“Don’t forget how quickly you pulled that dagger from wherever it was…that was beautiful.”

The conversation around me lulled me into a comfortable cocoon of happy while listening to Varric tell a story about Hawke in a similar situation with a group of Carta thugs.

“Have you given it to her yet,” Varric asked him curiously.

Solas glanced at him quickly and shook his head, “no I have not.”

Varric laughed at his obvious nervousness and gazed back into the fire.

“Wow Chuckles, I never would have thought you to be the fearful type.”

Solas let out a sigh of annoyance with his comment.

“It is not fear that prevents me Master Tethras, it is clearly not that simple.”

Both falling into silence, they heard footsteps on the stairs and turned to see Cassandra coming down having changed into a simple blue tunic and black leathers. Heaving a heavy sigh, Varric thought about what Solas had just said and muttered under his breath as he stood to greet her.

“No, I guess you’re right, it isn’t.”

Solas smirked at his comment and turned to see that Fenlin was not far behind Cassandra wearing a simple grey tunic with black leathers. Her hair was free of its braids to flow around her, and for once he allowed himself the thought of seeing her as a vision of beauty without chastising himself for it. She walked towards Varric’s vacated seat and sat down. She was glancing up at him through her dark lashes smiling, and he felt his heart stumble in his chest. She had an effect on him that he had never thought again possible. Moving to sit back down he watched her, while she watched him with her soft amber gaze.
“Would you like to walk with me?” He asked after a long silence.

I smile at him slightly nervous. *Maybe we will finish what we started earlier.*

“I think I would like that,” I tell him while getting up from the chair to follow after him from the building.

The night was warm on my skin and when I looked up, the twin moons shone brightly in the night’s sky. I saw that he walked with his fingers linked behind him as they strolled towards the garden area, and my gaze wanders to the angle of his jaw. I can’t stop the small sigh that escapes me before I can tear my gaze away, and glance back up at the moons again. The pavilion area was mostly empty, with a few straggling couples walking here or there, but in whole, it was like they were alone. When we came to a small park, we found a lovely spot with a bench. It sat on rock pavers, surrounded by flowers and moss growing thru and around all the spaces. A large cherry blossom tree delicately draped over the seating area giving a very romantic glow to the small area.

Glancing around, I notice that we were indeed the only ones in the small courtyard and the never-ending flutter of nerves that was usually in my stomach when around him went into overdrive. He sat next to me while I continued to stare at a cluster of flowers off to the side. Focusing on the vibrant colors of pink and blue that shone brightly even in the barely lit small garden.

“It is a very nice night,” he says as he sat down.

I feel my lips rise at the ordinary comment so unlike him.

“I particularly like the way the moons shine in the night's sky. I have always enjoyed the night,” I replied staring up at the sky enjoying their brilliance.

When I felt his hand gently take hold of mine, and lace our fingers together, it pulled my gaze from the sky to him with surprise. My stomach dropped to the ground as he held my gaze, unable to stop the flutter of butterflies flurrying around my stomach. His gaze held desire, and pain and they held me a willing captive.

“I should apologize for my actions earlier this evening,” he said to me quietly.

I stare at him as comprehension comes swiftly, and without mercy, as my whole body ran cold with anxiety at the coming conversation. I take a hasty swallow past the growing lump in my throat as I pull my hand from his. Folding my hands together in my lap, twisting my fingers nervously, I rip my gaze from him and stare at the ground. *I have heard this before. If I rip it like a band-aid, it will only hurt for a second.*

“Its fine Solas, it was just a momentary…lapse of judgment. I…best that we stay just friends, I understand...there is no need for an apology.” Standing abruptly, without giving him a chance to say anything, I left him in the garden behind me.

I ran.

Through the winding, narrow side streets towards our lodgings. Everything was but a blur of mixed colors and darkness even when I ran passed Cassandra and Varric as they returned from their own stroll.
“Fenlin?” Cassandra called to me, but I didn’t stop as I ran by her. I needed to get to my room before I broke. I needed my soothing silent darkness, the calm before this storm of emotion could take over. I ran through the doors for my room, taking the stairs two at a time, and when I finally got there, I slammed the door shut, taking a few more steps into the room I finally allowed myself to slump to the floor.

Holding my head in my hands I began the well-known mantra. Focus…center…deep breath…it does not matter. You knew that it would be that way. Closing my eyes I find the darkness in the center that will still my mind from any further thoughts, and wrap it around me tightly like a cocoon. I had not anticipated that his rejection of me would hurt worse than anything I have ever felt before. Clenching my eyes tighter, and pressing my hand to the solid hurt in my chest, I hear the knocking on the door, while Cassandra called out my name.

“Fenlin? May I come in?” Cassandra asked from behind the closed door.

When I didn’t answer her, I heard the door open and quickly close behind me.

“What happened? Are you okay?” she questioned me quickly with a rough, worried voice as she knelt beside me on the floor.

I finally swallow past the throbbing ball of pain in my throat, ignoring the churning hurt in my chest and open my eyes exposing the unshed tears to look at her an answer.

“Nothing happened, I will be fine…I just need to sleep,” I croak out and get off the floor.

The worried gaze that Cassandra was giving me was understandable, I am sure I look a hot mess. I can see that she wants to pry and ask questions, but thankfully she remains silent as I change into my night clothes and slip into the bed.

Solas watched her run from him in stunned surprise at her abrupt retreat. He replayed what he said and suddenly slumped over. Cradling his head in his hands at his utter stupidity, felasil! Rubbing his face, he replayed the conversation over. He felt the solid kick to his stomach as he remembered the look of rejection that flashed across her face before she had turned from him.

He stood suddenly, pacing the small space in front of the bench. He was never one to be moved towards violence, and yet he would gladly hit something right this moment. His time training her was enjoyable. He knew that often he made excuses so that he could be closer to her. Then there were his visits with her in the Fade. Her lack of fear of him in his wolven form was refreshing; her thoughts provoked questions that kept him returning to her woods to learn more about her.

He had ruined that with just one misspoken sentence. Stopping suddenly in the middle of his pacing he stood with stunned surprise. She had become important to him, and he was suddenly afraid he had ruined it all. He turned to take the path back towards their inn and hoped that she would talk with him in the Fade. He might have difficulty getting her to speak with him in the waking world, but she would talk unknowingly with him there.

I sat at the water’s edge and ran my fingers through the water when I felt the shift in the air around
me. Letting out a sigh, I brace myself for his presence. The loud sounds of branches snapping around him as he moved were surprising. He is making a lot of noise like he is in a hurry, he shouldn’t be…I gave him an easy out. It’s not like anything happened anyway. I take a deep, steadying breath and pull the dark silence over my thoughts and slipped my fingers through the water again absently.

His breath echoed around me when he came from the cover of the forest. I kept my back turned to him and slipped my fingers back through the water again letting the motion soothe my ragged emotions. I listened to the sounds of his paws as he came closer. The soft, muffled sounds against the grass mixed with sand and dirt were kind of calming.

“I have thought about your question da’len,” he said sitting down beside me.

*I can’t believe my head only reaches his knee bone.* Pulling my focus back to the water and my fingers running through it, I just hum my answer.

“Mmm”

“I care to ask if you are troubled because I do not like to think you unhappy.”

I let a small smile form and shake my head at his answer. I know he has not said all of what he wanted, and you could feel the indecision and discomfort swirling around him.

“Thank you, but you cannot help whether I am happy or not.”

I hear his soft growl of annoyance next to me and dip my fingers back into the water before gazing up at him.

“Do you take other forms besides a wolf, Fen’Harel?” I ask him suddenly.

I can tell that my question is throwing his thoughts askew while he considers my question.

“Yes” he finally growls looking down at me, and I am glad for at least this bit of honesty between us.

The soft exhale of breath as I turn my focus from him back to the water obviously frustrates him as I soon feel his aura reaching out to examine mine. It was so much like Solas’ in the waking world, but so much more powerful here in the Fade. Pulling my aura close to my body, I do not respond in kind and I hear his frustrated growl again.

“Why are you hiding from me da’len,” he growled close to my head.

I slightly shake my head and gaze out over the shiny water’s surface not wanting to answer so I attempt to evade his question.

“You have seen more than most. What do you want from me, Fen’Harel?” I ask quickly ignoring if my question was a smart one to ask of him.

“For you to speak with me, tell me what is troubling you,” he replied. His answer swift and clear.

I could hear more of Solas in his reply than I had before. I also heard his unspoken question in the air of why did I run from him in the garden.

“I wish I could, but that I cannot do,” I whisper painfully.

Running my fingers back through the water focusing on the feeling of it rushing over my skin, I felt the shift in his aura with my words and kept my eyes forward, as he moved away from me.
“Is it because you do not feel me worthy to have such an understanding of you?” He growled slowly, looking away from me.

His aura is blindingly blue, and I can see that he is either angry or upset with me for my unwillingness to speak of what happened earlier with him. I push my discomfort away suddenly not caring about his feelings, his comfort or if any of this was a good idea.

“You’re asking me to tell you my secrets when you will not share your own and you question why? It is because I cannot trust you with them. God knows I want to,” I say evenly with a touch of desperation in my voice. I can see the stiffening of his posture with my words, and I let out another sigh.

“Would you prefer I do not return?” He growled quietly asking me while he looked at the forest prepared to leave.

I could hear the sorrowful sound in his voice as he asked and it reflected my own feeling at the thought. The idea of him never returning, and the thought of losing him as my friend was not something I could handle, not now. For some reason, in my mind, I had separated the wolf from the man and made them two different individuals. Realistically, I knew Fen’Harel was Solas, but at this moment he was not. Unable to stop myself, I reach out and touch the fur on his side and feel the strong muscle beneath my fingers stiffen.

“I don’t think I could handle losing you too,” I say to him quietly.

I feel his side move with a deep heavy breath, and the soft rumble of his voice vibrate under my fingers as he spoke.

“I am not worthy of such emotion da’len.”

I let a small held breath leave me and grip his fur as I answer.

“To me, you are always worthy; you just think you’re not,” I reply simply, focusing on the softness of his fur running through my fingers.

I slid closer to him, and like the night on the river, I laid my head on his side and stared out over the water in silence.

Chapter End Notes

Felasil - fool
da’len - young one
They approached the darkened estate and I could feel his frustration with me at refusing to speak with him. For what was probably the hundredth time today, I felt his aura reach for mine and I let a sigh of annoyance escape when I glanced towards him. Cassandra’s voice brought me back to the moment and I pulled my gaze from his clearly frustrated blue eyes. The first time he has ever allowed any emotion to show – good.

“We are to meet this…Red Jenny here?”

“Yeah, she said there is a Marquis that is working against the Inquisition meeting here tonight. Come on Cassandra, where’s your sense of adventure” I tease her.

Cassandra gazes at me with a slight smirk on her face.

“I left that with my other suit of armor,” she joked back. Softly laughing, we watched Varric pick the lock on the back gate.

After dodging a couple of fireballs directed at my head, I watch the Marquis stand in a pose full of self-importance. Chin jutting out while trying to look down his nose at me, which must be difficult with that ridiculous mask on his face. His feet are positioned almost like a ballerina’s with his heel flush against the inside of the other foot, and his hands are on his hips. I don’t think I will ever get used to the masks.

“Herald of Andrastrae, how much did you expend to discover me? It must have weakened the Inquisition immeasurably.”

“Even if I knew whatever you meant, I wouldn’t spend a copper trying to find out. I’m actually here to meet someone else and you got in the way.”

Crossing my arms I watch the lower half of his face tighten with my words and from the corner of my eye I caught the bright yellow leggings sliding over a railing.

“You don’t fool me! I’m too important for this to be an accident. My efforts will survive in victories against you elsewhere.”

A loud sound from the left of the Marquis, near the set of steps, made everyone look in that direction. I watched a man fall forward with two arrows in the back, while Sera pulled another arrow from her quiver.

“Just say…what” she dares him, drawing the string of her bow back tautly.

“Wha…” The Marquis begins and then sounds of gurgling and choking as he hits the ground with an arrow through his mouth. Gross…but she did warn him.

The taller, muscular elf walked towards the dead Marquis with almost a swagger to her movements. Her uneven blonde hair and raggedy red tunic over bumblebee yellow and black checked leggings, was a sight to behold.

“Ugh…squishy one, but ya heard me right? Just say what…rich tits always try for more than they deserve. Blah, blah, blah! Obey me…arrow in my face.” She says pulling the arrow from the
Marquis mouth and walks back towards me. “So I see you followed the notes well enough. Glad to see…and you’re an elf,” she said with a tone layered in distaste as she took in my vallis’lin. “Well, I hope you’re not too…elfy. It’s all good innit; the important thing is you glow. You’re the Herald thingy.”

“Sure I’m a glowing elf, who are you again and what’s all this about.”

I can’t keep the smile off my face as she stands in front of me.

“No idea, I don’t know this idiot from manners. My people just said the Inquisition should look into him.”

“You mean our people, elves?”

Sera looked at me annoyed.

“No – people, people. Names Sera, this is cover, get ‘round it for the reinforcements. Don’t worry, someone tipped me their equipment shed…they’ve got no breeches,” she said giggling.

My eyebrow rose at her promise and the sudden noise coming from the small balcony made me turn and cast a swift barrier.

The rest of the reinforcement’s descended the small stairs towards them, and true to her word, none of them were wearing pants. A loud burst of laughter escapes me at the sight.

“Brilliant,” I yell out as I start casting.

Cassandra made a disgusted noise, and Varric got a chuckle. I heard Solas’ mumbling ‘seriously?!’ from behind me, as pants-less warriors came rushing down the narrow staircase. The small group was taken care of quickly, and I still had a large smile on my face as I walked towards Sera busy pulling her arrows out of bodies.

“Friends really came through with that tip, ‘no breeches’,,” she laughed and turned towards me. “So Herald of Andraste, you’re a strange one. I’d like to join.”

Sera will be quite the interesting if not entertaining one. I could already see that she and Solas would never get along just from the annoyed glance she already made in his direction.

“Let me ask you something Sera, do you not like elves?” I ask her curiously.

Sera gazed at me with clear blue piercing eyes and laughed.

“As long as they aren’t too elfy,” she snorted.

“Well Sera, I don’t know if I can get any elfier than this,” motioning towards my own body. Sera laughed for a second then crossed her arms.

“I want to join, let me help you.”

I glance back at the others before letting my gaze return to her. Nodding my head slowly, sure this should be interesting.

“Alright Sera, we could use more like you – and your friends. Meet with Leliana when you arrive in Haven.”

Sera turned towards the door then turned back quickly,
“Meet you back at Haven then,” she said with a large smile and a mock salute before turning on her heel and leaving out the back gate.

I wave goodbye to her as she leaves. Turning back towards the others, I could not miss that Solas was watching me. Ignoring his gaze, and the sudden onslaught of flutters humming in my stomach, I looked at Cassandra.

“Do you think it wise to acquire her assistance?” Cassandra questioned me as I approached.

I smiled and shook my head chuckling.

“Wise? Probably not, but she will make it lively.”

Cassandra snorted at my answer and I glance at her.

“Come on, let’s get out of here and enjoy our last night of not sleeping on the ground.”

The inn was relatively empty when we arrived and I moved to follow Cassandra and Varric up the stairs when his softly spoken words halted me as securely as mage ice.

“A moment if you please,” he asked quietly.

I let a sigh escape at the traitorous tingles that ran over my skin at the sound of his voice.

I really wish that would just stop.

“What do you need?” I reply, schooling my features to reflect indifference before turning to look at him.

His expression looked almost pained, and swallow back my urge to make him happy. Steeling my courage, I hold his gaze and wait for him to speak.

“With my stumbling’s I have inadvertently hurt you lethal’lan.”

His gentle voice was almost my undoing, and I had to swallow past the painful lump that was suddenly growing in my throat. I focus on a spot just over his shoulder as I try to keep the dark silence tightly wrapped around me that would keep me from showing him how much it had hurt me.

“You have done nothing that you need to apologize for, Solas. Please let’s not speak of this again,” I replied trying to reassure him and mentally cringe at the obvious hurt in my tone.

He took a small step towards me and I took a small step back now looking at him fully instead of the spot on the tavern wall. His sigh of frustration loud in the quiet room.

“Last night I said ‘I should apologize’, not that I ‘was’ apologizing, lethal’lan. You left before I could possibly clarify.”

He held my gaze imprisoned with his own and I felt my heart double beat in my chest. Who the hell starts a conversation with ‘I should apologize’? Wait does this mean? Nope…not gonna think about that.

“Okay, well thank you for clearing that up for me, now can we drop it.”

I fidgeted under his intense scrutiny. His silence was killing me at this point, and the slight tilt of his head as he studied me carefully made my stomach drop to somewhere around my toes.
“Wait here for a moment please,” he asked of me.

I nodded my head and let a small sigh of relief escape as he left me to jog up the stairs, taking them two at a time. The small reprieve was short lived as I heard the soft closing of his door upstairs. Twisting my fingers together as I waited, all too soon I heard his soft footsteps coming back down the steps and I turn at the sound. He held out a medium-sized wooden box with a Halla and a Wolf carved on the top, and a small silver latch on the front.

“I meant to give this too you yesterday, after you returned from the soiree.”

I stared at the finely carved box unsure what to say as I took it from his hands. I was too stunned that he would choose to purchase me anything that I was speechless and stood staring it at.

“Will you not open it, lethal’Ian?”

My eyes snapped up to his at the soft question, and with slightly unsteady fingers, I slip the latch free and open the box. Inside there was a leather bound sketchbook, pencils, charcoal, and chalks for drawing. I pull my eyes from the contents of the box back to his.

“I thought perhaps you might appreciate having your own means to continue drawing while we travel.”

_How can I not continually just stare at him like some love-starved teenager, when he does thoughtful shit like this?_

“I love it, thank you for such a thoughtful gift,” I said my voice thick with emotion.

His eyes softened as he watched me, and my heart melted at the sight.

“I shall let you retire for the evening then,” he said softly and gave me a gentle smile before turning for the steps.

I trace the outline of the carvings on the top with my fingertips; _oh this is so going to hurt._

*****

While crossing the pavilion to leave Val Royeaux, an Elven woman with short black hair stepped out from under an archway into our path. _Grand Enchanter Fiona_, my mind told me as I took in the dark blue and gold mage robes.

“If I might have a moment of your time,” she asks politely as we approach.

“Grand Enchanter Fiona,” Cassandra says sounding surprised at her appearance.

“Leader of the Mage Rebellion, is it not dangerous for you to be here?” Solas questioned her.

Fiona glanced around, and her bright green eyes settled on where I stood between Cassandra and Solas.

“I heard of this gathering, and wanted to see the fabled Herald of Andraste with my own eyes. If it’s help with the Breach you seek, perhaps you should look among your fellow mages.”

My eyes narrow slightly on her, and I cross my arms. “I don’t suppose you are talking about the ones running around the Hinterlands killing everyone they meet.”

Her face slightly tightens with my words and she folds her hands together.
“No I am not. They left their towers full of hate and anger; I am speaking about the mages that have gathered with me in Redcliff seeking peace.”

“I am surprised that the leader of the mages was not at the Conclave.” My expression must have conveyed my lack of trust with her because she visibly stiffened.

“Yes, you were supposed to be, yet somehow you avoided death.” Cassandra added while looking at the enchanter suspiciously.

“As did the Lord Seeker you’ll note,” she pointed out quickly. “Both of us sent negotiators in our stead in case it was a trap. I will not pretend I’m not glad to be alive. I lost many dear friends that day. It disgusts me to think that the Templars will get away with it, I’m hoping you won’t let them.”

Her words sparked surprise in Cassandra, but for me I heard nothing but her anger with the Templars. *There is seriously something wrong with this woman.*

“So you believe the Templars are responsible?”

“Why wouldn’t she,” Cassandra said to me with a look of annoyance on her face.

“Lucius hardly seems broken up over his losses, if he’s concerned about them at all. You heard him. You think he wouldn’t happily kill the Divine to turn people against us? So yes, I think he did it. More than I think you did it at any rate.”

“So you are what? Offering an alliance for possible protection during your fledgling freedom?”

“We are looking for a discussion on the matter at least. Consider this an invitation to Redcliff. Come meet with the mages, an alliance could help us both after all. I hope to see you there. Au revoir, my Lady Herald.”

I watch Fiona walk away from us and I still can’t get out of my head that the whole conversation felt off. Even if I could remember this part in the game, I don’t think it would have helped me. “Did she sound paranoid to any of you?” I ask anyone willing to answer.

“She did sound very sure of her assumptions about the Lord Seeker,” Solas offered.

“Come, we need to return to Haven,” Cassandra said to me turning towards the boat arrival and departure area.

****

He couldn’t have given me anything better than what he did. From the moment I received my gift, I was seen drawing constantly. I drew everything I saw, and one night around the fire on our way back from Val Royeaux, I was drawing when Cassandra stopped behind me.

“I have never seen such a creature, what is that?” She questioned me curiously as I drew Fen’Harel.

I smiled up at her and put my pencil down, picking up my ale, I take a sip before answering her.

“It is Fen’Harel, one of the Elvhen God’s.”

Saying his name aloud, I saw his head slowly rise from his book and look at me.

“It has seven eyes?”

Cassandra looked at the drawing curiously, and I was instantly thinking of the children’s story *Little
Laughing a little, I nod my head at her question.

“All the better to see you with,” I quote knowing she wouldn’t get the joke.

“It is more likely all the better to scare you with,” she teased back before sitting next to me. “I must admit, I am unfamiliar with your Gods. What is he known for?”

I grimace slightly at the question and take another drink of my ale. I notice that Solas is staring intently at me now waiting for my answer, and I swallow past the ball of nervousness suddenly lodged in my throat.

“Well, he is known for many things actually. The Dalish do not reflect on him kindly though. It is said that in ancient time, only Fen’Harel could walk without fear among both our gods and the Forgotten Ones. He was kin to the gods of the People, where he could walk in his Elvhen form. The Forgotten Ones knew of his cunning ways and saw him as one of their own, and he could walk amongst them in his wolven God form. They say that is how Fen’Harel was able to trick them. The Creators and the Forgotten Ones were at war with each other, and because they both saw him as a brother, they listened to him when he asked them both to stay in their respected places while he arranged a truce. They trusted Fen’Harel, and he betrayed them by sealing them all away so they could never again walk among the People.”

“Why would he do that?” her curiosity dripping from her tone as she glanced back at the drawing.

“Who knows, the story has been told so many times who is to say that it is even accurate.”

Cassandra watched me for a moment curiously as I took a drink of my ale ignoring Solas’ intense gaze as he listened.

“You do not believe it is as they say?” Cassandra asked sounding slightly surprised.

I shook my head, “No I do not. I believe there might be pieces of truth in the story, but not the complete truth. There are no surviving records of Arlathan, or the Elvhenan Empire so all’s the Dalish have is retold stories. The problem with this story, like all stories, it requires a hero and a villain. I believe that he was depicted the villain because he was the only one believed left. No one really knows if there was truly a war going on between the Forgotten Ones and the Creators, or if it was a war amongst the Creators themselves only. The Dalish prefer to romanticize the Creators and I don’t. I believe the Creators were not as benevolent as portrayed.”

Cassandra listened to me carefully and then nodded her head with understanding.

“I to believe the Chantry does this as well. It is not widely known that Shartan, an elf, fought side by side with Andraste. He is not known because any records that show what he did were stricken from the Chantry’s histories. They would rather the people perceive Andraste as something other than what she was. Don’t get me wrong, I believe in the Maker, and Andraste. I just believe there is more to it than what is told.”

My eyes followed Solas’ movements as he walked around the fire towards me. The flicker of the fires glow in his gaze was captivating as they held mine. There was something about the way he silently walked towards me in that moment that reminded me of his wolven nature.

“May I see your drawing lethal’lan?”

I handed my sketchbook up to him and his fingers slid over mine as he took it. The swift tingles and heat ran through my hand and up my arm with the simple touch. This is ridiculous; I silently chastise myself while rubbing at my hand absently.
“It is a very good likeness of him.” Handing me the book back, this time careful to not touch him as I took it, I keep my eyes cast on the book afraid to look at him.

“Thank you.”
After my debriefing with everyone, I found a young man outside of the Chantry. He was not a tall man, he had short brown hair shaved on the sides. His eyes were a soft brown, and he was cleanly shaven. He wore full warrior armor with a sword strapped his waist and a large shield on his back. His smile was welcoming as he held an arm out for me to stop as I left the Chantry.

“Excuse me, I’ve got a message for the Inquisition, but I’m having a hard time getting anyone to speak with me.”

“Who are you?” He stood a little taller as I asked.

“Cremisius Aclassi, with The Bull’s Chargers mercenary company, we mostly work out of Orlais and Nevarra. We got word of some Tevinter mercenaries gathering out on the Storm Coast. My company Commander Iron Bull offers the information free of charge. If you would like to see what the Bull’s Chargers can do for the Inquisition, meet us there, and watch us work.”

“Walk with me Krem and let me buy you a pint, it’s cold out here.”

His smile at the offer lit up his face and he fell in step next to me as we walked.

“So what should I know about your Commander?” I asked him.

Krem looked at me and shrugged.

“Iron Bull? He’s one of those Qunari, the big guys with the horns? He leads from the front, he pays well, and he’s a lot smarter than the last bastard I worked for. Best of all he’s professional. We accept contracts with whoever makes the first real offer.”

I chuckle at that, and walk through the tavern door he held for me. Stopping at the bar, I grabbed a couple of pints from Flyssa with a bright smile and handed one to Krem before leading him to the closest table.

“You’re the first time he’s gone out of his way to pick a side,” he said after taking a drink.

I took a drink, as he took a drink of his ale with obvious curiosity.

“Why did he want us to have this information?” I saw him shrug and put his ale down.

“Iron Bull wants to work with the Inquisition; he thinks you guys are doing good work.”

Smiling, pleased that at least some good words were getting out about our hard work.

“We are trying and that is what matters, but what can your Bull’s Chargers offer the Inquisition?”

“We’re loyal, we’re tough, and we don’t break contracts. You can ask around Val Royeaux, we have references.”

We talked about the Chargers for a bit longer, and I told him we would head for the Storm Coast by the end of the week to meet with him and The Iron Bull. Shaking his hand, I left for my cabin.
Shutting the door, I leaned heavily back, as I dropped my pack on the floor next to me. I already know we won’t be staying long, but I was going to appreciate my bed, my bathtub, and the tavern – often. Shrugging out of my jacket, I hang it on the peg next to the door and walk towards my bathtub. Hot bath, nap all in that order. I was filling my bathtub with water when I heard knocking. Ugh, I let out a heavy breath of annoyance and put the bucket down.

Opening the door, Solas stood on the other side holding a book. Fuck...how did I not feel him coming?

“By the surprised expression on your face, it tells me you did not feel my approach. You must always be aware of your surroundings Fenlin.”

I lean against the door jam and cross my arms while staring at him in annoyance.

“Thank you for the lesson hahren, was there a reason for you stopping by?”

There was a slight flicker of a smile around the edges of his mouth as he held the book on glyphs and runes out to me.

“I wanted to give you this to study. We will begin practice tomorrow.”

I took the book from him, careful to not touch him.

“Also to ask if you would share your nightly meal with me later.”

My eyes flash up from the book to meet his, and I swallow nervously. Shit, shit, shit! No? Yes? I want to...not a good idea...it’s just food...SHIT!

“We could do that I suppose,” the little wobble in my voice makes me want to kick myself.

My stomach instantly plummets to my toes when he smiles at me and then bows his head before walking away. I close the door gently and let my forehead fall against it.

Thump

“Why does he have to be the flame that calls to my moth?” I question myself aloud, and with a heavy sigh, I returned to preparing my bath.

Nervously combing through my unruly hair, I prepare for my nightly meal and felt his aura with his approach. The butterflies intensified as I lay the comb down and walk towards my door. Taking a steadying breath, I pull the door open as he took the last few steps towards it. He instantly smiled at my preparedness this time and laughed slightly.

“I didn’t want another lecture,” I tell him while pulling my coat off the peg and slipping it on before shutting the door behind me.

His soft laughter set the flutters to buzz at top speed, and I slip my hands into my pockets.

“Come lethal’lan, our meal waits,” he said gesturing towards the tavern.

I move into step next to him as we walked towards the tavern in silence. He held the door open while I walked in. My eyes scanned the room and I notice Varric is sitting in the back talking with Cassandra. I felt his hand touch my back to gently steer us towards the table near the window, and the simple touch set my skin on fire with tingles. Just why can’t I be normal? My reaction to him
Sitting quickly, I smile at Flissa who walked towards us with a couple of mugs of ale.

“We are leaving for the Storm Coast at the end of the week. There is a mercenary group that we are going to meet; also there are some rifts that need my attention.” I tell him to fill the silence. I quickly realized how that must have sounded and I look at him apologetically.

“I’m sorry that sounded very rude, let me try that again. I would appreciate it if you would accompany me and the others to the Storm Coast to meet with this mercenary band and help me rid the area of rifts.”

His smile and slight laughter sent goosebumps over my arms and I had to refrain from rubbing my hands over them in hopes to make the feeling stop.

“It would please me to accompany you and the others lethal’lan.”

His eyes held mine for a moment before I looked away and took a sip of my ale trying to swallow past the nervous ball in my throat.

“You’ve said that you traveled to many different places while in the Fade, are there any that stick out to you more than others?”

He appeared to consider my question as he took a drink of his ale.

“This world, or its memory, is reflected in the Fade as I have explained to you before. If you dream in ancient ruins, you may see a city lost to history. Some of my fondest memories were found in crumbling cities long picked dry by treasure seekers. The best are the battlefields. Spirits press so tightly against the Veil that you can slip across with but a thought.”

Hearing his voice is soothing to me, and we both thanked Flissa as she brought us a couple of bowls of her stew and fresh bread. There was something about the baritone quality of it that lulled me in to listen intently.

“Oh which battlefields have you dreamt in?” I asked.

Taking a bite of my dinner, I pull off a piece of bread and dip it into the broth of the stew while Solas finished chewing.

“I dreamt at Ostagar. I witnessed the brutality of the Darkspawn and the valor of the Ferelden warriors. I saw Alistair and the Hero of Ferelden light the signal fire…and Loghain’s infamous betrayal of King Cailan’s forces.”

I watched him take a bite of his dinner, my curiosity obvious piqued.

“So…you hear stories about the battle. If you have seen its reenactment, what really happened?”

He smiled at me as he placed his spoon back into his bowl.

“That’s just it. In the Fade, I see reflections created by Spirits who react to the emotions of the warriors. One moment I see heroic Wardens lighting the signal fire and a power-mad villain sneering as he lets King Cailan fall. The next, I see an army overwhelmed and a veteran commander refusing to let more soldiers die in a lost cause.”

I drop my spoon back into my bowl and tent my fingers slightly frustrated.
“And you can’t tell which is which?”

His instant laughter at my obvious frustration made my stomach flip.

“It is the Fade lethal’lan, they are all real.”

Sitting back understanding what he is trying to tell me, and I let a very unladylike snort escape.

“Okay, I get it. Spirits express what emotions they receive, none are correct or incorrect they just are.”

His smile at my perception spurs my curiosity about Arlathan. Knowing he had been there, but maybe he would tell me about it if I used the Fade as a reference.

“Surely out the many places you have dreamt in, you have come across Arlathan, what was that like.”

His face took on a wistful expression for a brief moment before he covered it quickly and glanced at me curiously.

“I have found a few memories of that time in my travels. May I ask why you are curious about it?”

I lean forward in my eagerness to hear what he will tell me of his home, to possibly get a glimpse of him.

“What is not to be curious about? It was a time when the elven people were a proud race, not disregarded and treated as creatures like they are now. Their ability to achieve immortality, magic everywhere, in everything…oh, the things you could learn from their libraries or the knowledge from their teachers…the art…the food…the clothing, I mean just think about it all” I said rushed ending with a romantic sigh. A blush raced across my cheeks as I realized that I had grabbed his hand during my sudden impassioned blathering. Letting his hand go quickly, I sat back and folded my hands in my lap with embarrassment. He must think me an absolute idiot.

“You must think me foolish to have so many questions. Ir abelas Solas, you do not need to answer me.”

He was staring at me intently, and I felt my face get even redder under the intense scrutiny of his gaze.

“No, on the contrary lethal’lan, I found your eager expression of that time…fascinating,” he finally said.

I shyly smile at him, sliding a lock of hair behind my ear as his words warmed me and lessened my embarrassment. I could never truly think coherently around him, and I sometimes wondered if my constant questions were not an annoyance for him.

“From my travels through the Fade, Arlathan was all those things and more. Imagine instead of aravels, spires of crystals twining through the branches, palaces floating amongst the clouds. A place where magic was as natural as breathing, that is just a little of what was lost.”

Sadness flooded me at what he lost when he cast the Veil. Not just his home, but his people, his way of life. I knew I was not his people; I represented a shadow of what they once were. I wonder if sometimes when he looks at me if I am not a glaring reminder of all that he has lost.

“Solas, do you think that the ancient elves possibly used magic to increase their lifespan?”
His sudden smile at my curiosity only sent the stupid butterflies in my stomach into a flying frenzy.

“No, it was simply part of being Elvhen. The subtle beauty of their magic was the effect, not the cause of their nature. Some spells took years to cast and echoes would linger for centuries harmonizing with new magic, a never-ending symphony. It must have been beautiful.”

I smile at the romantic picture he paints with his words. The idea of magic slipping from one song to harmonize with the next until finally reaching a crescendo – its destination; it really must have been beautiful. I let out a soft sigh as I picked my spoon back up.

“It really does sound beautiful.”

We continue our eating in silence and I catch him looking at me with an indecipherable expression. I wish I knew what he was thinking when he looked at me like he was doing. Finished with my dinner, I sit back in my chair and gaze out the window.

“Would you care for a short walk before we retire for the evening?” he asked.

“I could definitely use a walk after all the food I just ate,” I said jokingly to him.

Standing, I slipped my coat on and followed him to the door. Through the door he held open for me, I waited a moment for him and we walked silently beside each other towards the gates.

“Have you always traveled and studied alone?” I asked him curious to think him alone all that time.

“Not at all,” he said glancing down at me as we walked through the gates. “I have built many lasting friendships. Spirits of Wisdom possessed of ancient knowledge, happy to share what they have seen. Spirits of Purpose helped me search. Even wisps, curious and playful, would point out treasures I might have missed.”

We take the path that leads to the lake that Cullen’s recruits ran daily with automatic steps.

“Is it really that easy to become friends with Spirits? I have yet to meet any when I am in the Fade.”

I glance up at him and see him gazing down at me and I knot my fingers in the pockets of my jacket nervously.

“Anyone who can dream has the potential, few ever try. My friends have comforted me in my grief and shared in my joy. Yet – because they exist without form as we understand it, the Chantry declares that spirits are not truly people.”

I see the frustration on his face and can hear it in his voice as he talks about it.

“Is Cassandra defined by her cheekbones and not her faith? Varric by his chest hair and not his wit?”

I laugh at his explanation and shake my head.

“You have an interesting way of looking at the world Solas. I hadn’t thought about it that way, but I do see your point.”

“I try and thank you. Few are willing to entertain such a notion.”

We fall into a companionable silence, and I gaze up at the overabundance of stars in the sky. It is a beautiful night, and the air was not as cold as it was when we had left for the Crossroads before. Spring was finally reaching the Frostbacks and it promised to be beautiful. I push my hair out of my face by grabbing it and pulling it over my shoulder.
“It continuously surprises me, your ability to understand and comprehend some of the variables I present to you.”

Laughing, I stop and gaze up at him making him stop.

“Why, because I am Dalish? Will you define me by my vallis’lin and not my mind?”

His instant, easy laughter with me using his own logic made my heart speed up.

“Point taken,” he said still chuckling as he held my gaze. I turn to continue walking and felt his hand grab mine and lace our fingers together, and my pulse raced at the contact. The slight trace of his thumb over mine was sending sparks up my arm and making me a little dizzy with the small action in a very good way. We continued walking the path in silence, holding hands, and I felt more connected to him at that moment than I ever had with any other man in my whole adult life.

That has to be crazy…right? I gaze back up at the night sky wishing the answers were there and I felt the chains around my locked heart just fall away. It was foolish for me to want that…with this man especially, but I could not fool myself any longer. I wanted to willingly give him the one thing I had never given another – my heart. It will probably kill me in the end if I do this. I gaze up at him quietly and realize I would regret it more if I didn’t.

We rounded the last bend of the path and I saw the gates of Haven. I thought as we got closer he would surely release my hand, but he did not and it left a warm feeling in my chest that he did not pull away. We walked silently beneath the gates arches towards my cabin.

“Thank you for the conversation and the walk. I will see you tomorrow for training.”

I gaze up at him as he finally releases my hand and smiles down at me gently, slipping a stray lock of hair behind my ear.

“Until tomorrow then,” he says folding his arms behind his back.

I wore a silly smile as I walked back through my door watching his retreating form. I waited to close my door until I could no longer feel his aura or see him.

Chapter End Notes

hahren - elder/teacher
Ir abelas - I'm sorry
I rode in silence actively thinking about everything that was gathered from the reports and none of it was good. Ignoring the conversation between Varric and Sera, I thought about endless rain, and reports about missing soldiers. If I remembered correctly they were the blades of...something, my mind drew a blank on the name, but I did remember I was going to have to fight their leader. Slightly grimacing with the thought, I felt his aura brush mine and I glance over to him riding next to me.

“Is everything okay lethal’lan?” His look of concern sets off flutters through my stomach and I smile at him.

The four days in Haven had been a much needed moment for everyone to relax. I studied the runes and glyphs with Solas, and sometimes we just sat together. He would read one of his old dusty tombs, and I would sit on the floor near the fire, drawing or reading.

“Yes I am fine, I was just thinking about the reports on the area is all,” I answered him.

He nodded his head in understanding as Sera turned around and calls back to him.

“Solas, you can make magic anywhere, right? Ever piss it by accident?”

I cover my mouth trying to hide the sudden smile at her ridiculous question, and his look of immediate annoyance.

“No.” He spat out immediately and then held his hand up appearing to actually think about it. “Wait...No.”

Sera turns completely sideways in her saddle to stare at him.

“What? How would you not remember something like that?”

“We were all young once,” he replied calmly.

I could no longer keep the laughter back and bent over my horse Etta laughing as tears slid down my face. Sera faced back forward on her mount and I saw the small smile on Solas’ face while Varric picked up the conversation again.

“Enjoying the Inquisition so far, Buttercup?”

“Oh sure, right? Happy as a pig in clover.”

There was a confused look on Varric’s face.

“Shit” he corrected her.

“What?” she said looking at him confused now.

“The phrase is commonly ‘happy as a pig in shit.’”

Cassandra lets a small chuckle leave her as she keeps facing forward.

“No argument there,” he replies and it finally fell silent until we reached the first camp for the night.

*****

Traveling with Sera was steadily giving me a headache with her constant chatter. If she wasn’t making fun of someone, and by someone I mean Solas, she was talking about...anything and everything that had to do with noble assholes. By the fourth night on the road, I had begun questioning my own sanity with inviting her along.

“The Veil is very Veil-y. Or something,” she said staring at Solas.

I could hear his loud sigh of annoyance from where he sat across the fire from me.

“Sera,” I said, my tone warning. I was close to my snapping point, and I tried to focus back on my sketchbook. *If she could just shut up for five minutes.*

“What? He is the one whose heads crammed up a thousand years ago.”

“Sera!” I snapped and saw her eyes grow round at my angry tone.

I hurled my sketchbook into my pack and grabbed my staff as I stood.

“I need to find some fucking silence before I gag her,” I told Cassandra as I stalked by her and saw her slight smirk as she nodded her understanding.

I left the camp to calm down and heard her ask Varric quietly what was wrong.

“Sketch? She just likes a little quiet is all Buttercup.”

I found a peaceful spot near the river and sat down. The sound of the water slowly moving was instantly soothing my frayed nerves. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath to calm my anger and hopefully de-escalate a headache that was quickly bordering on a migraine. I felt his soothing aura reach out to mine hesitantly, politely asking if he could come close. A small smile lifted the corners of my lips, and I let my own aura respond. I did not have to wait long for him sit next to me in blissful silence.

We sat quietly for a long time before I glanced over at him and see that he is studying me quietly with an unreadable expression.

“I should apologize to her for losing my temper. It’s not her fault I like silence.”

He shook his head and gave me a lopsided smile that sent the butterflies flying.

“I do not believe you owe her an apology when clearly it was what everyone wanted to do.”

I shook my head laughing and glance back towards the water.

“That does not make what I did right,” I tell him teasingly.

“No, but clearly appropriate,” he said bumping my shoulder gently.

I chuckle softly and rub my forehead trying to release some of the tension that was tightly squeezing my brain.
“If I may,” he said holding up his hands towards my head.

I nod in agreement and soon felt his cool, soothing magic relieving me instantly of the pounding in my head.

“Solas…have I ever told you how wonderful you are?” I smile teasing him softly and hear his easygoing laughter.

Opening my eyes to look at him, I instantly froze at how close he was to my face. Blushing heavily, I lean back and turn my head back towards the river, slipping my hair behind my ear. He reached over and laced his fingers with mine and after a few moments, I leaned my head against his arm enjoying the silent connection we shared.

After we met with Lace, and taking the directions she gave us to where the Chargers were camped, we set off. The rain was falling at a steady drizzle, and there was a familiar scent that was slightly sulfuric; with a dash of green algae and the smell of briny salt in the air. We moved down the short, sandy hill and came upon the fight. I could see the large Qunari from the far off distance and watched as he swung a large axe with graceful ballet-like moves. He is impressive – even from here.

The Qunari stood easily eight foot tall, and from the exposed upper half of his body, I was guessing he weighed about three hundred pounds of pure muscle. His horns spread out the width of his shoulders and were obsidian black that offset his medium grey colored skin. I couldn't stop the small smile from forming when I saw he wore a pirate-like patch over his left eye.

“Should we intervene?” Cassandra questioned me and I shook my head.

“Only if it looks to be going badly should we interfere. We were asked to come and ‘see what they could do’, so…let’s see what they can do.”

We watched for a while and only a few times did I throw a quick barrier over someone when it looked that they were going to get overwhelmed. Solas’ slightly smirked with a raised eyebrow at me.

“I can’t help it,” I said with a cheeky smile.

Thankfully, I was not the only one because I watched Sera shoot one in the head, but I think it was because she was bored more than anything. The fight was over quickly, and we made our way slowly towards them. The large Qunari held his hand up, warning his team of our approach.

“Stand down men,” he bellowed out before turning towards the man I met in Haven.

“Krem, how’d we do?”

“Five to six wounded Chief, no dead,” he replied quickly.

“That’s what I like to hear. Let the throat cutters finish up and then break out the casks.”

He turns towards us and stares directly at me. His one grey eye was a little unnerving at the intensity of the stare. I slowly start walking towards him when he motioned for me to come closer. The man is bigger than a fucking house…I think I am literally as tall as his navel. Ugh…why did I have to be born so damn short?

“So you’re with the Inquisition hu? Glad you could make it. Come on, have a seat, drinks are
coming.”

“The Iron Bull, I would wager. I am Fenlin,” I introduce myself falling into step next to him as he chuckled. He led me towards a low rock so he could be at eye level with me.

“Yeah, the horns usually give it away.”

When he sat I let a little breath of relief out at not having to crane my neck up to look at him or be forced to stare at his navel when my neck grew tired.

“I assume you remember Cremisius Aclassi, my lieutenant.”

I glance over to him and smile nodding my head in greeting.

“Good to see you again,” he says to me with a nice smile. “Throat cutters are done Chief.”

“Already? Have them check again. I don’t want any of those Tevinter bastards getting away. No offense Krem,” he tells him with a slight chuckle.

Krem shrugged his shoulders, “None taken. At least a bastard knows who his mother was. Put’s him one up on you Qunari, right?” He joked with him before turning away, and I couldn’t keep the small laugh from escaping.

“So you’ve seen us fight. We’re expensive, but we’re worth it. And I am sure the Inquisition can afford us.”

I fold my arms and gaze at him shrewdly.

“Exactly how much is this going to cost me?”

“It wouldn’t cost you anything personally, unless you wanna buy me a drink later” he flirted with me easily and I laughed shaking my head.

“Your Ambassador, what’s her name…Josephine. We’d go through her, and get the payments set up. Gold will take care of itself, don’t worry about that. All’s that matters is we’re worth it.”

“Well the Chargers do seem like they would be a welcome addition to our growing force.”

“They are, but you’re not just getting the boys, you’re getting me. You need a frontline bodyguard, I’m your man,” He said standing and I feel suddenly dwarfed by his size like an ant next to a boot.

“Whatever it is: demons, dragons, the bigger it is the better.”

He started walking us back towards the others and I fell in step next to him thankful that he moderated his steps so I could keep up. Solas’ aura softly poked at mine and I sent mine back in response. It was nice that he felt a compulsion to make sure I was alright, but I was also selfish enough to admit that I simply liked the feel of his auras touch.

“And there’s one other thing. It might be useful, it might piss you off. Ever hear of the Ben Hassrath?”

I gaze up at him quickly and nod my head. “A Qunari order, spies I think.”

“Yes, we’re spies,” he tells me holding my gaze, and gaging my reaction to his admission.

“The Ben Hassrath is concerned about the Breach. Magic out of control like that, could cause trouble
everywhere. I’ve been ordered to join the Inquisition, get close to the people in charge and send reports on what’s happening. But I also get reports from Ben Hassrath agents from all over Orlais. You sign me on; I’ll share them with your people."

I shake my head and let a small laugh escape.

“So do you tell everyone you’re a Qunari spy Bull, or am I just really special?”

I hear his rumbling laughter from beside me.

“What happened at that Conclave thing is bad. Someone needs to get that Breach closed. But I told you because I knew that sooner or later your Spy Master would have found out.”

I thought about Leliana and I smiled nodding my head in agreement. He was right, Leliana was no fool.

“Okay Bull, you’re hired on one condition. You run all your reports through Lady Nightingale before you send them off. Deal?” I ask him holding out my hand to him.

“It’s a deal,” he said suddenly dwarfing mine within his.

“All my reports never told me how tiny you are,” he kidded as he let my hand go.

I laughed at his teasing comment.

“I’m just vertically challenged Bull, it is you that is just overly vertical,” I joke back and hear his responding laughter.

I left Cassandra to direct him to our camp and glanced out over the water. Taking a deep breath of the briny air I took in the rolling waves and surrounding forest. This place is really beautiful, even if it does rain almost nonstop.

Sitting beneath one of the covered areas with my sketchbook, I gazed out over the shoreline. My fingers moving quickly before the light was lost, while Sera sat down next to me looking at the drawing.

“You’re really good at that…you should do more of that and less of that magic-y stuff.”

I raise my eyebrow with her comment and continue to let my fingers commit to paper what I could see.

“Were you hurt by magic? Is that why you dislike it so much?”

She snorts at my question, and I chance a quick glance at her before continuing my assessment of the landscape.

“Pfft, no, it’s just scary and weird.”

“Scary and weird,” she could hear by my tone that I thought her response ridiculous.

“Yes, scary and weird. It’s unnatural,” she says looking down at the rough sketch.

My light was finally gone and I close the book and look at her.
“To you, it is unnatural, for me it is as natural as breathing. I didn’t always have magic Sera; when I came through the rift it changed me. I had to learn how to use it, and it became second nature to me, not unlike the way it is for you and your skills with a bow.”

I obviously stunned her because she stared at me for minute in silence before she finally spoke again with a snarky smile.

“But my bow doesn’t shoot magic-y shite from it,” she said crossing her arms as if that was the point.

“Well my bow just happens to have a glowing tip and it does,” I quickly replied back with a wink at her.

Laughing at our sarcastic silliness, Sera shook her head and then looked at me. I could actually see that this was ‘Serious Sera’ not the Sera that played jokes, and teased mercilessly.

“Were you scared when it happened?” she asked me quietly.

I laughed and bumped her shoulder.

“Shit yeah, I was scared. Scared I would set myself on fire, scared of how people would treat me. But Solas helped me overcome those fears and taught me how to use it properly.”

“Hu,” she said.

I patted her shoulder and left in the covered area for my tent.

*****

Our encounter with our first group of militia was intense. When we crested a steep hill in the direction of our last known location for our soldier’s, was when they attacked. Fighting on a hill would not be one of my top ten favorite places to have an altercation, especially when it seems they had more archers than anything. When we finally got past that group we found the abandoned cabin on the hill, and our soldier’s bodies were strewn within.

“We should notify their families,” Cassandra told me as we walked further into the mildew smelling room.

I rubbed my face in anger as I listened to her read a note she found on a dirty desk with directions on how to challenge the Blades of Hessarian leader.

“So I have to make this…crest thingy, and challenge their leader. Do I have that correct?” I asked her angrily.

She looked at me and nodded her head, while I gazed around again at all of the dead men lying on the mossy wooden floor.

“Fine, let’s lay our men to rest and we will make this stupid thing so I can kill him. This whole thing is fucking ridiculous.”

We filed out of the cabin and another group of militia waited for us.

“Oh come on,” I grumble casting a quick barrier as an arrow hit the side of the cabin where I stood.

Everyone scattered quickly as the Hessarian agents ran towards us. The Mabari war dogs were the worst part of the whole fight, and when we finally finished, I wiped rainwater out of my eyes.
“Hostile bastards,” I mutter.

Taking a couple of steps, I heard a soft whistle before a sudden piercing pain blossomed in the center of my chest. Glancing down I see an arrow sticking out of my chest, and glance back up in confusion. The last thing I see is Solas’ stricken expression before darkness swallows me.

Solas watched as if in slow motion as the arrow pierced through the middle of her chest. This is not happening…No, No, NO! His mind screamed as he fade-stepped to her, catching her as she fell. He couldn’t stop the fierce growl that left his throat as he slid to the ground with her in his arms. No… you cannot leave me, his mind screamed as he wrapped them in a barrier of pure, impenetrable magical energy.

Everything happened so fast, yet everyone seemed to be moving in slow motion. He heard Cassandra yelling at Varric from a distance as his hands pulled out potions from his pouch.

“Find that son of a bitch Varric.”

He held Fenlin’s unconscious body in his lap, sliding one healing potion after another down her throat, while Varric and Sera ran for the archer that was dropping from his perch in a tree. This is not happening…I…I cannot breathe, he realized as he spoke pleadingly to her.

“Fenlin…tel’ vara” he uttered quietly to her.

Pushing his magic mixed with his own spirit into her, tethering her spirit with his he focused on the wound. He knew he was ensuring she was incapable of leaving this world, and he felt no remorse with his decision at making her stay, selfish as it was.

He caught the soft footfalls of the archer running to his right and cast an instant static cage over him so he could no longer run. His eyes swirled molten silver with his use of ancient magic. Directing his gaze at the archer he now held within his magical grip, he called on his Dread Wolf to devour him. He spoke only one word softly in Elvish to the man as the others could only watch at how quickly Solas’ whole demeanor had changed.

“Dina,” he whispered his tone full of anger.

When the cage evaporated around him, the archer reeled back in pain. Dropping his bow and grabbing his head he began screaming. Stumbling backwards to slide to his knees in agony as the word echoed through his mind with a deafening roar. Voices echoed through his head with agonizing screams, clawing at him. The man started hallucinating, seeing and hearing the howling of red-eyed wolves chasing him. He was frozen with terror at the imagined sight, watching the creatures rip through his mind towards him. Everyone watched unsure what was happening to him, as the man suddenly stopped grabbing at his head, and babbling nonsense. He picked up his blade and slid it over his own throat, falling sideways, blood poured out of him. Cassandra sheathed her sword and turned from the dead man running towards Fenlin’s deathly still body within his arms.

Cassandra released a ragged breath and with silent tears streaming down her cheeks, she hit her knees. Varric slid his arm around her shoulders, feeling her hand slide up and clench his tightly. Sera stared at Fenlin’s still form in Solas’ lap still in shock, and Bull kept his eye out for any more that might show up.

Solas continued to pour more of his magic into her, forcing her to continue living. His aura changed
from a soft green to darker green around them. The more magic he used, the brighter they both became. They watched as the arrow slowly backed out of the wound as it healed. He continued to mutter in elven, crying silently as he poured more magic into her. He was using magic to not only tether her spirit to his own while he healed but also started another spell that used his own heartbeat, making hers beat in sync with his own when hers began to falter. You will not leave me Fenlin, not now... he thought feverishly as he worked.

When the bright glowing had finally subsided, Cassandra wiped tears from her cheeks as she spoke brokenly.

“Is she?” He heard the unasked question knowing she felt as he that if the word was said aloud, that the possibility was there for it to be true.

Solas cradled her in his arms waiting, breathing heavily from his exertion. Finally, he let a small sigh of relief escape when he felt the slow beat of her heart on its own.

“She will live,” he said quietly, his voice thick with emotion.

He couldn’t tear his gaze away from her face where her vallis’lin stood out starkly against her colorless skin and gently touched at it with shaky fingers.

“Thank the Maker,” Varric said under his breath as he felt Cassandra squeeze his hand sharing his words.

Chapter End Notes

tel’ vara - don't go
Dina - die
Wake Up

Chapter Notes

Thank you everyone who is following my story, leaving comments and just over all feels. You guys are the best!
Feel free to leave comments, ideas, critiques, whatever, I love it all.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I awoke in a much larger tent than my own and glanced around carefully. My eyes fell on Solas holding my hand while slumped over, sleeping. What happened? Moving, I suddenly groan from the sudden pain in my chest instantly waking him.

“Tel’ josh,” he reprimanded me quickly with a thick, sleepy voice of concern.

I give him a wane smile as he is still holding my hand looking at me worriedly.

“What happened?” I croak sounding like my vocal chords were dragging over shards of glass.

He let go of my hand and helped me sit up slowly, holding a cantine to my lips with some water. Smiling my thanks, I drank it back enjoying the cool moisture on my tongue as it slipped down my parched throat. Laying me back down, his voice sounded thick with worry as he stood suddenly pacing. I could feel his aura vibrating around me and it felt chaotic.

“You were shot in the chest by an archer a week and a half ago,” he replied clearing his throat before he continued. “The pain and discomfort you’re feeling is from the arrow coming very close to your spine. It will take time for you to fully heal, but now that you are awake, we can move you back to Haven.”

I stared at him in stunned shock at the reality that I should be dead. What did he do?

“How am I even alive?” I whispered with confusion.

He held my gaze for a long moment, and I knew it was because of him. I stare down at my marked hand, and I wanted to believe he had kept me alive because he needed me, and not this, but that would be selfish to think. I couldn’t keep the little voice quiet that whispered ‘he will do whatever it takes to get it back’.

“Well I can’t close rifts or the Breach if I’m dead,” I say quietly before taking a shallow breath and clenching the marked hand.

“Don’t,” he said angrily, and I pull my gaze from my hand to him.

His eyes were stormy and held an emotion I had never seen before with an intensity that was frightening. He was hurting. It radiated at me through his aura in thick waves, and I could feel it.

“You think you don’t matter? Fenedhis!” He growled infuriated with me taking a step towards me then stopping.

“You most certainly matter Fenlin. No one thinks of you as some tool to be used and then discarded,
you mean more than that mark on your hand.”

I close my eyes and feel properly reprimanded by him. I would have preferred it if he had told me that I meant more to him than the anchor, but I know he won’t, and I sighed knowingly.

“I’m…Ir abelas Solas,” I finally say opening my eyes to look at him.

His face was flushed red with my earlier words, and he pinned me with his angry blue gaze as he spoke with a thickened voice full of unexpressed emotion.

“Rest, I will let the others know that we can begin preparations to safely move you.”

I swallowed past the sudden lump in my throat as he left my tent. Looking around I saw my sketchbook lay open next to where Solas had been sleeping. It was open to the drawing of him reading in his cabin, and I wondered why he was going through my sketchbook. The drawing showed that it was a quiet moment, and his face was relaxed. I had captured the peaceful expression he wore when he was reading that day.

It had been a good day filled with reading, drawing, and lunch. We were both naturally quiet people that preferred silence over endless babble. Glancing back at the drawing I smiled – yes, it had been a good day.

Solas came back carrying a cup of broth, and a small hunk of bread. He went about propping me up so that I could drink the broth. Taking the drink with slightly unsteady hands, I sipped from the cup carefully. Damned if I don’t feel like a weak, newborn kitten.

“Ir abelas for becoming angry with you,” he said abruptly breaking the silence.

“Tel’ abelas, Solas. I should not have assumed. I am unused to having friends.”

I know my explanation is weak, but at the moment it is all I got.

I saw his slight nod, still not looking at me but focused on his hands. His aura still swirled around me with anger and hurt, but there was something else that I couldn’t quite put my finger on. I nibbled on some of the bread he brought as I studied the feeling carefully. I had never felt this from him before and I was unsure what it meant.

I casually study his profile taking another drink of the broth, and saw the dark circles, and strained tightness in the corners of his eyes, the paleness of his skin. He looked exhausted and my soft knowing sigh brought his eyes finally to mine.

“You need to sleep,” I tell him gently.

He took my now empty cup and shook his head.

“Well okay you stubborn ass, two can play this game. I finish my bread and with his help, he laid me back down. Smothering the groan that wants to work its way out of my throat at the movement, I pat the side of my bedroll. Looking at him expectantly, his befuddled expression at my action was endearing and made heart hiccup in my chest at his confusion.

“You said you would sleep when I did. Now stop being so obstinate, I know you’re not going to leave so come lay down.”
I see his hesitancy and I let out an annoyed sigh.

“Come on Solas, I will not be able to rest if I know you are not.”

It was a manipulation; he knew it, I knew it and the soft smile that lifted his lips just barely at the corner was worth it. He finally moved to the side I patted and lay down. I try not to blush as I glance at him but that was a waste of effort when I feel my ears heat.

“I think I would sleep a whole lot better if you were holding me,” I tell him with a small smile.

He looked at me and with a knowing half-smile and slid his arm gently beneath me, pulling me closer. My head rested against his chest, and the strong metronome sound of his heart beating beneath my ear made me yawn. Sliding my arm just around his waist I felt a stumbled breath beneath my cheek.

“Are you comfortable lethal’lan?” he asked thickly as his arm wrapped around me.

The soft rumble of his voice under my cheek and the heat of his body were soothing.

“Mhmm very…sleep Solas, I need you to take care of you too” I tell him soothingly and let the sound of his heart lull me to sleep.

****

The ride back to Haven felt like it was taking forever. I had to lie in the back of a wagon, and it was not comfortable – not at all. Between the horrible bumps and Solas’ mother-henning me, I wasn’t sure I would be sane by the time we reached Haven.

“You’re fidgeting again lethal’lan,” he reminded me in a chiding voice and I glared at him.

“Of course I am fidgeting Solas. I can’t feel my ass, my back is killing me, and if we hit another damn bump I am going to embarrass myself. So yes, I am fidgeting, sorry for your inconvenience.”

His eyes held surprise at my sudden outburst, and I rubbed my face preparing to apologize.

“Bull would you please stop the wagon for a moment.” He called over his shoulder and brought his gaze back to mine full of understanding.

“I am sorry lethal’lan, I should have realized…” he started to apologize to me and I was the one who had been a rude bitch.

“Don’t apologize Solas, I have a voice and I shouldn’t have snapped at you. I should have said something earlier.”

Cassandra and Sera came to the side of the wagon looking at us questioningly.

“I need to relieve myself,” I tell them and see their shared understanding look in their eyes.

Bull jumped down from the seat at the head of the wagon and walked to the end. Solas slid his arms beneath me, picking me up as if I weighed nothing and passed me over to Bull. I hated this…I hated everything about this. I couldn’t even pee by myself and it was starting to really piss me off.

“Please set me down on my feet Bull,” I pleaded ignoring Solas’ sudden censuring gaze and the feel of his aura’s disapproval at my choice.

“That is not a good idea lethal’lan,” Solas said with a disapproving tone.
“Well, how else am I going to stretch my back a little and get blood flow back to my ass, Solas?” His eyes narrowed slightly at my frustrated tone.

Bull’s rumbling laughter against my side, irritated my very full bladder and I glanced up at his face to see his cheeky grin.

“Well if you want Boss, I could rub that for you while Solas drives” he flirted with me.

The man never gave up and I groaned as I laughed not missing Solas’ very disapproving stare and his aura moved in chaotic swirls.

“Oh God, I just need to find a tree or I am totally going to give you a golden shower Bull.”

Bull chuckled and set me down, holding onto me until I had some balance. Cassandra and Sera swiftly flanked me and together we walked slowly into the small forest.

When we returned Bull picked me up carefully and then passed me off to Solas who laid me back down. I felt like a weightless sack of potatoes the way they passed me around. Thankful that my bladder was empty, but the instant my backside touched the thick bedroll on the floor of the wagon, I wanted to scream. When the wagon took off again, I clenched my jaw as I tried to take deep breaths to calm my growing pain.

My eyes flashed open to look into Solas’ when I feel his hand take mine. There was tenderness in his gaze as he spoke and it made me feel instantly emotional.

“If you will permit me lethal’lan, I can help relieve some of the tension in your back.”

I sighed, grateful for any kind of relief at this point.

“Please, Solas; I don’t know if I can take two more days of this.”

His gentle smile of understanding was my undoing and small tears slipped out of the corners of my eyes.

He moved quickly to sit beside me when he saw them and pulled me gently into his lap. My head fit right into the crook of his neck, and I took a shaky breath when I felt his fingers begin massaging my neck. His hands were pure magic as he gently rubbed my sore back, finding all the spots that were on fire. I couldn’t stop the small hiccupped-cry of relief with his gentle manipulations of my muscles. I could finally breathe easier as I felt them began to relax.

“Have I ever told you how wonderful you are Solas,” I mumble drowsily against his neck.

I felt the soft rumble of his laughter on my side even as his aura felt comforting interweaving with mine.

“I believe you have lethal’lan.”

His tone was soothing along with the smell of him, and I breathed deeply wanting to imprint it in my brain. I drowsily snuggled into him and fell asleep against the heat of his chest.

*****

Our entrance into Haven was somewhat of a fucking nightmare. Everyone was gathered to watch the injured Herald be carried to her cabin. Hiding my face in Solas’ neck, he carried me while I wished that I could fall into a rift right then. He placed me on my bed and I smiled at Varric who had
followed behind them silently carrying their packs.

“Thanks for bringing those Varric, you’re sweet.”

Varric smiled at me and shook his head holding up his hands at the compliment.

“No thanks needed Sketch; I will visit with you tomorrow. Maybe you will let me teach you, Wicked Grace, finally.”

“It’s a deal,” I tell him.

I softly laughed as he shut the door behind him leaving me with Solas. I followed his movements as he pulled out the wooden box that held my drawing materials and places it next to me on the small table and moves back to my pack pulling out my underwear.

“Solas,” I say evenly as he began removing everything from my pack for me.

His eyes met mine and found my eyebrow was raised at him curiously.

“Why are your hands on my unmentionables?” I tease him.

Giggling as his eyes darted to what he held in his hands and his face colored with embarrassment, dropping my smalls back into the pack hastily.

“I…” He stammered out rubbing his face.

“Go unwind in your cabin Solas. Cassandra promised she would send someone to help me unpack and bathe.”

As the words left my mouth there was knocking at the door.

I watched him move quickly to pick up his pack and then finally look at me.

“I…may I return to sit with you later?” he asked somewhat nervously.

His eyes held an unreadable look and I gave him a soft smile. Something is up with him.

“I would like that.”

His quick smile made my stomach flutter, and as he opened the door Nia came in and he left.

*****

Three weeks…I can’t take much more of this bedrest shit. I relaxed against my pillows and watched Nia slip out the door with a promise to bring me dinner later. Hearing the soft click of the door closing, I slip my legs out of the bed and placed my feet on the floor to stand.

“Damn it,” I mutter as I made the third pass around my room. I was already out of breath and hurting.

The touch of his aura reached me long before I heard the swift knock at the door and I mentally groaned. He is going to be angry finding me up. Solas came in observing me leaning against the wall slightly out of breath, and he looked angry as he stepped towards me. Yup, just as I thought – angry.
“I can’t take all this laying around, it’s killing me,” I told him as I lean against the wall frustrated.

“What you need is rest lethal’lan. You are pushing yourself too hard,” he argued.

Setting the books he brought with him down, he moved to take my arm gently. He walked me back towards the bed, and I let a sigh of exasperation out that he ignored. Tucking me in, I close my eyes in frustration and take a calming breath. I listen to him move about my room, the soft rustling next to the bed, and taking another calming breath before I opened my eyes to look at him.

“It has only been three weeks since you returned from the Storm Coast, injured lethal’lan. Your injuries were severe, it will take time.”

I just nod my head having heard this argument from him before, but I had no patience left for just laying around.

“Yes, yes…be a good little da’len and stay put. I know, you’ve said something like this before.”

Solas obviously heard the snark in my tone mixed with frustration and laughed.

“Fenlin, you are no child, now please, stop scowling and just give yourself time to heal. There is nothing so pressing that it should endanger your recovery.”

I stare at the wall angrily for a moment and tried for a calming breath before I said anything to him.

“I know your right Solas, but that doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

He laughed and nodded his head in understanding at my frustration.

“This is true, and this is also why I brought you some books that I thought you might enjoy passing the time with.”

I perk up at his mention of books and look at him. Taking the first one he handed me it was a book about advanced fade magic in elvish. I knew I could speak the language, but it was still a bit surprising that I could also read it. One look and I could tell that the book was old. Caressing the binding carefully, I glance from the book to him and smiled.

“However, did you come by this?”

His ears blushed at my obvious pleasure with the book, and he looked at it in my hands.

“It is mine. I have carried it with me since I was a child,” he said quietly.

*I am holding a piece of Ancient Arlathan history.* I stare at him in surprise and then back to the book. I gently opened the book and moved through some of the pages and saw his small neat script along the edges of some of the pages, and smiled touching them reverently. It was so well preserved and obviously cared for.

“This is…ma serannas for lending me your book Solas. I promise to take good care of it while I read it.”

Solas bowed slightly as he moved to leave and I spoke quickly.

“Solas?”

He turned and glanced back at me questioningly.
“Will you share your nightly meal with me tonight?”

His smile made my toes curl as he nodded his agreement.

“I would like that lethal’lan.”

I turn my focus back to the book and open it. Reading the first couple of pages I smile with a sudden idea. Grabbing my sketchbook, I started to draw him illustrations of the examples hoping he would like the gesture.

Chapter End Notes

Tel' josh - don't move
Fenedhis - wolfs dick (lovely universal elven cuss word)
Ir abelas - I am sorry
Tel' abelas - Don't be sorry
Ma serannas - My thanks
Dinner for Two

Chapter Notes

It's Sunday, and I am ahead of schedule on my chapters, so I thought I would share my success and give you two chapters in one day.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Nia helped me set the food on the small desk and I smiled at her grateful that she hadn’t minded running to grab me another plate for Solas.

“Is it Master Solas that you are dining with tonight?” She asked me with a small smile helping me set the table by bringing more food.

I blush at her question and cut some slices of bread from the loaf.

“Yes” is all I say, and I hear her girlish giggle.

Looking at her quickly about to say something, I feel his aura as he makes his way here. Slowly moving towards the door, I open it as he reaches to knock. He gives me his disapproving look which I am starting to think is strictly reserved for me, and I smile at him.

“Don’t look at me with that tone,” I tease him quickly before he can say anything and gesture for him to come in.

Nia bowed quickly and gave me a sly grin as she moved past us and I just shook my head at her as my ears grew warm and closed the door behind her.

I saw his curious look and just shook my head at him ignoring it.

“You really should try not to push yourself so much lethal’lan,” he scolded me while holding his arm out for me to take.

I let out a slight groan of annoyance at his constant mother-henning as I took his offered arm.

“There is nothing fun or exciting going on in that bed Solas, why would I want to stay in it?”

As soon as the words left my mouth I wanted to vanish through the floor with embarrassment. Why? Why do I do this to myself, with him? I stare at the floor knowing my traitorous blush is coloring my face, and his soft laughter from beside me only made matters worse.

“That is a valid argument,” he said and walked me towards the already set up table.

I snuck a glance at him and saw that he too had a slight pink to his cheeks and it made my stomach tighten as my mind ran with what he might have been thinking to put the color there.

Sitting down, I clear my throat and pour us some wine as he sat across from me.

“Well now that that is out of the way, what shall we discuss next?”

I hand him his glass and take a sip of mine before looking at him. He had such a mischeivous look
about him as he took a drink of his own wine that I was sure whatever he was going to say was going to make me blush again.

“Maybe you will share with me what you would consider fun and exciting?”

_Oh, sweet baby Jesus, you wicked man!_ My face instantly went red with the thoughts that ran through my head with his question and I felt like I had the morning I found out we had shared a bedroll. _No! I will not let him get away with it again._ Swallowing my embarrassment, determined to turn the tables on him I cocked my head at him and smiled at him impishly.

“Why? Has it been so long that you have forgotten?”

Oh, the blush that instantly ran over his face was worth it. His eyes held mine for a moment sparkling with merriment and he set his glass down and I swallowed nervously knowing instantly I was never going to win this.

“Perhaps, or perhaps I am looking for further insight into you and what you consider fun and exciting.”

I instantly laugh and shake my head at him, blushing to the bottoms of my feet.

“That was a smooth recovery, I will give you that. You must beat women away with a stick with that silver tongue of yours.” I tease him and take a drink of my wine.

His laughter sends tingles to bounce over my skin and I see him shaking his head at me.

“You are never what I expect,” he says with a smile still on his lips as he picks up his glass.

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?” Sipping on my wine his eyes hold mine.

“It is a good thing,” he replies before taking a drink of his wine watching me carefully.

_Oh, this man’s eyes are going to be the death of me._

With our dinner finished we sat quietly for a moment until he glanced from the wine in his glass to me.

“Your drawings of Fen’Harel are very detailed. Has he come to you in the Fade before or have you seen memories of him?”

I wondered when he would try to find a way to worm that out of me, and I took a drink of my wine before answering him. Setting my glass down, I decided to see if my answer would surprise him.

“Actually I meet with him often. I enjoy my time with him, he has become my friend, or at least as much as he will allow me to be one or I him in return.”

I watch as his eyes slightly dilate with my answer while his face stays calm almost contemplative.

“And he truly does not frighten you?” The curiosity in his tone made me smile and I shook my head.

“No he does not, is that really so surprising? Wait, is this another one of those ‘Dalish’ things I’m not doing right again?”

The sound of his laughter and the sight of his smile always send my hormones into a tailspin.
“I am sure your Keeper would have something to say about it.”

“I’m sure she would if her opinion mattered,” I replied simply and took another drink of my wine.

“Is this why you chose to not have a clan any longer, you do not agree with them?”

His curiosity about my past was insatiable, and I thought about my relationship with my parents, my family, and shook my head.

“It was a mutual decision.” I finally answer and I see that my answer is enough for him…for now at least.

My forest was full of wisps, and my eyes searched for signs of spirits, but still, none had come or none were going to show themselves to me. The shift around me told me he was near, and I threw a pebble into the lake to watch the ripples as they spread out slowly. He sat close to me and I leaned into his side in greeting. He didn’t stiffen at the action and smiling, I threw another pebble into the water.

“May I ask you something?” I ask him after a few moments of silence and throw another pebble into the water.

“If you must,” he answered and the soft vibrations of his growl rolled up my side in almost a caressing way.

“When you look at me, do you see a shadow of the people that once were?”

“No, I do not, why do you ask?” His sound of surprise is clear as it vibrates around me.

I can feel him looking at me and I sit up and chuck another pebble into the water watching the ripples before wrapping my arms around my legs.

“I might if I were you,” I finally reply.

I felt his surprise in his aura with my answer, and I continue to gaze out over the water. The caress of the moonlight on the shimmery surface was breathtaking.

“Why do you think this?” he asked curiously.

His low questioning growl surrounds me and I finally look up at him.

“Because I know elves are laden with a history and culture that the Dalish can only pretend to know and City elves ignore or don’t care. Vallis’lin among the Dalish is something to be celebrated, but they are nothing more than slave markings that I now carry. The elves of now think the Creators Gods, but they were not, not really, that is why.”

His silence was deafening as his red gaze stared at me intensely.

“Am I wrong?” I ask him holding his gaze.

“You have surprised me again with your knowledge da’len, that is all.”

“It surprised you that I knew something, or surprised that I answered you honestly?”

His laugh with my cheeky smile up at him warmed me as it echoed over the water.
“Both,” his voice rumbled around them. Smiling, I leaned back against his side and gazed out at the water.

*****

After three more weeks of pretty much house arrest, I was going insane. I wanted to go outside and smell the fresh air while in it and not from a damn window. Moving from my bed with determined steps, I grabbed my jacket while opening the door and found Cullen outside with his hand up in a motion to knock and dropped his hand suddenly.

“I thought perhaps you might want to walk about a bit, my lady” he offered to sound slightly nervous.

I slip my jacket on and close the door behind me hastily.

“Hell yes please, Cullen. If I spend one more moment in bed or in that room, I might light the place on fire just to get out, and please just call me, Fenlin.”

Cullen laughed as I took his arm and he slowly led me down the path out of Haven.

“I know if I had magic during the times I have been bedridden, I might have thought the same,” he joked with me as we walked.

I saw the men and women drill as they passed the training area including Cassandra, and I waved at her as we passed. I had never really been this close to Cullen before, and I realized that he was as large as he was portrayed in the game. He is handsome; I could definitely say that the man was genetically blessed with good looks. *The man must need to beat the woman away from him.*

“How did you become a Templar, Cullen? You don’t act like the ones I have encountered thus far.”

Cullen glanced down at me as we walked and then looked to the recruits training.

“When I was a small child, I grew up in a town called Honleath. There was this family that didn’t live too far from our farm. Their son was my age and we played together. He came into his magic when he was nine, and the people of the town feared him for it. They almost killed him before the Templars were able to get him safely to a circle. From that moment I wanted to protect those who needed it. Mages were hated or feared, which made people rash. I wanted to protect them,” he explained and it sounded heartfelt.

“I wish more thought that way,” I said and saw him smile.

“They were not true Templars you fought in the Hinterlands. Whatever is happening with the order, it is not the order I joined when I was thirteen. I am sorry you had to endure and witness such horrific acts. I am sure that sounds inadequate, but I am very sorry it happened.”

“Thank you for that Cullen, you are part of a dying breed I’m afraid. There are not many good Templars left.”

Cullen laughed as we moved on from the partially frozen pond entering the small woods.

“I have seen some of the things mages can do Fenlin, I am not perfect. I have distrusted magic and those who can wield it. I am trying to move past that, but I still have my moments of…” he stopped unsure of how to continue and I chuckled.
“You mean just being a distrustful ass?” Laughing at his surprised expression, I patted his arm again. “Me too Cullen if it’s any comfort.”

Cullen laughed at my wording.

“Yes, I have been that. It is comforting to know I am in such good company.”

I laugh and take in a deep breath of the fresh air. It was definitely getting warmer in the Frostbacks and I was thankful for it. We walked the rest of the way in a companionable silence just enjoying each other’s company. He returned me back to my cabin, and I turned to stop him before he could leave.

“Cullen?”

“Yes, my lady?”

“Would you teach me how to fight with a sword and shield or just a sword I don’t care, and maybe learn how to defend against the way a Templar negates a mage's power?”

Cullen gazed at me curiously for a moment as if weighing if I was healthy enough for such training.

“I believe it might be a benefit for you if you knew how to defend yourself against others with more than magic. When you are healed enough Fenlin, I will show you how to negate a Templar smite, and how to wield a sword and shield at least competently.”

I hug him quickly and backed away seeing some of the people of Haven staring curiously after them.

“Thank you so much, Cullen.”

Blushing slightly, he nodded at me and walked away.

*****

For the next few weeks, Cullen taught me how to handle a Templars smite, and damned if they didn’t hurt. That feeling of instantly being cut off from the Fade was painful. He kept his word and showed me how to survive one better than I did at the Crossroads. I could now continue standing after one, and that gave me a little piece of mind. He also showed me exercises to do with a sword and shield.

He had forbidden me to spar with anyone yet, but I could beat the shit out of dummies with the sword so I could learn to use the weapon properly. I kinda enjoyed learning from him. He was extremely patient with my fumbling and joked with me often making me laugh at my own mistakes. He stood behind me and corrected my wrist angle and grip on the sword.

“Hold it like that Fenlin, or you will wrench your wrist.”

Accepting his tutoring, I smile up at him cheekily. “Yes, Sir!” His following laugh and shake of his head made me laugh.

Solas watched from above the training area with a frown between his eyes as Fenlin laughed at something the Commander said. Jealousy is an ugly thing wolf, especially when what you desire is not yours. Sighing with frustration he realized that he was indeed jealous of the Commander and his
time with her.

Turning away from the training grounds he went to his cabin finding a small note left on his table. Curious as to whom had gotten past his wards while he was out collecting herbs; he was pleasantly surprised to see the neat flowing script of elvish writing. Smiling he read and reread the small note pleased that she wanted to have dinner.

Ma Falon,
Lasa em'an ava saron min'nydha.

Fenlin

He smiled at her request for his company. Running his finger over the flowing script unconsciously, he thought of how she felt in his arms. Spirits knew he wanted to kiss her, and had since Val Royeaux. He had thought of little else since that almost moment they had shared. Something about her and her scent of vanilla pulled him to her as a moth flies towards a flame. Finding her had not been something he planned for, how could he? Folding the paper carefully, he placed it in his sketchbook that held drawings of her now from their shared time in the Fade.

Their shared conversation in the Fade and her knowledge of the People had truly surprised him. It was not expected that she would know so much of the history; it also made him curious about what else she might know. She consistently exceeded his expectations of her and showed him she was so much more than her Dalish family.

He rubbed his face as he thought about her almost dying and the fear he had felt that day. It was the single defining moment that he knew his reality, his future, was irrevocably changed by her. The fear of losing her still haunted his dreams.

He had known that she had become important to him, but he had not realized to what extent until that moment. When she believed that she was only alive for the anchor enraged him that she couldn’t see that she meant more to him than that. He had spoken harshly to her and instantly regretted his words. He could not expect her to know his feelings when he himself didn't understand them. He had wanted to tell her what she meant to him, but could not find the words. She continually turned him inside out with just a simple look, or smile.

It was unlike him to not know exactly what to say, and yet with her, he found himself struggling to put a sentence together. Shaking his head, he laughed at himself.

Slipping his jacket on, he left his cabin when it was time to collect her for dinner. Walking to her cabin he watched her door open before he could knock and smiled at her awareness of his approach.

His breath left him as she opened the door wearing a dark blue tunic that made her amber eyes glow at him, the soft brown leather leggings hugged her closely, and her deep black hair was free, curling around her shoulders and down her back with a dark shine. She smiled at him and grabbed her jacket before stepping out, closing the door behind her. He took a small step back with his arms behind him and felt his heart double beat in his chest as the scent of vanilla filled his senses.

Walking next to him, I tried to control the butterflies flurrying around in my stomach. The man either rendered me a blushing idiot, or a senseless blathering one. Entering the small tavern they moved to
the corner table by the window that they preferred and sat down. He cleared his throat lightly, and I glanced from the window to him.

“I saw that you have started training with the Commander.”

Flissa brought them two mugs of ale, and two plates of roasted ram with potatoes and carrots. Smiling my thanks, I took a drink of my ale.

“Yes, he is showing me how to use a sword and shield properly. He won’t let me spar with anyone other than the padded dummies until you give the medical ‘I’m okay’.”

He instantly looked very happy that the Commander wouldn’t let me spar, and I rolled my eyes at his reaction. *Mother Hen!* He took a bite of his food and I found myself captivated with watching him chew. *Jeebus, pull it together.* Spearing a piece of the ram, I focused on my own plate instead.

“Why did you want to learn how to fight with a sword and shield?” he asked.

I shrugged my shoulders as I finished chewing.

“Why not? After that incident in the Crossroads when I found myself unable to use my magic, it woke me up to needing to have some other way to protect myself. Not all Templars are like Cullen, we definitely saw that, and I want to at least have a fighting chance if my magic has been taken from me.”

Solas nodded at my answer, understanding showing clearly from his dark grey-blue eyes as he looked at me.

“You appear to get along quite well with the Commander,” he said turning his gaze to his plate and cutting another piece of his ram.

He was not looking at me, and I felt that little internal woman’s smile at seeing this man fight showing his own jealousy.

“He is a good man, and very easy to get along with,” I said choosing to not answer the unspoken question drawing him out.

Solas quickly looked at me unable to mask the hurt I saw in his eyes at my comment and it took my breath away.

“He does appear to be quite honorable,” he replied holding my gaze.

I heard the roughness of his tone and gazed at him wanting him to not misunderstand.

“Ar tel’ nuvena’ish, is ni’falon,” I tell him honestly.

I watched his internal struggle from my seat across from him and turned my gaze back to my plate. *Silly man, can you not see how much I just want you?* Focusing on my own dinner we did not speak further for the remainder of the meal.

Chapter End Notes

Ma Falon - My friend
Lasa em'an ava saron min'nydha - Let's eat together tonight
Ar tel' nuvena’ish, is ni’falon - I do not desire him, he is a friend
Trip to Redcliffe Village

The ride to Redcliffe was pleasant once we left the Frostbacks. The lower elevation was warmer for sure. Peeling off my coat I stuffed it into my pack and snuck a quick glance at his profile while trying to look busy putting my coat away. *He is too damn handsome for safety.* I was so busy trying to not appear to be looking at him that I didn’t even notice Bull riding up next to me, and his voice startled me.

“I caught that.”

“Shit!” Almost unseating myself from Etta, I patted my chest trying to calm my suddenly racing heart, and look at him questioningly.

“Caught what?” I said and he gave me a teasing smile and shook his head at me.

“Oh you know, that ‘I’m not gonna be obvious about my looking’ thing you just did.”

I felt the heat race over my face and instantly started fiddling with my reins.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He could obviously see and hear the blatant lie.

“You’re a bad liar Boss. You like him, so what.”

He laughs at my embarrassment and I grimace at how loud he is.

“Do you even have an indoor voice for fuck's sake? Just because you can see everything with your one, ‘all-seeing eye’, doesn’t mean everyone needs to know.”

Bull is laughing at me even more now and shakes his head.

“Do you need pointers on how to get that ball rolling, Boss?”

My face is fire red now and I cover it, mumbling through my hands.

“No Bull, I just need you to shut the hell up.”

His booming laughter made me jolt in the saddle, and I felt the cool touch of his aura slide against mine soothingly increasing my embarrassment. *Yes, I am aware you just heard everything...great. Maybe I will fall back in a rift...yeah that could happen.*

“We should reach Redcliffe tomorrow,” Cassandra informed me as we set up our tents for camp.

“Okay, thanks, Cassandra.” I go back to pitching my tent and notice she is not leaving.

Letting a small sigh escape, I glance up at her holding the hammer for my tent spikes.

“And that isn’t all I take it.”

“No,” she said looking around to make sure no one was paying attention to them and knelt down next to me.
I wanted to talk with you about your meeting with the Grand Enchanter tomorrow.”

I nod my head and pound the stake into the ground and taking the hammer from me she pounds the other one into the ground.

“I urge extreme caution when dealing with them, Fenlin. I don’t trust this…meeting.”

Smiling at her I nod my head in agreement.

“I don’t either Cassandra. Something was off with the Grand Enchanter when we saw her in Val Royeaux. Just as there was something off about the Lord Seeker. Rest assured I am not going to offer them anything without talking with everyone first.”

She smiled at me and handed me the hammer back before standing and moving away. In some ways, I was nervous about this meeting. I remembered that there was a Tevinter Magister that was in charge, and if I chose the mages to help us close the Breach, then I was going to get thrust into the future. Grimacing at the thought of what it would be like, I put the hammer back in the pack.

If I chose the Templars, an Envy demon would pull me into my own mind in some way to try and assimilate me. Damned if I did or didn’t, either way, both choices was a shit show in the making. Sighing, I rub my face and lifting the flap of my tent I went in to set up my bedroll.

*****

The approach to Redcliffe was quiet until the anchor flared, and I swallowed the nerves. The time-warping rift, yuck.

“We have a rift up ahead,” I tell everyone as I dismount, while a scout runs towards us quickly.

“Turn back there is a rift ahead,” she yells at us and I smile, holding my hand up as it flashed with the proximity of the rift.

“I know, we will take care of it.” I watch the scout run to safety, and we started walking down the road towards the small green tear.

This rift was different and most unlike the others they had encountered before. Some places slowed you down, others sped you up, and it was unnatural. You couldn’t dodge the large circles on the ground no matter how hard you tried, and it was frustrating. With the last demon finally killed, I raise the anchor towards the tear. With a loud pop, the rift finally closed.

“If that wasn’t a fucking nightmare, what the hell was that?”

Everyone looked as confused as I was.

“We should ask the Grand Enchanter,” Cassandra muttered and everyone agreed.

With the rift finally closed, I glanced around to make sure everyone was okay before walking through the gate. The Inquisition scout ran swiftly towards us to warn that no one knew they were coming. Well, that isn’t what I wanted to hear.

“What do you mean they’re not expecting us? The Grand Enchanter invited us.”

He shook his head at me.

“If she did, she didn’t say anything to anyone.”
Staring from Cassandra to Solas, I felt like I had missed something.

“Is it me or is something just wrong here?” I asked completely confused.

Solas and Cassandra both nodded together and I gazed around the area warily.

“The Veil is actually thinner here, than in Haven if that is even possible.”

Solas’ words made me even more nervous and I nodded in understanding.

“Stick together everyone, this just doesn’t…feel right.”

Solas looked at me with the same nervousness I felt, and we walked in.

The walkthrough Redcliffe was unreal. It was wall to wall mages, and none of them had the aura that I or Solas had. I thought at least a few of the mages in here would have it; he called it a ‘magical signature’. I felt them, but couldn’t see them and it was very telling. I glanced at him and interestingly enough he was avoiding my gaze. Oh, you and I will talk handsome…soon very soon. I poked him with my aura and saw the slight lift of his lips with the gesture, and I could feel his pleasure with the action. You definitely have some explaining to do buddy.

We walked down the slight hill leading away from the main gates, and you could hear people murmuring their discomfort at the Inquisition being there. Not like we didn’t clean up the area or anything, fucking assholes. I couldn’t keep the slight snort from escaping as we continued walking down the hill.

“Grateful lot, aren’t they” Varric muttered, and I chuckled softly before bumping his arm with my own.

“Some people you just can’t please. Maybe they liked the constant looting and pillaging by the bandits.”

Varric gives me a sideways glance with a lopsided smile and just nods his head in agreement.

Rounding a corner, we found the monument to the Hero of Ferelden. Smiling at the sight of it, I let my hand touch it gently as we moved past it towards the tavern, which thankfully was easy enough to find. Opening the door, I saw that Grand Enchanter Fiona was waiting for us, flanked by a couple of mages.

“Welcome agents of the Inquisition. What has brought you to Redcliffe?”

“We’re here because of your invitation back in Val Royeaux.” The Grand Enchanter looked very confused at me and shook her head slightly.

“You must be mistaken. I haven’t been in Val Royeaux since before the Conclave.”

“Okay, well if it wasn’t you that invited us here, then who did?”

“I…I don’t know. Now that you say it, I feel strange…” she looked to the mage standing next to her with a scared expression. “Whoever or…whatever brought you here, the situation has changed. The Free Mages have already…pledged themselves to the service of the Tevinter Imperium.”

I felt Cassandra stiffen next to me, while Bull let out a soft growl from behind.

“An alliance with Tevinter? Do you not fear all of Thedas turning against you?” Cassandra’s tone was full of disbelief that the Grand Enchanter would do such a thing. Solas shook his head, and I felt
his aura flare with anger sharply at the news.

“I understand that you are afraid, but you deserve better than slavery to Tevinter,” he said calmly though his aura said something not as calm.

“As one indentured to a Magister, I no longer have the authority to negotiate with you.”

I knew this was coming, but it didn’t make it any easier to hear.

“An alliance with Tevinter is a horrible mistake, why didn’t you reach out to the Inquisition?”

The Grand Enchanter looked nervously at me and shook her head.

“All hope of peace died with Justinia. This bargain with Tevinter would not have been my first choice, but we had no choice. We are losing this war. I needed to save as many of my people as I could.”

“Yes, I suppose slavery was your only option,” my tone was dripping with sarcasm even if I could empathize with her reasoning.

Everyone looked towards the tavern door as it opened and my stomach tightened. It would be the Magister and his son.

“Welcome friends, I apologize for not greeting you earlier.”

The Magister approached as I watched warily and placed my hand on Cassandra’s arm when she reached for her sword.

“No Cassandra,” I tell her softly holding her gaze for a moment before returning my focus back to the Magister.

“Agents of the Inquisition, allow me to introduce you to Magister Gereon Alexius.”

Fiona introduces him, but I was unwilling to let my gaze stray from the Magister who stopped in front of me. It was moments like this that I wished I was taller than my five foot four status.

“The Southern mages are under my command, and you are the survivor, the one from the Fade? Interesting.”

There was an instant shiver of foreboding that ran up my spine with the way he was looking at me as if he was dissecting me with his eyes. Okay, this guy is a solid ten on the creeper scale.

“If you would indulge me, I would like to know more about this…alliance between the Rebel Mages and the Imperium.”

“Certainly, what specifically would you like to know?” he replied patiently.

“When did this arrangement take place?” I asked.

His eyes only slightly narrowed at me as he looked at me.

“It was only through divine providence that I arrived when I did. These poor mages were surrounded by the Templars for what occurred at the Conclave.”

_Uh huh, sure they were you lying sack of shit._ Crossing my arms, I looked at him carefully.
“I haven’t seen any sign of Redcliffe’s Arl or his men, perhaps you know where they might have gotten off too?”

His smile reminded me of Vivienne’s. The condescending one she uses when she feels superior, or maybe it is the one she saves for me.

“The Arl of Redcliffe left the village,” he answered simply.

From beside me, Cassandra snorted in disbelief.

“Arl Teagan did not abandon his lands during the Blight, even when they were under siege.”

He gave her the same condescending smile he had given me. *Oh buddy, don’t do that. She will cut off your dangly bits and feed them to you.*

“There were tensions growing, I did not want an incident.”

I softly snorted holding his gaze.

“Of course you didn’t because you’re just that nice of a guy.”

Bull’s chuckle from behind me bolstered my confidence as did Solas’ aura constantly touching mine.

“If you are in command of the mages, then let’s sit down and discuss what can be done,” I said wanting to get this over with.

He bowed his head towards me and motioned towards a table for us to sit at.

“It is nice when meeting a woman who is prepared to negotiate,” he replied.

I was going to need a long, boiling hot bath, to remove the grossness this man oozed all over.

Pulling my staff off, I handed it to Solas and sat down across from Alexius as he spoke to his son.

“Felix, would you send for a scribe, please? Pardon my manners, my son Felix, friends.”

Felix bowed towards me before moving to do as his father requested.

“I am not surprised you are here. Containing the Breach is not a feat many could even attempt. There is no telling how many mages would be needed for such an endeavor. Ambitious, indeed.”

“Well, when you’re fighting a gigantic hole in the sky, you can hardly afford to think small.”

“There will have to be…” Alexius stopped suddenly watching his son walk stiltedly towards them. I saw that Felix was dragging his right leg just a bit and holding it as he approached. I stood to possibly help him and he fell forward grabbing my left hand as he hit his knees.

I felt the note he deftly palmed into my left hand before Bull who had been standing behind me moved to help him stand. I know the Qunari saw the move and winked at him when he looked at me. Felix looked embarrassed about his faked, momentary fainting and started apologizing to me.

“I’m so sorry. Please forgive my clumsiness, my lady.”

I gave him a soft smile and patted his arm.

“It is quite alright Felix,” I told him.
Alexius went into overdrive on mother-henning that would put even Solas to shame.

“Come, you need your powders,” he told him grabbing his arm and heading for the front door.

“Please excuse me, friends, I shall send a message to the Inquisition for us to conclude this business at a later date. Fiona, I require your assistance,” he called to her over his shoulder.

“Of course,” I reply watching them make a hasty retreat with Fiona following.

Once the door closed, I pull the note from my hand and open it to read aloud.

“Come to the Chantry, you are in danger.”

“I don’t know about this Boss. This place is crawling with Vints, I can feel it,” Bull advises me quietly, and I nod my head looking up at him.

“We will be careful, but we need to check this out.”

On our way out of the tavern, I saw a man with a large sunburst tattooed on his forehead in the corner. I knew he was Tranquil by the symbol and stopped to speak with him quickly to invite him to Haven. If I remembered correctly, they weren’t wanted here in Redcliff. The tone of his voice was without inflection as if he were a robot, and it was a bit disturbing to listen to.

“Gather every Tranquil that would like to come with you, Clemence. We would be pleased to have you there.”

I hand him a map to the nearest Inquisition camp that I pulled from the pack over my shoulders.

“Get an escort from one of our men there to lead you and whoever you gather, back to Haven. I would feel better knowing you are not traveling alone.”

“Thank you, I will gather them.”

I turn towards Cassandra who looks at me with a surprised expression.

“What?” I ask her.

She shakes her head as if she is trying to gather herself and smiles.

“Nothing, they will be a welcomed asset.”

My mark flared when we approached the Chantry door and everyone pulled their weapons. Opening the door we came upon Dorian fighting demons with his staff. He was another character I had really looked forward to meeting. His witty and sometimes snarky commentary was perfect.

“Ah, you’re finally here. Now help me close this, will you?”

As soon as he said it the rift crackled and more demons spit out, and this rift is just like the one that led into Redcliff. I stare at the large green circles on the floor wearily.

“It’s like the other one,” I warn quickly pulling the fade to me and casting a barrier over Cassandra and Bull.

The fight to close the rift took very little time, and with a loud pop, it finally closed. Turning towards
Dorian, I took in the dark black hair beautifully coifed to part on the left and flow towards the right. His tanned skin and hazel eyes was a beautiful combination with the perfectly manicured mustache he wore over thick lips. He was quite handsome really and fairly well built, but it was his bright smile I found infectious and smiled back at him.

“Fascinating, how does that work exactly?”

I shrugged my shoulders unsure and heard his light laughter.

“You don’t even know, do you? You just wiggle your little fingers and boom! Rift closes.”

I laugh and shake my head slightly.

“Something like that, my name is Fenlin.”

Holding my hand out to him, he grasped it and bowed over it placing a brief kiss on the back of my hand.

“Dorian of House Pavus, recently of Minrathous. How do you do.”

“Let one Tevinter in, suddenly they are scurrying out of all the walls like roaches,” Cassandra said under her breath.

Varric and Bull chuckled with the small joke while he still had hold of my hand.

Dorian looked at Cassandra with a smile on his lips.

“Now, now, I’m ever so much more handsome than a cockroach.”

Turning back to me he winked and let go of my hand.

“Magister Alexius was once my mentor, so my assistance should be valuable – as I’m sure you can imagine.”

I felt Solas’ aura slide against mine and it was interesting that I could feel his emotions through it now. He didn’t like Dorian being close to me, and it definitely flared when he had hold of my hand. I noticed that I could feel more of what he was feeling since I was hurt which made me wonder exactly what did he do that saved my life. Pulling my focus back to the task at hand, I glance at Dorian effectively pushing that thought into the folder marked for later.

“Then you sent the note,” I said.

Dorian nodded his head and smiled pleased with me.

“I am. Someone had to warn you after all. Look, I’m sure you are already aware there is a danger. That should be obvious, even without a note. Let’s start with Alexius claiming the allegiance of the Mage Rebels out from under you. As if by magic, yes? Which is exactly right. To reach Redcliffe before the Inquisition, Alexius distorted time itself.”

“Well of course he did, there is nothing dangerous about that, right?”

Dorian laughed and shook his head.

“Most definitely dangerous. The rift you closed here? You saw how it twisted time around itself, sped somethings up and slowed others down. Soon there will be more like it, and they’ll appear further and further away from Redcliffe. The magic Alexius is using is wildly unstable, and it’s
unraveling the world.”

“Well, that’s a lot to swallow,” I tell him as I rub my face suddenly tired of it all.

“I know what I’m talking about. I helped develop this magic. When I was still his apprentice, it was a pure theory. Alexius could never get it to work. What I don’t understand is why he’s doing it? Ripping time to shreds, just to gain a few hundred lackeys?”

Felix entered from a side door into the Chantry and I turned at his approach. His face looked drawn and tired, and I felt remorseful that he would not live for much longer if I remember correctly.

“He didn’t do it for them,” Felix said and Dorian nodded briefly towards him in greeting.

“ Took you long enough, is he getting suspicious?”

Felix shook his head.

“No, but I shouldn’t have played the illness card. I thought he would be fussing over me all day.”

Felix looked at me and nodded his head in a short greeting.

“My father has joined a cult. Tevinter Supremacists, they call themselves, The Venatori. And I can tell you one thing: whatever he’s done for them, he’s done it to get to you.”

“Well aren’t I just the special girl today. What I am finding interesting here is Alexius is your father Felix, why would you choose to work against him?”

I saw the saddened look cross his face as he spoke, his voice confident in his choices even if he didn’t like it.

“For the same reason, Dorian is working against him. I love my father, and I love my country, but this? Cultists? Time magic? What he’s done now is madness. For his own sake, you have to stop him.”

Dorian nodded in agreement with Felix.

“It would also be nice if he didn’t rip a hole in time. There’s already a hole in the sky.”

“Okay, so he did all this to get to me and the anchor on my hand, wonderful. So what do you gentlemen suggest we do about this?”

Dorian gave me a cheeky smile and I smiled back, ignoring Solas’ disapproving aura.

“Well you know you’re the one he’s after. Expecting the trap is the first step in turning it to your advantage. I can’t stay in Redcliffe, Alexius doesn’t know I am here, and I want to keep it that way for now. But when you are ready to deal with him, I would like an invitation to the party.”

I chuckle and hold my hand out to him and saw him briefly hesitate before taking it.

“Thank you, Dorian, I will be in touch,” and turned to Felix to did the same.

“Thank you, Felix, I know this could not have been an easy decision to make.”

Both men bowed slightly towards me and left the Chantry. Turning towards everyone I gave them a tired smile.
“Let’s get out of here; I don’t want to stay another minute in Redcliffe.”
Discussions

Chapter Notes

I hope the wait was worth it and everyone enjoys. Thank you again for all of you that have read my work so far, left comments and kudos. It truly is a wonderful feeling to know I can bring someone just a moment of relaxation from our crazy world.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Glancing around at everyone as they sat around the fire eating their meals in silence, I knew that what we had learned in Redcliffe was weighing heavily on everyone’s mind. I also knew that we needed to go back to Redcliffe, and I glanced over at Cassandra trying to figure out how to tell her that. *Spit it out, which is what I gotta do. Just throw it out there and see if it sticks.* Taking a calming breath to settle my nerves, I focus on her.

“You know we can’t leave it like that, we must go back for them.”

Everyone looked at me than her, and the telling grimace on her face told everyone that she had come to that decision as well.

“Yes. We cannot leave a Tevinter Magister in Redcliffe’s castle with over two hundred mages under his command.”

Her tone sounded resigned to what must be done, and a part of me felt sorry for it.

“If Arl Teagan didn’t leave his lands during the blight, where do you think he went?” I questioned her taking another bite of my stew.

I wanted to give her time to come to a personal understanding of what needed to be done, especially when I knew she sided with Cullen in gathering the Templars.

“The King most likely,” she said finishing her dinner and setting her bowl down before tenting her fingers thoughtfully.

“He would go to Denerim to petition the King for help in removing the Magister from his home.”

Finishing my own dinner, I hold my hand out for her bowl and stand after she handed it to me.

“Then we should let them know of our plans so we don’t piss anyone off. It might even give us a little bit of influence with the Crown if we help remove Alexius from his lands.”

I left for the creek to clean out our bowls and leave her to think about it. Kneeling by the water, I was finishing up when his aura caressed mine with his approach. He knelt next to me, cleaning his own bowl and his closeness sent the flutters zinging through my stomach as they always did. I had given up on trying to control them, and finally told myself ‘*fuck it*’ they are there to stay as long as he is around.

I never knew what to do, or how to act or react when around him. Since our almost kiss in Val Royeaux, he had not tried again and there was a tension building that I couldn’t explain. I could have blissfully killed Cassandra for that interruption, but then maybe it was for the best. Perhaps he was
meant to be the unobtainable, greatest love of my life.

“Have you thought about what kind of an alliance you will offer the mages, lethal’lan?” he asked me washing his bowl.

I finished washing the bowls and utensils and sat on the ground with a heavy sigh. Plucking a piece of grass, I twirl it between my fingers and stare at the water.

“Yes, and I am sure I will meet with a lot of resistance with my decision.”

Finished cleaning his own bowl, he sat next to me. His nearness always made my heart race, and his relaxed posture as the heat from his hip pressed next to mine did not help matters any. He sat with his hands lying on his drawn up knees, silently waiting for me to continue and I cleared my throat trying to ignore my racing heart.

“I want to offer them an actual alliance; I don’t want to conscript them. What Fiona did is horrible, yes, but I can empathize with her want to be free from a circle. The others will not so readily agree with me or the Mages wanting freedom, especially after this cock up. I just need to think about how I am going to approach the discussion so I may logically discuss it without the passion I feel towards the whole thing.”

Shaking my head in frustration, I study the forest behind the rushing water and then glance up at the large moons overhead.

“A large majority of this could have been avoided if the Chantry hadn’t given the Templars full sanction to do whatever they wanted to the Mages. The power to imprison someone, the ability to make them Tranquil, the possibility of death at any moment, and all, because they have magic, is sickening.”

“Absolute power corrupts absolutely,” he stated simply before looking at me.

I return his look for a moment and then look at the anchor in my hand. Letting my eyes trace over the burn marks that went over and around my hand and wrist. Knowing that they spread over three-quarters of the way up my arm that no one else saw. I don’t think anyone even knew that the burns glowed eerily when I used the anchor. Clenching my fist, I let out a weighty sigh full of sadness.

“Do you think I too am destined for corruption by the power that was allowed me?” I asked him quietly.

His hand grabbed mine and opened my clenched fist looking at the anchor carefully. Lifting his gaze, his blue eyes held mine intently, and he bent placing a kiss to the middle of my palm. The intimate touch sent lightning up my arm, and my want to feel his lips on mine was almost unbearable.

“No lethal’lan, I do not believe that is your destiny,” he replied softly.

Wanting to touch him so badly, my hand slid over his cheek to caress the smooth skin of his angular jaw. He held my gaze and my heart melted at the sight of him looking at me so tenderly. This is probably the worst decision I have ever made, and may whatever God listening, forgive me, but I want this man more than I want my next breath.

He leaned into my hand and closed his eyes. It felt like he was memorizing the feel of my touch and my breath hitched with the need I saw when his eyes opened and he pulled me towards him.

There was no hesitation, no thoughts about if this was a good idea or not. His lips softly pressed against mine asking for permission. My hand slipped from his face to grasp his neck and pull him
closer while I ran my tongue over his lower lip and then bit him gently, giving him the permission he silently asked for. The small action broke whatever chains of restraint he had that held him back, and with a soft groan that immediately excited me, he consumed me like mage fire. His hands slid around my head, his thumbs rested just over my cheekbones, and his aura crashed into mine and I took it all gladly.

My body sang at the strong connection of lips pressed against lips, tongue dancing with tongue, finally, my heart raced excitedly. Pulling him even closer, my mouth opened further to allow him greater access to its moist warmth. The silken glide of his tongue on mine sent my body rocketing; wrapping my other hand into his shirt I held on. This is what I have been waiting for, this moment where nothing else mattered but this. Nothing in my life could have prepared me for the sudden storm of emotion I felt emanating from him. The gentle scraping of his teeth along my lower lip as he nibbled at me, only made my pulse race and my body crave him.

He pulled away slightly to gaze deeply into my eyes and shook his head slightly before he bowed to take my lips once again. I couldn’t get enough of him; his taste, his smell, it was all intoxicating. He was a drug in my veins, and I melted into him, celebrating in the high as lightning danced along my skin. I never wanted this feeling to end. The sounds of our soft panting breaths mingling together as we drank hungrily from one another met our ears. Our aura’s twined into a never-ending tapestry of colors, and I felt my heart fly.

Pulling slightly away again, we searched each other’s eyes, and all his emotions were clearly on his face for me to read. He wanted…me, and every pretense at keeping my heart from him faded. There is no turning back now.

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I rubbed my face in frustration with the circular arguments from around the table. They had been deadlocked and arguing for over an hour. Leliana and Josephine sided with me; of course, I knew that Cassandra and Cullen would oppose my choice. Slapping my hands on the table to pull everyone’s attention, I waited for it to quiet down.

“For fuck’s sake, we need their assistance in closing the Breach. An alliance with them is the only answer. Conscripting them will only build more animosity, and likely just lead us into a disaster like it did for the Chantry.”

“The Templars can assist us in the safest way, Fenlin. This whole thing sounds like a trap, and you are the bait. You wouldn’t need to play the bait if we went and got the Templars. The Mages have shown that they do not care how their freedom is obtained with this alliance with the Imperium.”

Shaking my head, I pinched the bridge of my nose and tried for patience desperately, anger would get us nowhere.

“So, should we ignore the Tevinter Magister in Redcliffe with over two hundred mages at his disposal? Just ignore that for a couple of handfuls of Templars, who may or may not play nice with others, including me?”

“They can…” he began.

I cut him off angrily, and for the first time, everyone saw me lose my temper. I so rarely did because I hated losing control of my emotions. Anger was never an answer.

“DAMN IT…ENOUGH!” Breathing heavily, I feel the start of a massive headache as everyone quietly stared at me in surprise.
“A fucking Tevinter Magister has taken hold of a strong force…weapons, with magical abilities Commander. They have enslaved them…let that sink in for a second, because that is exactly what they are. Slaves, for ten years – magical slaves that will do whatever the Imperium requires of them. What disgusts me more is that neither group thought the Breach worthy of their attention because they were so fucking focused on their own selfish wants. Mages want freedom, Templars want recognition, and no one wants to pull their heads out of their asses long enough to see that there is a giant fucking hole in the sky waiting to kill us.”

Rubbing my temples as the vise tightened around my brain, I tried to breathe through the pain and calm down before addressing Cullen again.

“If the Templars were in the same situation, I wouldn’t let them become slaves either. But I just can’t Cullen…I can’t in all good conscience leave them to this fate, they need protection and they need help. Please…can you not see the injustice here?”

Everyone was silently staring at me as I kept my focus on him. Cullen had become my friend in the last few months. Him showing me how to fight with a sword and shield, joking with him, I knew he couldn’t look past this and still be the man I knew he was inside.

He stared at me for a moment before the dawn of understanding entered his gaze as it held my own, and I let a breath out that I hadn’t realized I was holding when I saw it.

“I am sorry Fenlin, you are right. I…I just didn’t want to…”

I look at him with understanding and nod my head. “I know you didn’t, and your loyalty is commendable. I had hoped…shit, it doesn’t matter what I had hoped would happen, Cullen. Write to Baris as we discussed and get those out that we can, they can’t all have forgotten their sworn duty. But I need you to back me on this Cullen, I need your support.”

Our eyes held for a long, silent moment and finally, he gave me a nod of agreement.

“Thank you ma falon,” I say softly and look towards Cassandra.

“And you, will I have your support this time as well? I cannot do this alone Cassandra.”

She stared at me for a moment, and then with a soft smile nodded her head in agreement. Giving her a large smile, I grabbed her arm gently.

“I knew I could count on you.”

Letting her go, I looked at Leliana expectantly.

“We need another way into the Castle. Please find that while we wait for his invitation, which shouldn’t take too long. Alexius didn’t strike me as someone who would wait any longer than he had to. Also, make contact with Dorian, the man we met in Redcliffe. He will be of great assistance to us.”

Leliana nodded her head in understanding and gave me a soft smile that barely lifted the corners of her lips. I look towards Josephine and gave her a bright smile needing to bring some cheer back into the room.

“Josephine, please inform the King and Arl Teagan of our intentions. Obviously convey that we are on their side and that we are only going there to remove the Magister and gather the mages, nothing more. I trust you will know exactly how to spin it to make everyone breathe easy.”
Josephine wrote quickly on her ever-present clipboard smiling and nodding as she scribbled.

“Of course, that is a wonderful idea.”

Cassandra, who had argued only a few times, but quietly observed during most of the interaction, cleared her throat as she looked at me.

“Do you have a team in mind?”

I lay a hand on her arm and smile at her.

“But of course I do. I go nowhere without those I trust implicitly. I will want you, Varric, and Solas to go with me, send Bull, Sera, and Madame Vivienne with Leliana to help squelch any of those Venatori we can count on waiting for us inside.”

Cassandra nodded at me with a small smile and I looked around at everyone and smiled.

“Well then, with that finished can we continue any further conversations or arguments for tomorrow?” I teased with a cheeky smile.

Everyone slightly laughed as they nodded in agreement and I bolted from the room quickly. First I needed fresh air, second, I just wanted to give Solas back his book with my illustrations, and hoped he liked them.

I all but ran to my cabin to grab the book and slip it under my jacket. Walking briskly across Haven, I got to his door and found him opening it as I was within steps.

“Do you have a moment?” I ask him before entering.

His soft smile sends my heart racing as he gestures me inside.

Pulling his book from under my jacket, I hold it towards him. I spoke quickly while he took the book from my fingers.

“I made illustrations of the examples, and I hope you like them. I thought maybe…”

He stopped me by pulling me to him and placing his lips to mine tenderly, and I melted. His lips nipped at mine teasingly and I laid my hands against his chest, moving closer to him. His arms pulled me in tighter, and I never wanted to leave his embrace. When he lifted his head away, I was blushing with embarrassment. It had been four days since their shared kiss by the creek, and I had thought of little else since.

“I believe proper greetings should be made first.”

His teasing made me laugh, while he slid a lock of hair behind my ear and placed another quick kiss to my upturned nose.

He stepped back and watching him open his book so he could see the small pages of illustration while I slipped my jacket off. He ran his fingers gently over one, and I could see the surprise in his expression as he thumbed through the pages slowly. He finally looked from the book to me before slowly laying the book down on his desk and turning back towards me.

“It is…beautiful,” he finally said with surprise looking at me.

I let out the breath I was holding hoping he would like them.
"You don’t mind that I…” and he cut me off again by pulling me towards him.

"No,” was all he said as he held me close to him.

The feeling of his body against mine did nothing to quiet my rampaging hormones but it was starting to soothe my headache. He must have felt my quiet pain through my aura, as he pulled back and gazed down at me.

“Your meeting was…difficult?” and I snorted totally unladylike at his comment.

“Difficult is a kind way of saying I got pulled through the south-end of a northbound horse.”

Chuckling, he sat down and pulled me onto his lap. It was comforting to feel him so close to me, as his hands suddenly went to my head soothing my headache. I let out a sigh of relief as I felt the vice-like grip on my brain release with the cool touch of his magic.

“Everyone has agreed with me, and we leave as soon as I have the next invitation from Alexius until then we wait.”

He couldn’t miss the anxiety I felt, and his hands moved from my head and ran over my back soothingly. Pulling me into him, I let my head fall to his shoulder and nuzzled my face into the crook of his neck. This particular spot gave me a deep sense of comfort. I don’t know if it was because he held me most of the way back from the Storm Coast just like this to help alleviate the pain in my body from travel, or if it was because I could soak in his scent.

“Will you go with me, when it is time to go back?” I ask him unsure if he would want to go.

I felt his arms wrap around me, and it was nice to feel so wanted. I had never felt that before, and to feel it now, if even for a moment, was nice.

“Of course I will lethal’lan. I find it difficult to be away from you,” he answered honestly.

Smiling, I listen to the strong metronome of his heartbeat. Abruptly I felt bad about not telling him about where I came from, and what all I knew. I bit my tongue to keep it quiet. No, this will only confuse him, piss him off or…swallowing the sudden lump in my throat, push him away from me.

He must have felt the sudden change in me and slightly tightened his hold on me, while his aura moved soothingly against mine.

“I am sure it will be fine lethal’lan.”

I smile against his neck at his words.

“Only time will tell,” I reply with a calm I didn’t feel as his hands moved soothingly over my back again.

*****

It is definitely a romance for the ages, Varric thought as he watched Fenlin and Solas walk towards Cullen's training area. Those two were like magnets…always moving towards each other. He smiled as he grabbed his folder full of notes, and glanced back at the couple. Shaking his head at them he turned towards the tavern.

Anyone could see that they were completely into each other, yet they always kept a safe distance. Sketch…she was a puzzle and had a past that no one knew about and she was reluctant to share with
anyone, but so did he. They were perfect for each other. He smiled at Flyssa when he entered the
tavern and moved towards the table in the far back by the fire.

She was a completely different type of Dalish, or at least not like any he had ever met. Daisy had
spoken almost nonstop for a year about her clan, Sketch, nothing. She was quiet, questioned her
whole Dalish heritage and not afraid to give her opinion or question the beliefs of the Dalish he knew
would have made Daisy uneasy. Chuckles, well…he too was not like any elf he had ever met and
that included his broody friend. The elf knew things, and after Sketch had taken that arrow in the
chest, he didn’t know what to make of him, especially after that archer offed himself. Glad as he was
she had lived, the girl should have died and everyone that witnessed what happened knew it too.

The magic he used was not something he had ever seen before, and even the Seeker was nervous in
its presence though she didn’t object his use of it. Sighing heavily, he glanced at the window and
shook his head slightly. Whatever they were or not were, it was obvious they were a couple. Now if
only he could get the Seeker to look at him the way Sketch looked at Chuckles, he might not feel so
tied in knots around her.

“What do you mean?” I ask him curiously.

Solas smiled and folded his arms behind his back.

Oh, no…he is in his teacher mode.

“It is clear to me that you understand much more about fade magic than I previously thought
lethal’lan. So today we will focus on advanced types of techniques.”

I shake my head thinking back to the day he knocked me on my ass.

“Like what exactly, and will this also include you knocking me on my ass? Because it took weeks
for that bruise to go away just so you know.”

His deep laughter rang around us sending tingles over my skin with the sound. The instant shake of
his head was slightly comforting as he finally gazed at me with obvious merriment in his eyes.

“No lethal’lan, today we will work on some of the techniques that I witnessed you use and expand
on them.”

Smiling at him I clapped my hands together in excitement, glad to know I wasn't going to be on my
back from a wicked snowball to the chest.

“Well than…let’s get to work, hahren.”

I giggled at the instant look of disdain on his face with hearing the name and smiled at him cheekily.
His return look of retribution was enough to set my stomach into a churning group of flutters.

Chapter End Notes

ma falon - my friend
hahren - elder
Thank you, everyone, for your great comments!
You guys are awesome!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I glared at the invitation like it would bite me. Everyone stood silently waiting for me to say something, and I took a deep breath before letting it out.

“We leave tomorrow.”

Cassandra nodded her head and left the room to tell the others.

“You found our other way into the Castle?” I question Leliana, picking up the invitation again.

“Yes, there is an underground escape tunnel for the family during emergencies. I will lead a group of my agents through the passages with the help of this Tevinter mage you met in Redcliffe. He should be capable of removing any wards that would stop our progress.”

I nodded my head pleased that she had another way in and listened to Josephine update me as well on her correspondence.

“I have also received word back from the King of Ferelden. He is pleased that we are taking care of this matter for him, and has said he is indebted to us for this favor.”

I smiled slightly, glad that I was right. It would give us a little wiggle room with the Crown and I knew this would please Josephine. The sound of Cullen’s voice pulled my gaze from Josephine to look at him.

“Sir Baris and a handful of Templars arrived this morning to join us. It would seem you were right, he just needed an invitation.”

“Good, then if we have everything prepared, please excuse me; I have a bag to pack.”

Everyone slightly nodded towards me before I left the room and as soon as I closed the door I took a quick calming breath as I leaned against it. I needed to have my game face on before I left this building. I am scared of what waits for me in Redcliffe. Taking another deep breath, I pushed myself away from the door.

Walking through the Chantry I nodded towards Mother Giselle as I passed, and ignored looking at Vivienne as I went through the ornate Chantry doors. I didn’t need that woman compiling my anxiety. I proceeded towards my cabin to get my bag packed and take a long, hot bath to hopefully relax before dinner with Solas.
He thumbed the pages of his book looking at her illustrations and smiled. It was a thoughtful gift she had given him and she did not realize how much it meant to him to see the well thought out pictures that had never been there before. She had cut the pages just slightly smaller than the others so that they would fit perfectly into the book. Placing the book down, he grabbed his coat. Hopefully, Master Harritt had finished his request he had made a couple of days earlier. He wanted her to have it before they left for Redcliffe tomorrow.

“Master Solas, I am glad that you are here. I finished what you asked for this morning,” Harritt said moving towards a table.

“Excellent,” he said walking inside towards the Blacksmith’s table.

“The runes you asked to have inscribed on the grip are waiting for you to charge them.”

Picking up the staff he held it, checking the balance and feel of the weapon. It was light enough for her to carry, and built to fit her small frame. The staff was made from Ironbark ensuring the weapon was light enough to carry but strong enough to conduct the magical energies and perfectly sized for her small stature. The runes he had Master Harritt etch into the grip were for energy conduction, and he ran his finger over them making sure they were correct before continuing his inspection.

A large, perfect sphere the size of his fist of Fluorite crystal at the top would help focus her spells and pull the fade to her with but a thought. The crystal was attached with Everite, Silverite, and Navarrite strands that woven together, wound around the sphere keeping it in place. The blade was of Everite, and a rune was etched down the length, for fade magic. Picking up the new leather harness, he smiled at Master Harritt pleased with the craftsmanship.

“This is fine work Master Harritt; she will be very satisfied with it.”

Harritt nodded his head, smiling happily with the praise.

“With the materials you provided, it was nice to do some real work for a change.”

Laying the staff back on the table, he charged the runes before wrapping it back up on the leather cover. He was very pleased with the work and felt a sudden excitement at giving her the gift. Her current staff was too long for her to wield efficiently and in fact not the best for her magical abilities, and the harness she wore had been adjusted so many times to keep the weapon from dragging on the ground it was ragged and threadbare with the manipulations.

“I will let you know if I come across any more materials that can benefit from your skill. Again Master Harritt, you have my deepest gratitude.”

Harritt waved him off and turned back to his other work as he left for her cabin. Approaching the cabin he was surprised that she had not already opened the door as was her usual. Perhaps she was busy, he thought before knocking on the door.

“I was just getting out of the bath, just give me a second and I’ll be right there,” he heard her yell from behind the wooden door.

Staring at the door for a moment, he fought the sudden urge to shove it open, and his hand clenched suddenly against the wooden frame. His mind instantly flashing back to the night he accidentally found her bathing in the Hinterlands and desire kicked him deep in the stomach. He let his hand fall away from the door and gripped the leather-wrapped staff tightly when the door suddenly opened.

Fen’edhis, I will never sleep again.
She stood wearing but a towel and dripping hair.

“Is everything okay? Is something wrong? I thought we were meeting later?”

*I have no words...none at all.* He could do nothing but stare at all her exposed damp, alabaster skin.

“Solas?” she questioned him quietly.

His eyes dashed to hers quickly and he saw the amusement in her amber gaze. *Fen’edhis!* Clearing his throat, he held up the leather covered staff.

“I came to bring you this…I did not expect…” *This is not going as I had planned.*

“Well don’t just stand there, Solas, come in.”

He felt his own feet defy his thoughts of retreat and walk through the opened doorway, closing it behind him.

“Give me just two seconds to throw something on. Sorry, I would have earlier but I was concerned that something was wrong.”

He swallowed heavily again and stayed behind the wall that separated the room from the doorway and stared fixedly at a plank of roughly hewn wood. *This is not wise; I should put this down here and leave.*

“Of course,” he tells her instead and grimaces at how thick his voice sounded.

Rubbing his face, he mentally starts counting to ten trying to cool the never-ending craving he had for her. Glancing down at himself, feeling his heavy arousal, he was grateful that he had not removed his coat, or it would be apparent what he was thinking.

“Okay, so what is it you wanted to give me?” she said from behind the wall.

He walked around the wall and saw that she was toweling her hair dry watching him. His mouth went dry at her wearing only a long grey tunic exposing the lovely skin of her legs from mid-thigh down. It was not immodest, only his thoughts were. He let his eyes devour every exposed inch before meeting her gaze.

Her beautiful eyes followed him, and it excited him, pushed the wolf in him to take what he wanted. The intelligence he could see sparking behind the amber gaze, but also her own desire was obvious for him to see as well. It only made him harder at the sight of it. It was intoxicating at times this careful game they played.

He walked towards her and held the staff out. She dropped the towel she had been using to dry her hair and took the object he held out and laid it on her bed, slowly peeling the leather away. Her simple actions did nothing to cool his sudden lust to lay her on the bed and peel away the layers separating them. Clearing his throat, he folded his arms behind his back while she touched the staff to keep from touching her. He was captivated with the site of her fingers gently gliding over the surface, and the heat in the room intensified.

“Oh, Solas…this is – beautiful.”

She ran her hands over the runes inscribed into the grip, and he barely held back a moan when she wrapped her hand around it envisioning her hands wrapping around him. *I must get this under control…quickly.* She turned towards him and suddenly she was wrapped around his waist, head...
pillowed against his chest. I’m dying…that is what is happening. She was sent to punish me with sexual tension, and this is how she kills me.

“I am pleased you like it lethal’lan,” he tells her before hesitantly wrapping his arms around her wishing his voice didn’t sound so desperately hungry.

“I do, I really, really do.” She mumbles into his chest, and the smell of the vanilla soap she used in her bathing excited him even further.

He leaned down and kissed the top of her damp head, breathing in the scent. He needed to get out of here. Her closeness, her scent, all these things were quickly turning him into a ball of need and desire and it would not be long before he kissed her and did what his body was demanding him do.

She leaned slightly away and looked up at him.

“Is everything okay Solas?” she asked him curiously.

Clearing his throat again, he shook his head.

“It is nothing really; I just remembered that I needed to do something before we shared our meal together later.”

He felt her let go of him and barely held back the breath of relief. Her quick smile as she gazed up at him with softness in her amber eyes set his body on fire, and he cleared his throat.

“Well then I will let you go so you can get that done, I will see you later?” she asked sounding hopeful.

“Of course,” he tells her moving towards the door.

He left as quickly as was possible without appearing rushed. Closing the door behind him, he took a shaky breath and headed quickly for the safety of his own cabin. *This did not go as I had planned at all.*

*****

They walked through the doors of Redcliffe’s castle and the knot of apprehension intensified. *I can do this…piece of cake.* An attendant walked towards them with hurried steps and stopped in front of us.

“Announce us.” I hear my voice echo around us in the Great Hall.

“The Magister’s invitation was for Mistress Lavellan alone. The rest of you lot will have to wait here.”

I cross my arms and give the man a cold smirk.

“I go, they go.” *Take that you ass-kissing monkey.*

The man looked at me to Solas and then Cassandra and Varric. Letting out a sigh of annoyance he turned and led us towards a doorway, leading to the throne room. We walked in silence and saw that the hall was lined with Venatori. As we passed them they filed in behind us, and it made the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

Entering the throne room, we walked up a few steps and saw that Alexius was sitting on the throne on the dais with Felix standing beside him. *He appears to be quite satisfied with himself, that will*
“My Lord Magister, the agents of the Inquisition have arrived” the attendant introduced us.

Alexius stood and stepped forward. “My friend, it’s so good to see you again, and your associates of course. I’m sure we can work out some arrangement that is equitable to all parties.”

Fiona walked from a side door into the room to stand next to Cassandra. “Are we mages to have no voice in deciding our fate?”

Alexius looked at her and gave her a patient smile.

“Fiona you would not have turned your followers over to my care if you did not trust me with their lives.”

Yes, because you just simply ooze trust. I glance at Fiona and smile reassuringly.

“If the Grand Enchanter wants to be a part of these talks, then I welcome her as a guest of the Inquisition.”

Fiona gave me a small nod of appreciation to the offer.

“Thank you.”

Alexius turned from them and went to sit back on the throne. I had to suppress the laughter that wanted to bubble out with his action. The man truly was a peacock full of self-importance.

“The Inquisition needs mages to close the Breach, and I have them. So, what shall you offer in exchange?”

“Nothing,” I tell him with a calm face enjoying his sudden expression of surprise.

“Excuse me?” His tone dripped with disbelief.

“No, you heard me correctly Alexius, nothing. I offer you nothing, will give you nothing. Just like this whole pretense to get me here will be for nothing.”

Felix turned towards his father and spoke desperately.

“She knows father, she knows everything.”

Alexius turned towards him with an angry glare.

“Felix, what have you done?”

“He is only concerned that you’re involved with something terrible,” I interject on Felix’s behalf, and Alexius jumps to his feet angrily.

“So speaks the thief! Do you think you can turn my son against me?” Angry spittle gathers in the corners of his mouth with his contemptuous glare. “You walk into my stronghold, with your stolen mark, a gift you don’t even understand and actually think you’re in control? You’re nothing but a mistake.”

Oh, ruffled a few feathers I see. Crossing my arms, I gaze at him with obvious disgust.

“Well if you know so much, why don’t you enlighten me Alexius. Tell me what this mark on my
hand is for.”

“It belongs to your betters, not some lowly elf. You couldn’t even begin to understand its purpose.”

Felix walked towards him and laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Father, listen to yourself. Do you even know what you sound like?”

While Felix kept his father’s attention, Dorian slipped into the room from behind a pillar. That told me Leliana’s people were in place.

“He sounds exactly like the sort of villainous cliché everyone expects us to be.”

Dorian came to stand next to me and gave me a quick wink, before focusing on Alexius.

“Dorian, I gave you the opportunity to join me, you turned me down. The Elder One has a power that you would not believe. He will raise the Imperium from its own ashes.”

This guy is crazy – completely flipped his lid and lost the last marble.

“That’s who you work for? The one who killed the Divine, is he a mage?”

Alexius looked at me smug like.

“Soon he will become a God. He will make the world bow to mages once more. We will rule from the Boric Ocean to the Frozen Seas.”

Yup, completely fucking lost his mind.

“Alexius, this is exactly what you and I talked about never wanting to happen. Why would you support this?” Dorian looked at Alexius with shock and dismay.

Felix stepped towards his father. “Stop it, father! Give up the Venatori, let the Southern Mages fight the Breach and let’s go home.”

Alexius turned towards Felix and grasped him by the shoulders his expression desperate. “No, it’s the only way, Felix. He can save you.”

Felix stared at his father in shock. “Save me. I am going to die; you must learn to live with it.”

“No! There is a way. The Elder One promised me if I undo the mistake at the Temple of Sacred Ashes that he would save you. Cease them Venatori, the Elder One demands this woman’s life.”

I turned to where the Venatori had lined between the pillars and saw that they were all lying dead on the floor, replaced by Inquisition forces.

“You men are dead Alexius, surrender so we can all go home.”

Alexius looked around like a cornered animal, and I internally cringed at what was to come when he pulled the amulet from inside his pocket.

“You were nothing but a mistake, you should never have existed.”

Dorian cast a magical blast at Alexius to stop him.

“NO” he yelled.
With a loud, grinding popping in my ears, we were pulled through the rift and I landed in water up to my thigh.

“Blood of the Elder One! Where did they come from?”

Chapter End Notes

fen’edhis - wolf dick (a nice universal type of curse word)
“Well, son of a bitch!” I snarled casting a fade fist at one of them knocking him and his comrade that stood behind him to the ground.

Dorian placed fire runes on the ground surrounding them and I overlaid frost runes on top of them. When the Venatori scrambled back to their feet they ran towards us and froze from my runes before the fire runes engaged and burned the men in mage fire.

Cassandra jumped Alexius when she saw the burnt marks on the floor where Fenlin and Dorian had once stood.

“WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?” She yelled into the Magister’s face as she gripped him by the collar.

Solas stood next to Varric and Leliana as they stared at the scorch marks on the marble. He knew she was not dead, she couldn’t be. The magic of the rift was not unlike the rifts they had encountered when first they came to Redcliffe for the meeting, and then the one in the Chantry. He had to believe she survived. He pushed past the large lump of fear that was growing in his chest before addressing Cassandra and the others.

“Seeker, he has sent them through time. How far ahead or back is unknown, she is not dead,” he said slightly clearing his throat.

He would keep telling himself that in hopes that he would start to believe it. He could not believe otherwise. To do so would be his end.

Cassandra punched Alexius hard enough to render the man unconscious and turned wild eyes towards Solas.

“Then she will return…she must,” she said almost desperately.

“Displacement…interesting…it’s probably not what Alexius intended. The rift must have moved us…to what? The closest compliments of arcane energy,” Dorian was speaking aloud to himself as I watched understanding almost none of it.
“The last thing I remember was we were standing in the castle hall,” I muttered looking around the room.

“Let’s see…if we’re still in the castle, it isn’t. Oh…of course, it’s not simply where it’s when. Alexius used the amulet as a focus, it moved us through time.”

I started rubbing my face and shook my head.

“Did we go forward or back and how far?”

Dorian smiled at me pleased to see I was still thinking and not panicking. Yes, panicking is a very bad idea… breath.

“Those are excellent questions. We’ll have to find out, won’t we? Let’s look around and see where the rift took us, then we can figure out how to get back if we can.”

His injected ‘if we can’ caused me to square my shoulders and take a deep breath. Oh no sir, I am going back to him.

“Oh no, don’t talk like that. We will get back; I have a date tonight with a sexy bald elf I plan on keeping.”

I turn towards the bodies of the Venatori and started searching for a key to the door of the dungeon as Dorian chuckled at me. Finding it, I hold it up with a bright smile on my face full of accomplishment.

“Now let’s get the fuck out of this wet shit hole, shall we?”

Dorian bowed with a smile towards me and gestured for the cell door.

“After you my lady.”

We ran up the stairs, passing cells full of the red lyrium. I couldn’t stop the shiver of unease that ran up my spine at the strong, disjointed song that emanated from it. Rubbing my head on the wrong sound, I noticed Dorian doing the same.

“That is a horrible sound,” I say quietly as we continued moving quickly.

“It is most unpleasant, I agree.”

Running up the next flight of stairs we turn left to find Fiona, locked in a cell with red lyrium growing out of her, adhering her in place to the wall.

“Oh my God,” I softly mutter as I step closer to her horrified.

Red lyrium had grown over the doors locking mechanism and most of the door.

“You are – alive! How? I saw you disappear into the rift.”

Her voice sounded eerie as if it echoed slightly through a hollow room in her throat. Her once bright green eyes now held a ghostly red glow in them.

“Is that red lyrium growing from your body? How is that possible?” I asked her horrified.

“The longer you’re near it, eventually you become this. Then they mine your corpse for more,” she replied slightly wheezing.
“Can you tell us the date? It’s very important.” Dorian asked Fiona quickly.

“Harvestmere, 9:42, Dragon,” she replied and rested her head on the raised arm against the wall appearing exhausted.

Dorian looked shocked.

“9:42…then we’ve missed an entire year.”

I look at him, grasping his arm tightly.

“We have to get out of here, go back.”

Fiona lifted her head and looked at us pleadingly.

“Please, you must stop this from happening. Alexius serves the Elder One, more powerful than the Maker. No one challenges him and lives.”

“Well that sounds discouraging, but this Elder One is no God, Fiona,” I said rubbing my face.

“Our only hope is to find the amulet Alexius used to send us here. If it still exists, I can use it to re-open the rift to the exact spot we left. Maybe,” he said as an afterthought.

I softly laughed and looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“I’ll take ‘maybe’ over being stuck here.”

“It could also turn us to paste,” he said frankly and I chuckled.

“Still better than here wouldn’t you say?” Dorian gazed at me for a moment before he shrugged his shoulders.

“Good, you must try. Your Spymaster, Leliana – she is here. Find her quickly before the Elder One learns you’re here, now go and leave me,” she said before laying her head back down on her arm.

We left Fiona in her cell unable to help her and ran for the stairs. I was scared of what I would find in the next area of cells. If I remember correctly, we should also find Varric, Cassandra, and Solas here because they came with me into the castle. I suddenly wished I had played the game more often as I ran up the steps. I felt my stomach knot painfully at the idea of if I would find them in similar states like Fiona and suppressed a shiver.

Running down another hall, and up more steps, we came to the next room full of cells and I found Cassandra and Varric. I ran towards the cell doors, and with shaky fingers used the key to open Cassandra’s cell and handed the key to Dorian before entering Cassandra’s cell.

“You’ve returned to us, can it be? Has Andraste given us another chance? Maker forgive me, I failed you, I failed everyone. The end must truly be upon us if the dead return to life.”

I kneel down and wrap my arms around her tightly, and felt hers wrap tightly around me. The hollow sound of her voice and the red haze over her once beautiful brown eyes was sickening.

“I’m not dead Cassandra. Alexius sent us through time, I am so sorry.”

Helping her stand, she stared at me in surprise.

“Then Solas was right. When you didn’t return we began to think you were dead.”
“We plan to try and go back in time, and undo this horrible mess,” I told her quickly.

“Alexius’ master, the Elder One, after you died we could not stop him. Empress Celine was murdered; the army that swept in afterward was a horde of demons. Nothing stopped them, nothing.”

Dorian unlocked the cell next to Cassandra letting Varric out and handed me back the key.

“We will stop them this time, but I will need your help. Please, Cassandra, tell me where is Solas?” I asked her almost scared to know the answer.

“He is through that doorway,” she said pointing to the end of the cell block.

I ran the short distance and ripped the door open. Passing one then two then in the third cell I found him and couldn’t stop the small whimper that escaped as I approached the cell door. His aura was tainted by the red lyrium and sang the same disjointed music. His aura was once a brilliant rainbow of color was now dull and red. My whole body began shaking, and I could hardly hold the key steady enough to unlock the door. At the sound of the key scraping against the metal, he turned quickly.

“Y…you’re alive,” he said moving swiftly towards me.

Wrapping my arms tightly around him, I couldn’t stop the crying hiccup that escaped.

“I am so sorry, I…” she began in elvish and felt his shuddering breath as he held me close.

“Hush…hush lethal’lan. You’re here now,” he said gently to me as he rubbed my back in soothing motions.

The hollow sound of his once beautiful voice tightened the vice-like grip on my heart.

“The spell Alexius cast displaced us in time. We just got here, sort of speak,” Dorian informed him as he walked towards with Cassandra and Varric.

I felt his voice rumble against my cheek as he talked. I knew I should let him go and step back, but I couldn’t…not yet.

“Can you reverse the process? You could return and obviate the events of the last year. It may not be too late.”

All the while he spoke with Dorian his hands ran over my back and held me close to him.

“Well, I’m glad you got all that because I didn’t” I mumble in the middle of his chest.

“You would think that having such understanding would stop me from making such terrible mistakes. You would be wrong. This world is an abomination; it must never come to pass.”

I knew he spoke of his choices and creating the veil, his sorrow was clear in the way his arms slightly tightened around me. I wished I could tell him he did nothing wrong, that his choices had been right but I could not. Stepping away from him, I wiped the wetness from my cheeks and looked up at him.

“There is so much I wanted to tell you and didn’t. I thought I had wasted what chance I had to tell you what I wanted to.”

His elvish was spoken rapidly, on the edge of desperation as he held my face in his hands and studied my eyes.
“I already knew what you weren’t telling me, Solas. You’re Fen’Harel – I’ve always known and did not care. Was there anything else you didn’t tell me?”

His look of stunned shock only made me smile, and I reached up and ran my hand over his cheek never loving him more than I did right then. I could see that he was unsure what to say now and letting his hands fall from my face, I smiled tenderly at him before turning towards the others.

“Let’s find Leliana and then we find Alexius and get our happy asses back home.”

I knew that telling him here, the other him would not know and it made me feel better to get that small weight off my shoulders, if even for a moment.

Our fight with Alexius was brief and once he had fallen Dorian pulled the amulet from his body and shook his head in obvious grief. I felt sorry for him and this loss of a man he once truly admired.

“This is the same amulet we made together. Give me an hour, and I should be able to recreate the spell he used to bring us here.”

“An hour! We don’t have an hour, the Elder One comes,” Leliana said angrily to him.

Everyone cringed at the sound of a loud roar over the castle and little flecks of plaster and dirt fell from the ceiling.

“The Elder One,” Cassandra whispered.

She looked at me with, and then looked at Solas and Varric. They shared a simple nod, and I knew what was to come next. I will have to watch them die.

“No, no, no, no” I muttered over and over holding Solas’s gaze intently.

He stepped towards me and took my hands, running his thumbs over the knuckles trying to soothe me.

“Look at us, we are already dead, but you must return so that this can never happen.”

His softly spoken words pierced my already bleeding heart knowing he was right. He reached up and wiped the tears from my cheeks and smiled tenderly at me, and my breath hiccupped as I held back a sob.

“I should have told you that I loved you long before now, which was the only thing left to say.”

The sob broke free from my throat as another loud roar from the creature came from above as it flew over. He let my hands go and turned to leave with Cassandra. I grabbed his hand and reached up to his collar and pulled him down to me for a final kiss before he left.

It was desperate and brief…all too brief. Leaning my forehead against his, I spoke raggedly.

“Then know that I love you, I always have and always will.”

He kissed my forehead, looking at me with his love for me in his eyes before he turned and left as I moved backward towards Dorian watching him leave. When the doors closed Leliana pulled her bow and notched an arrow ready for whatever would come through the door.
When the doors burst open, a flood of demons and Venatori came into the room throwing their bodies as they went. I couldn’t stop the whimper at the sight of his lifeless body being tossed onto the floor. My heart died at that moment and I felt the heavy weight of it on my chest.

Dorian ignored the sudden flood and kept his focus steady on the amulet. I rained fade fire on them as they entered. I heard the softly spoken litany of Canticles that Leliana repeated with every shot from her bow, and bit my lip to keep from screaming out as I watched a demon thrust its clawed hand through her chest.

The rift suddenly opened behind me and Dorian’s hand grasped my arm and pulled me with him. When we came out on the dais, I was staring directly at Alexius. Stalking towards him angrily, I balled up all my hurt, anger at witnessing everything I cared for, everything I loved died because of him.

“You win,” he said defeated.

Close enough now, I hit him square in the balls with my knee, using all hundred and five pounds of me. Alexius fell to his knees where I could finally land a solid right hook to the jaw and felt the solid connection of my knuckles hitting his face reverberation through my hand.

“EAT THAT YOU SON OF A BITCH!” I yelled at him.

Panting angrily, with my fists clenched, Inquisition agents move to gather Alexius’ huddled body from the floor on Leliana's orders. Cassandra turned me around and hugged me tightly.

“Thank the Maker you’re alive,” she said her tone full of relief.

Cassandra released me and turned at the sounds of boots marching across the marble. Ferelden soldiers marched into the hall, lining the pillars as the King of Ferelden entered.

“It would appear, my dear, that it is not finished,” Dorian said calmly folding his arms.

Walking from the dais, I unclenched my fists, squared my shoulders back, and took a calming breath before nodding towards King Alistair who had just entered the hall. Fall apart later...right now suck it up.

“It would appear that you have everything well in hand Herald. You will be taking the Mages with you, yes?”

I nodded my head as I walked towards him.

“Yes your Majesty, the Inquisition is offering a full alliance with the mages so they may help us seal the Breach.”

Fiona looked at me in stunned shock.

“A full alliance?” she whispered.

I turn towards her and suppress the shiver of what I had seen of ‘future Fiona’.

“Yes, you will be our partners Fiona. We cannot close the Breach without your help. Will you help us?” I asked her.

“You will not get a better offer, and you must leave Redcliffe Grand Enchanter,” Alistair injected as he gazed at her.
“We would be foolish to turn you down. Thank you, you will not regret this opportunity you have given us.”

I nod my head at her and glance up at Alistair.

“May we take a few days to allow the mages time to prepare their things and depart from Redcliffe, your Majesty?”

He gave me a grateful smile and nodded his agreement.

“Of course my lady, I appreciate what you have done for Redcliffe and for Ferelden.”

Holding my hand out to him he dwarfed it with his larger one and we shook on it. Turning away from him, Cassandra, Varric, and Solas watched the conversation and me carefully. My eyes held his and every particle of my being wanted to run to him, but I made myself walk slowly towards them.

“Are you okay Fenlin?” Cassandra looked at me worriedly.

“I will be once I have a hot bath…and a lot of alcohol Cassandra.”

Varric chuckled at my statement, and I felt his aura reach for mine before I let a soft breath of relief leave me at the familiar touch.

“I believe we can obtain rooms at the Tavern for tonight,” Cassandra told everyone before leading the way out of the castle.
Moving the Mages

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, who is following my story and enjoying it. Your comments and kudos inspire me to continue the journey.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Leaning against the closed door a shaky breath leaves my chest. Dropping my pack, I was glad to have a room to myself; I didn’t need witnesses to my complete meltdown. The bathtub was steaming in the corner, and I was grateful for the thoughtful chambermaid who had done it for me. Pulling my leather armor off and letting it fall where it would, I walked towards the bath and slid into the waiting water.

Everything I had witness was too much to hold in any longer. I could still hear the horrible, disjointed song of the red lyrium and I dunked my head beneath the water’s surface scrubbing my scalp vigorously to try and remove the sound. My mind replayed the vision of their lifeless bodies scattered on the floor like trash wrenched an unwilling cry from my throat and I started scrubbing my face and arms harder as if to erase the memory.

Stepping from the bath, I toweled off briskly and held it over my mouth. Screaming into the cloth, muffling the sound as my knees hit the hardwood floor. I couldn’t stop the replay of seeing his body broken on the floor. The sight had left me shattered and wrecked, and it still continued to make me grieve over the loss. I kept telling myself that it didn't happen, it had been my silent mantra as we walked to the tavern. The reality of him still alive just down the hall was a flame at the end of a dark tunnel full of mind-numbing agony.

“This is stupid, he’s alive. They're all alive; stop this madness, it didn’t happen…it didn’t happen, just get the fuck up. Get - up!”

Hearing the words aloud pushed me to gather myself from the floor and get dressed.

Walking down the steps that led to the tavern, I noticed Varric already had a couple of bottles on the table waiting for me.

“You’re going to need more than that,” I told him as I sat down.

Varric shook his head as he poured me a full glass of wine.

“Damn Sketch, that bad?” His gaze held concern and I took the glass gratefully and drank.

“I will wait to tell everyone at the same time, and yes, Varric, it was that bad.”

Varric grimaced and took a drink of his ale and blessedly didn't press me with more questions. I felt his aura as he descended the steps and closed my eyes. A sudden lump lodged in my throat making it difficult to swallow as the memory of his dead body lay on the keeps floor replayed behind my closed eyes. With a shaky breath, I took another drink pushing past it as I opened my eyes. Solas sat down next to me and I seized his hand desperately needing the reality of him and laced my fingers
with his. His sudden look of concern made my eyes immediately water. Shaking my head to rid myself of the urge to burst into grieving sobs that would never end, I took another drink hoping he wouldn’t press.

When Cassandra finally came down, she watched me as I downed the last of my first glass, and slide it towards Varric as she sat down.

“Set me up bartender, I got a report to relive.”

Varric poured me another glass watching me carefully. Taking a healthy swallow, and a shaky breath for control, I started telling them about what happens in the future if we failed.

After the two hours of retelling what happened, we were four bottles down. There was a profound silence around the table from the information of Empress Celine being murdered, the horde of demons that swept across Thedas conquering everything in its path, and red lyrium growing everywhere.

The wine was not getting me drunk like I wanted, proving that it was indeed a state of mind you had to be in and rubbed my face annoyed with my free hand. Solas squeezed my fingers slightly and I looked at him, his eyes holding a wealth of comfort I wanted to just crawl into. The burning sensation in my chest only grew larger as he held my gaze.

I had told them everything except the part where I told him I knew his true identity, or that I loved him. He had given silent comfort through the retelling of the horrors I witnessed, by lightly rubbing his thumb over mine. Solas gracefully stood and pulled me with him, and I let him.

“We are going to take a walk Seeker, we shall return,” he told Cassandra.

Cassandra nodded her head at us, and I let him lead me out of the tavern into the night air. Walking down the short steps towards the water, we found a lush, grassy area, close to the water's edge but away from the people still moving about. He sat down and pulled me onto his lap, and I let out a shuddering breath that told him how close I was to losing it.

Nuzzling my face into the crook of his neck, I took a deep breath of the scent that was him. Soaking in the feeling of his arms around me and the comfort that they represented. The soft vibration of his voice under my cheek made me close my eyes and just listen to the full, beautiful baritone, as it vibrated through me. The sound removing the hollow voice I had heard in that nightmare of a future.

“You need to let it out now,” he told me quietly and I did as he held me tightly to him.

I cried against him for everything I witnessed. Watching everyone die was bad enough, watching him die had felt like the end of my world. No amount of pain has ever felt so agonizing or intense. It was as if a giant hole was punched through my chest, with no hope of repair. I gripped his shirt and hid against him, taking the soothing aura he gave me, and the soft kisses to my temple as I sobbed uncontrollably.

I don't know how long we sat like that but finally, with the last of my grief finally spent, I was emotionally exhausted.

I lay against him, just listening to his heart beat steadily beneath my ear, loving the steady thrums vibrating. Finally, lifting my face from its comfortable spot against his neck, I saw that I had completely soaked his shirt. Moving my eyes to his, I grasped his face and pressed a gentle kiss to his lips, leaning my forehead against his.
“Thank you.”

His deep blue eyes opened to gaze into mine. I had sensed his concern about what he might have said to me in that future. I had carefully avoided that topic like a plague, almost afraid of what he would see when he looked into my eyes. *Oh what a tangled web we weave my love.*

“You are welcome,” he replied.

After my emotional rollercoaster of a day, I needed the soothing water and my woods. Walking the path towards my water’s edge, I found a path I had never noticed before. Wisps promptly appeared and danced curiously around me, indicating for me to follow. They led me to a small grotto-like area and immediately I was embraced with the spicy and intense smell of Crystal Grace flowers that reminded me of the Lilacs that grew next to my home. Walking hesitantly forward, full of curiosity, there sat a woman I had never met before, on a lovely decorative rock bench smiling towards me.

“You are the one they call Fenlin, I am Wisdom.”

I was shocked. *Here is Solas’ friend Wisdom.*

“Come, sit with me,” she said patting the bench beside her.

I walked somewhat nervously closer to her and sat down. She gave me a welcoming smile, and I just stared awestruck. Her long black hair hung down her back over a long blue silk gown. Her feet were bare and the bones delicate. Her eyes were crystal blue surrounded by long dark lashes, and soft high cheekbones, and a royal slope to her nose. Her skin was powder white, almost ethereal – she was without a doubt, beautiful. *Are all spirits Elvhen?*

“I will admit that I have been quite curious to meet you,” she said.

Her eyes pierced mine as she spoke; her voice was soft and held an accent I had never heard before.

“You have?” I croaked out and clearing my throat, I tried again. “You have?”

“Yes, your forest and lake are quite different than anything I have seen before.”

I smile pleased that she had noticed it and slightly cock my head in curiosity.

“How so?”

“Your forest has only one moon da’len; it is not of a world I have ever witnessed before.”

The smile fell as my mouth fell open to the realization. *Oh my fucking God…I completely forgot about only having one moon.*

“Do not worry da’len, he has not noticed it,” she told me reassuringly and patted my knee.

“But he will,” I mutter softly and hear her soft laughter.

“In time, perhaps, for now, he is more focused on time with you and not his surroundings. You are a very good influence on my friend.”

I glance at her and see she has a gentle smile on her face.
“But this is not why I brought you here tonight. I received a visitor that shared with me why you were brought here. I wanted to offer my assistance to you.”

I look at her in surprise. *So the Elvhen woman got me help, I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing.*

“Really? You want to help me?”

Her patient smile and slow nod, made me smile in return. *Well hell, what could it hurt to have some wisdom, not like I got a lot of it in surplus.*

“It would be nice to have some help because I don’t have a clue what the hell I am doing.”

Her soft laughter and smile reassured me, and we sat talking until it was time for me to wake.

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Leaving Redcliffe with the mages was a relief. I shouldn’t be relieved, especially knowing that soon the Elder One would descend on Haven, but I was. The many residents of Redcliffe lined the paths to watch our departure waving, bidding us safe travels. Would have been nice to receive this type of welcome when we arrived, but I guess I should be happy they aren’t throwing things.

I glance over at Varric and saw that he had a similar look on his face and he shrugged his shoulders.

“Damned if you do, damned if you don’t.”

I chuckled and nodded my head in agreement and looked towards the gates leading out of Redcliffe.

Our first night in camp was the first time Solas and I did not need to set the wards. Hell, there were so many wards surrounding the camp that any poor bastard who dared step foot within a hundred yards would light fucking Thedas up like the fourth of July.

Walking through the mage areas making sure everyone was well, I saw that there were so many children with them. *How many will die if I don’t say or do something?* Solas was obviously picking up on my worry because he was now watching me closely. His aura was always close, soothing, but still, it was his nature to mother-hen me when he felt the urge too.

*I could always speak with Wisdom on what I should do or…Fen’Harel.* One thing I knew was that Solas would never betray himself. Not willingly, so he would give me good counsel if I needed it. Sighing heavily, I was still unsure of who I should approach when he sat next to me at the fire later that evening.

“Would you walk with me, lethal’lan?”

I smile up at him with a cheeky grin.

“Hoping we find a quiet spot to make out for a while?” I tease him quietly enjoying the soft pink that spread across his cheeks.

Clearing his throat he stared at me for a long while, his desire palatable before he answered.

“I will bear that in mind as we walk.”

Chuckling, I stood and followed him from the camp. We had not walked far before he laced his
fingers with mine, and kissed the top of my head.

“I can feel your worry lethal’lan; will you share with me what is troubling you?”

With a heavy sigh, I glance up at him.

“The mage children, there are so many of them. I worry that they will be in danger coming to Haven.”

He squeezed my fingers and stopped, pulling me into him.

“Why would you think that they were in danger?”

“Because of this Elder One, he is not going to be happy once he realizes what has happened.”

He bent and placed a soft kiss on my lips and then smiled at me tenderly.

“You are one of the most beautiful spirits I have encountered in some time, lethal’lan. You are concerned for their safety and we have not even reached Haven yet.”

“You think I’m worrying about nothing,” I said quietly my tone full of defeat as I tucked my chin and stared at the ground.

His hand lifted my chin and held my gaze intently.

“No, I do not. I think you are a woman who cares and loves deeply.”

I stared into his eyes and gave him a soft smile. *Then let me love you then you stubborn man.*

He let go of my chin and we continued down the path holding hands just enjoying the silence of the woods. The feel of our hands together, combined with the soothing calm he brought me I felt the tension slowly begin to leave me. We walked for a long time and found ourselves on a rocky outcropping that overlooked the valley in a very secluded area, and I smiled up at him.

“This looks like a very quiet place.”

He smiled at me and shook his head.

“That it is, but not why I brought you here.”

Letting out a sigh of frustration, I crossed my arms and glance up at him.

“Are you sure? This place is almost too good to be true to not want to take advantage of.”

His sudden burst of laughter sent my heart racing and my skin tingled with the sounds caress.

“It is, and that is why I thought we would sit and share the night together enjoying a rare moment of quiet.”

I glance out over the darkening valley and sigh. *Well, this is embarrassing.*

“Or we could do that too. Now I feel bad for thinking such dirty thoughts.”

His laughter echoed around us, and he pulled me to him kissing me thoroughly making my toes curl.

“Don’t, it is comforting to know you have them about me.”
Sitting on the ground he pulled me onto his lap and letting my head fall into the crook of his neck we stared at the night sky as he began to point out constellations.

The water looked especially dark with the crescent moon that night, and I loved the way it cast darkness over the whole forest. I remembered sitting here on the water’s edge and drawing this image. Someone had once told me the picture felt lonely. I looked out over the water and realized now what they meant. I was lonely without him in my life, even there.

The shift in the air around me told me he was coming and I smiled letting my fingers slip through the water waiting for him. Maybe that is just it – have I always been waiting for him? When he came to sit next to me, I leaned against his side and let a soft sigh escape at the feeling of him near me.

“You do that often,” he said, his voice softly echoing around them with its deep rumble.

“What?” I question and run my fingers through his soft fur.

“Touching,” he finally answered me with a soft vibrating growl over my head.

I laugh and look up at him with a large smile into his red gaze and lean away from him.

“Yes, I guess I do. That is very rude of me, and I shouldn’t assume you want it. Would you prefer I didn’t?”

“You may continue,” he finally growled out after a few brief heartbeats of silence.

I let a soft chuckle escape, and run my fingers through his fur before lying against him again. Making my decision on who to ask about the mages, I chose him. We would arrive in Haven tomorrow and I needed to have some idea of what to do.

“I would appreciate your counsel if you are willing to give it?”

“If you wish it, it is yours,” he replied.

I felt his stillness as he waited for me to continue and I took a calming breath before I explained.

“I have recruited the Mages into the Inquisition and there are numerous children that are with them, this concerns me. This…Elder One, I know he will come to challenge me in Haven.” Moving quickly to hold his gaze, I held my hand out to stop his questions that I could feel were coming.

“Please don’t ask me how I know this, I just do.” With a slow nod of his head, he watched me carefully, and I lay back against him. “I need a way to make sure they will be safe.”

After a long moment of silence, the rumble of his voice vibrated against my side.

“You require a way for them to flee safely, or perhaps removing them out of harm’s way,” he said simply.

Sighing heavily, I ran my fingers through his fur enjoying the soft texture between my fingers.

“Remove them?” I feel him take a slight breath beneath my fingers as he explained.

“Send them away before this Elder One comes to you.”
The more I thought about it, the better his idea actually sounded and I felt the weight I had been carrying leave my shoulders.

“That might actually work,” I said tapping my chin. “Brilliant, that is exactly what I am going to do. What do I owe you for such savvy advice?”

I felt him slightly stiffen beneath my fingers. Did I say something wrong?

“I was not aware you knew of the ancient custom. As you have inquired, what shall you offer me as a payment?”

His growl echoed around me with the weight of his words. Oh shit, what did I just get myself into?

“Well, that is a good question. What do I have that I could possibly offer you that you don’t already?”

I sat quietly and knew that the man I loved was beneath all this fur, so I was curious about what he would want in return.

His silence was almost deafening as I waited for his answer.

“Do you trust me, Fenlin?” his voice rumbled around me and I could feel the stiffness in his body as he waited for my answer.

“Yes,” I answer him instantly sounding slightly breathless and wished it didn’t all because he said my name.

The Fade around me disappeared and my sight was instantly dark. Well, I know when he asks ‘do you trust me’, that he might turn me blind...good to know.

I tilted my head as I listened to the sound of the water lapping against the shore and the sounds of the owls in the trees. The gentle breeze on my face and the fur that was beneath my hand was abruptly gone. A small shiver of trepidation worked its way down my back as I sat on the ground alone.

Letting my hand fall to the ground that had been touching him, I waited patiently for what his payment for his advise would be. The voice that echoed around me was not Solas’, but was. It was deeper, thicker, richer and my heart pounded at the sound of it as it vibrated around me.

“Then your cost is a kiss.”

I sat quietly and let the sound of his voice rush over me. Getting off the ground, I held my arms to my sides. Really? He gets those all the time.

“That is what you want. May I as why?” I asked him totally ferklempt with his request.

“You asked what you have that I do not already. My answer is your kiss. I do not have this already,” he replied simply.

Seriously…I just kissed you a couple of…wait. I get it now. I kissed Solas a couple of hours ago, not Fen’Harel. Ahh…I see you tricky bugger and I can hear your smug smile already.

“I should tell you that I…love another.”

His silence was telling as was the joy in his aura at my confession that I felt rolling from him. Smug bastard…ugh.

“Then you are not willing to pay this price?” he questioned.
I smiled and shook my head, *oh no you don't, you asked for it this time handsome.*

“I am willing to pay your price, Fen’Harel. I just wanted you to know that my heart belongs to another.”

“I will bear that in mind.”

I could feel him slowly circling me, and goosebumps rose on my arms. His power was substantial as he moved around me. His nose glided softly along my neck as he breathed me in deeply, and I wanted to melt at the intimacy of the action. The feeling of his hand tilting my chin as his nose grazed along my jawline was intoxicating. He was purposely seducing me, and heat pooled low and needy for him.

His lips softly grazed my cheek, and the gentle touch set off a chain of shivers through my body. When I felt his breath on the skin of my face as his lips gently grazed my temple, it sent more shivers flurrying through my nerves, and I began to tremble.

When he finally pressed his lips to mine, it was not questioning but demanding my participation. *Did he think he could not share this side of him with me?* I grabbed the front of him and felt cold armor beneath my hands and pulled him into me aggressively demanding more from his kiss. I wanted him to know that he could – ask me for this.

He groaned softly with the action and grabbed my hips pulling me into him stealing my breath. The sudden sensation was over the top as I felt his need for me solid against my stomach. My blood boiled, and my brain went blank, blind need took over. He was completely overwhelming me with the passionate dance of his lips against mine and I bit his lower lip surprising him.

He suddenly pulled away and I heard his labored breathing and felt the gentle glide of his finger over my cheek.

“This other is very fortunate,” he finally said with a thickened voice full of desire as he caressed my face gently.

Trying to gather my composure, I laugh softly hearing the husky tone of my laugh.

“Have I paid the price to your satisfaction Fen’Harel?” I ask him calmly thankful that my voice stayed steady.

Again I feel his finger grace my cheek and I reach up and grab his hand. *Oh yes, I know these hands, these beautiful hands.* I reluctantly let his hand go and wait silently for his answer.

“You have,” he finally said.

“I only have one more question, if you would indulge me.” His tone inquiring and I let a soft sigh out almost hearing him smiling.

“If you must,” I tell him throwing his own words back at him.

His deep laughter surrounded me and sent my pulse racing again.

The question caught me off guard and I tucked my head down, so he could not see my reaction. *I did not know if Solas truly loved me. He had said it to me as he was walking away to die in Redcliffe, so I didn’t really count that as a true declaration of love.* I felt his hand gently lift my chin, and knew he
would not let me free of this until I answered.

“I want to believe he will,” I finally replied.

I heard his soft sigh, and he let my chin go.

“Wake up da’len.” My eyes slowly opened to the early morning chattering of birds in the air and touch my lips.

Chapter End Notes

da'len - little one/young one
Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading and support of my story.

Haven was a welcomed site I’m sure for all of us. I slid off of Etta, as Cullen and Leliana approached and knew what they wanted even before they spoke. It would never stop amazing me how much everyone expects me to be at their beck-and-call. *Come to think of it, I don’t think I’ve ever just returned and not given a report. I really got to learn how to say no more often.*

“Herald, we need you to brief us on what occurred in Redcliffe,” Cullen requested.

Sighing, I pulled my pack from the saddle. *I just fucking got here…it would be nice for once if I was greeted with ‘hello’ first.* Sighing again, I slowly turn and look at them. *Looks like I will try out that new word today and see how well it works.*

“No, but you can get your report from Cassandra she has all the details. I am going to take a bath maybe get some dinner and a couple of ales and relax, Cullen. I will see you both at the morning meeting.”

Their combined look of shock at my dismissal was precious as I swung my pack over my shoulder and walked by them. Varric gave me a thumbs up, and Solas gave me a soft smile at my sudden unwillingness to just do as they asked. Cassandra looked at me understandingly and gave me a slow nod.

“Of course,” Cullen said as I walked by and waved at them from over my shoulder heading towards my cabin.

“Thanks, I knew you would understand.”

Solas watched her walk towards her cabin pleased to see that she was beginning to fit into her authoritative role. He had watched as they took advantage of her giving nature, and that her only time to relax was when they were away. He could see the pressure they put on her was weighing heavily on her shoulders, something else he would regret her having to endure for his failure.

He also suspected that talking about Redcliffe and what happened would not be a discussion she would readily have again.

“Well that was something, looks like Sketch is not as much of a pushover as I thought,” Varric said quietly.

Solas glanced down at Varric sharply.

“Don’t look at me like that Chucky, I didn’t mean it in a bad way. I just meant that normally she is
too nice to everyone, it’s good to see her growing some claws and setting some boundaries, that’s all I meant.”

Solas nodded his head in agreement.

“In that case, I would have to agree with you Master Tethras.”

Grabbing his pack from his horse, he slid it over his shoulder leaving the stables for his own cabin.

Cullen looked towards Cassandra and saw her shake her head at him.

“It is not a report the Herald will want to give again, Commander, I assure you.”

Gesturing with her chin towards the Chantry she pulled her own pack from the animal.

“I will give the report.”

Cullen glanced at her for a moment and finally left the stables with Leliana for the Chantry to wait for Cassandra.

“She did appear tired,” Cullen commented to Leliana as they walked towards the Chantry.

“We shall soon find out what happened. From the short brief, Cassandra sent us, Fenlin’s experience was not pleasant.”

Lying back into the hot water, I closed my eyes and thought about the kiss. My skin flushed with the memory of the intensity of it. Reaching up, I ran my wet fingers over my lower lip as if I could still feel the press of his lips against mine.

It had been about seduction, possession, and passion and it was completely opposite of how he was outside of the fade. In the waking world, he was always controlled. Caring, attentive but the calm mask he wore slipped very rarely. His request for a kiss had been a bold move; he had let his mask slip. He must realize that I would know it was him…or maybe that was the point. He wanted me to know without having to tell me?

Letting out a heavy sigh, I opened my eyes and stare at my ceiling. Everything just has to be so fucking complicated.

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“The mages are ready to close the Breach when you are Fenlin.”

I glanced at Cullen and gave him a brief nod.

“The sooner the better, damn thing gives me a headache just looking at it. I suggest we head up their tomorrow.”

Everyone nodded their head in agreement with the plan. Biting my lip with nerves, I glance around for a moment. Now let’s hope I can convince you of getting everyone out of here.

“I would also like to suggest that everyone, not military, evacuate Haven before we do that.”
“But why Fenlin?” Leliana questioned me quickly not masking her surprise with the request.

“If it doesn’t work and it blows up the whole damn area, then the only casualties would be those up there. That is why Leliana. Haven’t enough men, woman and children died for the Breach?”

Cullen nodded his head in agreement.

“She’s right. Civilians do not need to be present for this to be done, and for their safety, it would be best if they were not here. We don’t know what will happen when she tries to close it. It will be difficult to get them out, but if we send them with enough supplies it should work.”

Everyone around the table glanced at each other and then one by one they slowly started to agree with my idea. By the end of the meeting, Cullen and Josephine would begin letting the non-military people in Haven know of the evacuation. With luck, much more would survive the Elder One’s attack.

Overall, the meeting went splendidly and I felt pretty good. Until, while walking through the Chantry towards the main doors, Vivienne stopped me with her frosty tone.

“Herald, may I have a moment of your time?” she requested coolly.

Making sure my face did not reflect my personal displeasure or my hesitation with talking to her, I approached with a bright smile as I stiffened my spine and squared my shoulders.

“Of course Madam Vivienne,” I replied politely.

The obvious look of disdain on her face took the smile from my lips and my stomach knotted at the coming confrontation. Could this woman be any more of a real pain in my ass?

“You’re choosing to offer an alliance with the mages has put poor Cullen into a precarious position. He doesn’t have enough templars to handle incidents. Some of the rank and file will need to be trained.”

I took a calming breath at the calculated way she spoke as if it were only my decision, and she had a right to order me around.

“It was not just my decision Vivienne, but everyone made that decision. I digress, as it is not any of your concern to know what we decide or don’t. Also, in response to your statement, no, I will not have soldiers trained to act as Templars. The Mages should have an opportunity to govern themselves and they will get that.”

I held her gaze steadily not missing the slight twitch at the corner of her jaw. Good, I am glad to see that the feeling of dislike is mutual. I would hate to think I was the bitchy one in this relationship.

“My dear, there has never been a greater threat to mages than the Breach. Until it is closed, no one is safe.” Her eyes narrow as she crossed her arms. “Magic is dangerous, just as fire is dangerous. Anyone who forgets this truth gets burned.”

“Yes, and a falling tree hit by lightning may kill you too Vivienne. Mages deserve the same inalienable rights as non-mages. Just because you were enabled to live a pampered existence, does not mean that everyone had that opportunity.”

I could see that my answer angered her as her lips hardened into a straight line.

“As you will no doubt have a hand in shaping it, what future do you see for mages then if not in
circles?"

*Oh, she is really not going to like me after this conversation.*

“A free one, Vivienne.”

Vivienne’s eyes hardened to slate.

“I’m so glad we could have this talk and I could clear that up for you,” I said with a touch of sarcasm.

*God that felt good.* Walking away from her, I felt her gaze drilling holes into my back even as I swung the door open.

He glanced out his window and saw the flurry of movement around Haven. She had taken his advice, an evacuation of the town was in motion. His eyes followed her as she left the Chantry and his stomach clenched instantly with desire. He should never have taken a payment from her for something so simple.

He could tell by her surprised look she had not known that it was customary to offer some token for obtaining advice from an Evanuris. Turning from the window, he went to sit at his desk. What he had done had been dangerous, but her soft admission of love had taken him by surprise and made him reckless. She was not a woman to love lightly, for her it would be everything or nothing. She was also not a woman he could deceive; she had known it was him. He felt it as soon as her lips met his. Her passionate response and her demand that he reciprocate told him everything he needed to know. Now he had but to wait to see what she would do with such knowledge. It was in fact, a relief to not have to keep that from her when he thought about it.

Picking up his book he looked at one of her illustrations and studied it carefully. Each one was specific to the topic of the chapter, and this one was about the proper use of Fade forces. Her use of colors was bold, and her representation of the Elven using the Fade to create a pressure showed by the glowing around the hands of the mage. In the bottom right corner, he thought it resembled a word and turned the book just slightly, he smiled. She had been leaving him clues that she loved him even then with the simple word *lath* embedded in the drawing. He started looking through the others and found the same word embedded in all of them.

Rubbing his hands over his face he felt her aura as it approached his cabin and closed the book. He did not know how he was going to explain to her that her mark was his failing by allowing Corypheus to obtain his orb. Her finding out he was Fen’Harel was not as daunting as her finding out that it was his magic that was corrupting her hand. He was not too sure she would continue to love him once she knew.

“Enter lethal’lan,” he called towards the door.

Her gentle smile and the subtle sway of her hips as she walked towards him closing his door behind her made his heart race.

“I believe greetings are in order first,” she said to him and he couldn’t stop the small smile as she slid onto his lap.

“Indeed,” he answered her wrapping his arms around her loosely.
He stared into her amber eyes and saw the playful twinkle before she caressed his face and leaned in pressing her lips against his. She kisses him once, twice until he had had a small taste of her and he knew it would never be enough. His hands slid around her waist and pulled her just that fraction of an inch closer. Her soft moan in response set his senses spinning. Her subtle vanilla scent, the seductive glide of her tongue against his was undoing him. The delicate mingling of their shared breath and the gentle caress of her fingers on his neck brought a soft moan to his lips. He would never get enough of her.

Pulling slightly away from him, I stare into his eyes and saw the desire he held in there for me and it was breathtaking.

“We will attempt to close the Breach tomorrow.”

“It will work lethal’lan.”

Yes, it will, but will I survive Corypheus afterward? That was the million dollar question. Would everything follow what little I remember about game progression or has everything I’ve done changed the way events will play out? He must have felt my anxiety because his eyes suddenly turned to concern.

“You are worried something will go wrong.”

“I always am,” I tell him giving him a lopsided smile.

*****

The mages that were assigned to help seal the Breach all gathered behind me and my mark flared warningly as I stood beneath the swirling hole in the sky. Looking up, I took a deep breath. Solas stood on one side and Cassandra on the other. I felt his aura’s reassuring touch, and Cassandra laid her hand on my shoulder.

“Whenever you are ready, Fenlin.”

I glance up at her and give her a brief nod and heard Solas talking to the Mages.

“Mages, Focus past the Herald. Let her will draw from you.”

The power of their combined focus rushed into me, and the anchor ignited. Gritting my teeth with the sudden pain, I took a step forward. The forces of the fade pushing on me with every step making me fight to get closer to the center. Finally, completely beneath it, I thrust my hand into the air and the connection was instantaneous.

The scars that ran over my hand and up my arm glowed brightly with the connection, and my arm resembled something that had once been shattered and poorly put back together. Close mother fucker, close. Abruptly my connection was severed with a loud boom, as the Breach resembled an atomic bomb cloud and the wave of the blast knocked everyone from their feet.

Lying on the ground, I stared up at the sky and saw the small green scar, but otherwise, it was finally closed. The sky really is pretty without that thing screwing up the view. His bald head is suddenly blocking my view looking at me worriedly and it reminded me of when I first got here.
“Are you okay lethal’lan,” he asked concerned.

“Well, that depends on your definition of okay?” I replied.

His answering smile was beautiful and I took the arm he offered, pulling myself up. The sounds of the celebratory cheers around the ruined temple were loud.

“You did it,” Cassandra said rushing towards me with a large smile. “Let us return to Haven.”

“First drinks on me, Boss,” Bull called over his shoulder as he followed after Varric.

The touch of his fingers lacing with mine gave me a small measure of comfort as we walked. Soon everything would go to hell in a handbasket, and I was wearing gas-soaked panties.

Chapter End Notes

lath - love
I stood outside of the Chantry with my stomach in knots. Soon, the Elder One would attack – I could feel it. The sound of boots crunching over rock came from behind me and I turned to see that it was Cassandra that approached.

“Solas confirms that the heavens are scarred, but calm. The Breach is finally sealed. We’ve reports of lingering rifts and many questions remain. But this was a victory; word of your heroism has spread.”

“I didn’t do it alone, Cassandra. Everyone helped me close the Breach.”

“Perhaps you’re right; this was a victory for an alliance. One of the few in recent memory, but with the Breach closed, that alliance will need a new focus.”

The loud clamor of the alarms rang in the air and my stomach dropped.

*It begins.*

Cullen ran by us wielding his own sword, “forces approaching – to arms!”

Cassandra looked around quickly pulling her sword and moving to follow after him.

“We must get to the gates, hurry.”

Following her down the path towards the gate I saw that everyone had already gathered.

“So, it would seem celebratory drinks are on hold,” Bull joked.

I glance up at him and see that he is smirking at me and I chuckle.

“So it would seem.”

“Cullen, what is it?” Cassandra questioned him quickly.

“One watch guard reporting, it is a massive force the bulk of it over the mountain.”

Josephine looks at him worriedly, “under what banner?”

He said glancing at her quickly, “None.”

Josephine looked at him in shock and then a sudden pounding on the gate made everyone flinch and stare at the door hesitantly.

“I can’t come in unless you open!”

The desperate sound of a man’s voice yells through the wooden gates.
Moving forward I shove the locks open and push with Cullen’s help. A young man with a large brimmed hat that shrouded his entire face stood with two daggers in his hands as a Venatori warrior fell dead at his feet. Sheathing his weapons swiftly, he stepped towards me and Cullen brandished his sword warningly. The young man hesitated for a second, then continued towards me with a sense of urgency.

“I’m Cole; I came to warn you, to help. People are coming to hurt you, but you already knew that.”

I look at him steadily and nod my head. I forgot about Cole...he can read thoughts, shit.

“I won’t tell them,” he said quickly. “I came to warn you that the Templars come to kill you.”

Cullen stormed forward angrily sheathing his sword.

“Templars! Is this the order's response to our alliance with the Mages, attacking blindly?”

Cole looked at Cullen and nodded his head; the only part of him visible was his chin.

“The Red Templars went to the Elder One.” Suddenly he looks at me. “You know him? He knows you, you took his mages.”

Turning from us, he pointed towards a rocky outcropping and I saw him in all his hideous glory.

I could see that red lyrium had taken over his entire body and it was but a skeletal structure for him now. What skin that was left resembled leather and it was pulled taut over the lyrium frame. How does anything survive like that?

“I know that man that is standing next to him,” Cullen murmured from beside me.

“He is very angry you took his mages.”

Looking up at Cullen anxiously, ‘Got any ideas Commander?”

He glanced down at me and there was a battle, hardened look about him as he spoke.

“Haven is no fortress, the fact that only our military forces are here is in our favor. If we are to withstand this monster, we must control the battle. Turn one of those trebuchets towards the mountain and bury the bastards. Be careful Fenlin.”

Turning away from me, he addressed the handful of mages that went with us to the Breach.

“MAGES, YOU HAVE SANCTION TO ENGAGE THEM. THAT IS SAMPSON; HE WILL NOT MAKE IT EASY. INQUISITION, WITH THE HERALD! FOR YOUR LIVES! FOR ALL OF US!”

My crew ran forward and Solas’ aura instantly embraced me. I could feel his fear through the connection and glance at him silently conveying with my own aura how much he meant to me. I knew that if I didn't make it out of this he would find what I left for him in his pack.

“Okay, guys we fight. We protect the trebuchets and keep them firing.”

Bull, pulling his enormous double-edged ax from his back and tossed it in his large hands.

“Then let’s go kick some Venatori ass, Boss.”

“It is definitely never boring around here,” Dorian muttered pulling his staff from his back.
Bent over trying to catch my breath now that the first trebuchet was taken care of, a soldier ran towards us talking a mile a minute.

“Herald! The other trebuchet has been overrun by Red Templars. This way,” he said taking off at a run towards the machine.

Groaning, I run after him and we found the small force trying to turn the trebuchet towards the town.

Bull roared as him and Cassandra charged forward, while Cole stealthed to follow after them. Varric and Sera began picking off the archers while Solas, Dorian, Vivienne and myself handled ranged attacks and barriers. When the battle was over, Bull jumped onto the platform and began turning the trebuchet towards the mountain.

When he hit the release mechanism, a loud thundering boom of the sudden avalanche thundered in the air. The avalanche rushed towards the bulk of the force, crushing them beneath the heavy white snow. The loud cheers of the men and woman, who had seen it, rose loudly in the air. Those cheers turned to screams, mine included, as a dragon came through the flurries of the rushing snow directly towards them.

“Shit!” I yelled diving towards the ground as it swooped down and grabbed the trebuchet in its claws, shattering the large machine.

“That can’t be possible,” Solas muttered as he pulled me to my feet.

“GET TO THE GATES,” I yelled.

We ran back towards the gates and found Cullen motioning at people to hurry up and get inside. Scrambling through them, he slammed the doors, locking them and looked at me with angry frustration.

“We need everyone back to the Chantry. It is the only building strong enough that might hold against…that beast.” Shaking his head radiating frustration he held my gaze. “At this point, just make them work for it.”

So we did exactly as he advised, made them work very hard for it. We killed every Red Templar and Venatori we found as we worked our way through Haven towards the Chantry. By the time we reached the building, we were covered in blood and gore and exhausted. Bull pulled the door to the Chantry open and we entered quickly so he could shut and bolt it.

Cullen rushed towards me as soon as we entered and I could see his anger and frustration while Chancellor Roderick followed after him.

What in the hell is he still doing here?

“Fenlin, our position is not good. That dragon stole back anytime you might have earned us.”

Cole stepped towards me on silent feet.

“I’ve seen an Archdemon, I was in the Fade but it looked like that.”

Cullen looked at him irritated.

“I don’t care what it looks like! It’s cut a path for that army. They’ll kill everyone in Haven.”
Cole lifted his head so you could see his liquid blue eyes clearly.

“The Elder One doesn’t care about the village, he only wants the Herald.”

I look at him for a moment and then rub my face.

“If you know why he wants me, Cole, I’m all ears.”

His eyes held mine, and if felt as if he looked into my soul; it was a bit unnerving.

“I don’t know why he wants to kill you, no one else matters but he’ll crush them, kill them anyway. I don’t like him,” he stated plainly and I couldn’t help but laugh at his simple words.

“Well, I don’t like him either.”

Cullen looked at him in annoyance.

“You don’t…it doesn’t matter.” Turning towards me he held my gaze.

“Fenlin, there are no tactics to make this survivable. The only thing that slowed them was the avalanche. We could turn the remaining trebuchet, causing one last slide.”

“You do realize that if we do that, it will bury Haven and all of us under it, yes?”

He shook his head and closed his eyes briefly before opening them to look at me.

“We are dying Fenlin; we can choose how we do that, many don’t get that choice.”

Chancellor Roderick walked forward and tapped Cullen on the arm.

“There is a path; you wouldn’t know it unless you made the summer pilgrimage as I have. There is an escape, she must have shown me; Andraste must have shown me so I could tell you.”

I look at him and then Cullen.

“Then that is what we will use to get everyone out of here. Chancellor Roderick will lead the way out.”

Cullen looked at me suddenly very uncomfortable and unsure.

“That will work, but what of your escape, Fenlin?”

I stared at the floor and shook my head just slightly. Taking a deep breath I swallow the lump in my throat before looking at him and squaring my shoulders.

“Follow Roderick and take the others with you, I will turn the trebuchet and bury the town.”

I look at Bull and he held my steady gaze, with a mixed expression, but mainly of frustration on his face and I grab his large arm.

“Do not let him follow me, Bull.”

He didn’t need me to say his name and with his nod, I turned away from his knowing gaze. Moving towards the door I felt the Chancellor’s hand on my arm.

“I am sorry I ever doubted you.”
Giving him a quick nod, I slipped out the door before Solas could realize I was gone. *At least he will be safe with the others.*

Solas heard the Commander yell for everyone to follow Chancellor Roderick through the Chantry and turned towards him.

“Where is Fenlin?” He questioned him quickly searching for her aura. Not seeing or feeling her, he looked at the Commander.

Cullen looked at him with sadness in his eyes and he felt his heart stop.

“No”

“No, we have too…” Solas cut him off with a hard punch to his jaw knocking him to the ground.

“You let her go out there alone?” he yelled at him angrily as he stood over him suddenly breathing heavy.

“It was her decision, Solas,” Cullen explained.

He heard the loud roar of the dragon and his stomach clenched at the sound, while his heart pounded.

“She will die out there!”

Cullen moved from the ground and stood in front of him just as angry and upset.

“You don’t think I know that?” he yelled back into his face.

Solas suddenly felt physically ill. Starting for the doors, he stopped when a large hand grasped his shoulder.

“She didn’t want you to die with her, Solas. She asked me to make sure you didn’t follow her,” Bull said calmly from behind him.

Dropping his head, his eyes quickly shut, and he felt the tears gather around the edges at his complete failure. *Assan had sacrificed herself for him, and now, Fenlin was repeating the action.* Nodding his head in understanding, Bull removed his large hand moved from his shoulder. His body numb, he turned following the others through the Chantry.
Corypheus

Chapter Notes

I know you all probably thought I would just leave you hanging...I couldn't. I hope you enjoy the two chapters in one day and thank you again for following the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Making the final turn on the trebuchet, I heard the loud roar of the dragon as it flew overhead. Here he fucking comes...crap! Jumping from the platform, I dove for the ground. The heat of the dragon’s fire hit the ground cutting me off from the trebuchet and I felt the rumble of the ground beneath me as the giant creature landed somewhere behind me.

Scrambling to stand, the dragon slowly stalked towards me, roaring into my face and I fell back as I tried to get away from it.

“Enough!”

The disjointed sound of his voice from the red lyrium sent shivers of fear through my body. Rolling to my feet, I watched with a terrible sense of dread as the creature of what used to be a man walked through the fire towards me.

“Pretender, you toy with forces beyond your ken no more.”

Stiffening my spine and squaring my shoulders, I stared into the Magister's brown almost black emotionless eyes.

“I see I am not the only one playing with forces they don’t understand or was blowing up the conclave you’re master plan?” My snarky reply only makes the features of his face even more grotesque as they twist with loathing. “You do not frighten me.”

His snarling smile sent shivers of apprehension up my spine. His face a roadmap of lyrium veins and scars, quite hideous to look at.

“Words mortals often hurl into the darkness. Once they were mine, they are always lies. Know me, know what you have pretended to be, exalt the Elder One, the will that is Corypheus. You will kneel,” he said pointing one of his claw-like fingers towards the ground.

I shake my head at him and smile sarcastically. If I am going to die, then it's go big or go home… right?

“You’re insane if you think that’s happening willingly,” I spat at him.

He stepped closer and I could hear the disjointed song coming from him and suppressed the urge to rub my head at the noise.

“You will resist, you will always resist. It matters not, I am here for the anchor, and the process of removing it begins now.”

He pulled Solas’ orb from beneath his cloak and it glowed a tainted red as the anchor in my hand
flared angrily. Gripping my wrist at the sudden pain, I gaze at the flare and glow of the scars on my hand and wrist.

“It is your fault, Herald. You interrupted a ritual years in the planning, and instead of dying, you stole its purpose.”

I felt the sudden pull on the anchor as the Magister tried to remove it, and I hit my knees gritting my teeth.

“I do not know how you survived, but what marks you have touched, what you flail at rifts, I crafted to assault the very heavens. And you used the anchor to undo my work, the gall.”

Swallowing the cry of pain that wants to escape, I tear my gaze from my blindingly bright hand and look at him.

“Well, why don't you tell me what it was meant to do then?” I said between my clenched teeth.

“It is to bring certainty where there is none. For you, it was the certainty that I would always come for it.”

The immediate revulsion that rolled through my body was noticeable as the Magister walked towards me. Grabbing my wrist he yanked me up into the air and stared angrily into my eyes as he slightly shook me as he spoke.

“I once breached the fade in the name of another to serve the Old Gods of the Empire in person. I found only chaos and corruption. Dead whispers for a thousand years, I was confused, no more. I have gathered the will to return under no name but my own. To champion withered Tevinter, and correct this blighted world. Beg that I succeed, for I have seen the throne of the God’s and it was empty.”

He suddenly threw me away from him with a disgusted sound and wiped his hands. I landed hard on the platform of the trebuchet, trying to catch my breath at the sudden action.

“The anchor is permanent. You have spoiled it with your stumbling.” His voice was angry as he stared at the ground before piercing me with his cold gaze. “So be it, I will begin again and find another way to give this nation the God it requires.”

I slowly got to my feet and stared at him as he walked towards me with his dragon following closely behind him. I saw the bright flare of light shoot through the sky out of the corner of my eye, and I let a breath of relief out knowing they were safe, he would be safe.

“And you, I will not suffer even an unknowing rival, you must die.”

I squared my shoulders again, and prepared myself for what would presumably be my death and took a step closer to the releasing mechanism of the trebuchet.

“I didn't realize you would talk me to death. Do you ever shut up? You’re no God; you will never be a God, you long-winded prick. If you’re going to kill someone, then fucking do it, don’t just talk about it.”

Kicking the mechanism quickly, I jumped from the platform and prayed to whoever was listening there was a place for me to hide while the avalanche came crashing down over Haven. I saw the darkened hole as the thunderous sound of rushing snow met my ears and dove for it. Hitting a large piece of wood on the way down, it knocked the wind from me, before I could scream and I hit the ground on my back hard as flurries of snow from above fell on my face. Groaning with pain, I felt
Solas clenched his eyes shut at the thunderous sound of the avalanche as it roared towards Haven. The sound of the dragon’s roar barely heard over the din as his eyes slowly opened and he saw it fly away while snow rushed over the town. Turning away from the sight of the snow-covered town, he could not breathe. His chest ached, and it was because there was now a hole where his heart used to be. *Why hadn’t he told her he loved her?* He took a shuddering breath and felt the large presence of the Qunari next to him, silently walking with him as did Varric on his other side.

He did not speak as the tears silently ran down his face as they walked through the deep snow. He no longer cared about his people, about bringing the Elvhen culture back to greatness. Everything he cared for was now gone beneath an avalanche of snow, and he found he did not want to endure this existence any longer.

“Wake up lethal’lan…you must wake now.”

The words came through a foggy haze that echoed down a long, dark tunnel. My eyes slowly opened and looked around the darkened area.

“Am I dead? Is this where the dream ends and I wake up?”

There was a husky laughter that surrounded me and I looked around anxiously.

“No child, you live and it has not been a dream.”

A mage light suddenly appeared above me and the Ancient’s face is illuminated by the soft glow.

“How?”

“How am I here? I am with you, that is all you need to know for now. Come now, before the wolf truly thinks you dead and does something rash.”

*Solas*

Groaning, I slowly roll to my knees and saw that my staff had survived the fall and was still in one piece. Dragging it towards me, I used it to help me unsteadily stand. Looking around at the small cave I had landed in, it was covered in ice, and I shivered as the cold started to settle into me.

“You did well lethal’lan, but you have more yet to do,” she said while tracing a heating rune on my chest and smiling at me.

I looked at her and sigh.

“Well of course I do, how any of this could be easy is unimaginable.”

Her sudden soft, husky laughter filled the chamber echoing around us as she slid my arm around her waist.

“You were the hardest decision I ever had to make, lethal’lan. You were always bound by duty to me, but your love for him was eternal. For you, he would have moved mountains, remade worlds; he
would have challenged me for you. If we allow him to continue believing you are dead, there is no telling what he will do.”

*I must have hit my head harder than I thought.*

“What do you mean, or is this another riddle-like conversation?”

“I will take you as close to their camp as I dare. From there, you will continue doing what you have been doing.”

Okay, so no answer…got it.

“I know I should have asked before but who are you, exactly? I know you’re an ancient like Solas, I just can’t find the name. You feel…familiar.”

Her soft laughter against my side as we walked down the rock-laden corridor was almost soothing.

“I am known as Mythal, lethallan. You were once my banal’ras.”

I am sure she felt my shock from her answer, and I glance at her suddenly stopping.

“Shadow?”

Her soft laughter felt warm over my cold skin as she urged me to continue walking, and each step was more painful than the one before.

“Yes, my shadow, my arrow. You were deadly and served me well for many millennia.”

*This is why I wear her vallis’lin, I was her slave.* Her sudden intake of breath surprised me.

“You were never my slave, lethallan you were my Sentinel.”

Feeling instantly ungrateful I glanced up at her.

“I am sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you…this is just all…seriously bizarre.”

Her sudden laughter made me feel slightly calmer and I saw the opening of the cave ahead.

“That it has been lethallan, I will share everything with you soon, I promise,” she answered as the anchor suddenly flared.

The camp was profoundly silent with the knowledge that the Herald had sacrificed herself for them. He found himself surrounded by those she had recruited hovering around a fire for warmth, yet he could not feel the heat from the flame, nor did he recognize their presence around him. There was a heaviness in his chest that only increased by the minute without her.

He pulled his pack from his back and opened it to pull out a healing potion for Cassandra, and saw that on the top sat his book and her sketchbook. She had slid them into his pack without him noticing so they would not be destroyed.

With unsteady hands, he slowly reached for her sketchbook and pulled it from within. Opening to the first page he saw her flowing script.
His eyes flooded and he buried his face in his hands after dropping the book into his bag, forgetting about the needed potion.

The sound of a blaring whistle from a guardsman made his eyes dart towards him.

“Lone walker approaches Commander.”

Standing abruptly he moved towards the guard. *I am a fool...I should not hope for her survival.*

“Where?”

He pointed to the area they had entered three hours earlier.

“That way,” he said with a slight stutter at his intense gaze.

Running in that direction he knew he shouldn’t dare hope, but felt the small flame ignite regardless. He stood at the opening of the camping site and saw the instant familiar glow from the tip of a staff. Running forward quickly, he felt her aura weakly reach out to him as he caught her before she hit the ground. The guard turned and called out to the others waiting in the opening.

“IT’S HER! THE HERALD LIVES!”

Holding her to him, he picked her up relieved she was in his arms and alive, happy that he could now breathe again and angry that she had been so foolish all at the same time.

“You will never do that again,” his tone was commanding and full of relief.

Her soft smile with his words only made his tears fall quicker as he kissed her cold lips.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered before slipping unconscious.

Holding her tightly to him, he strode back towards the camp.

Chapter End Notes

banal’ras - shadow
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
Thank you, everyone, for the wonderful comments and kudos that you leave. I cannot describe how happy that makes me feel knowing that someone finds a moment of relaxation just reading my drabble.

My eyes opened slowly to a vaguely familiar scene, the good news was I was recovering from a fall and not an arrow. I took a steady breath, and though I felt sore, I was not broken just bruised. Was that really Mythal that helped me from the cave? What did she mean Sentinel...shadow...arrow? Letting out a soft sigh of annoyance at the cryptic ancient, I glance down at his sleeping face. The familiar feel of his aura, while he was slumped over sleeping, is comforting, plus he held my hand beneath his face as he slept. I am unsure how long I have been asleep, but by the look of him, it has not been long enough for him to get enough sleep if the bags under his eyes tell me anything. I knew he was going to be furious with me for doing it alone, and probably more so with my reasoning.

Running my other hand gently over his head, his eyes flash open instantly to look at me. I gave him a wobbly smile, and he moved swiftly towards me pulling me suddenly against his chest and onto his lap. His aura swirled around us in a mixture of anger, hurt and fear even desperation. I let my fingers brush over the skin of his neck, holding him to me and felt his shuddering breath before his arms tightened around me and he buried his face into my neck.

It was then I felt the wetness of his tears against my skin, and silently I tried to comfort him. The tremors that ran through him as he wept destroyed me, and I stroked his back in soothing motions pushing my aura to surround him. His normal calm façade removed and for a moment he is laid bare for me to see, and it is humbling.

His feelings for me are clear in his gaze when he pulled back to look at me and stole my breath by the beauty held within the stormy blue eyes. He appeared to be about to say something when we heard the sounds of arguing between Cullen, Cassandra, Leliana and Josephine outside. Closing my eyes at the auditory intrusion, I let out a loud sigh of annoyance as I dropped my head to his shoulder. Just once...could it not be like a fucking daycare?

Cullen: “What would you have me tell them? This isn’t what we asked them to do.”

Cassandra: “We cannot simply ignore this, we must find a way!”

Cullen: “And who put you in charge? We need a consensus, or we have nothing.”

Josephine: “Please we must use reason. Without the infrastructure of the Inquisition, we’re hobbled.”

Cullen: “That can’t come from nowhere.”

Leliana: “She didn’t say it could.”
“ENOUGH! This is getting us nowhere.”

Cullen: “Well we’re agreed on that much.”

“How long has that been going on?” I ask him and he shook his head.

“Hours,” he answered running his hand over my cheek tenderly. “And we are far from done discussing what you did.”

“How long has that been going on?” I tease him softly and see the slight stiffening of his shoulders.

“It is not a joking matter Fenlin, you could have died. I believed you had died. What you did was foolish.”

“But I didn’t die, and I am sorry that I put you through that, Solas,” I said quickly. Please, don’t press me for answers right now.

“You argue semantics, and that did not sound apologetic.” He countered his tone aggravated and hurt.

I sighed heavily and leaning up, held his hurt blue gaze steadily.

“What are we doing, Solas? We have made no actual verbal declarations of love to each other, yet we fight like an old married couple.” Running my hand over his face, I smile at him more afraid of what he won’t say to me than when I was facing Corypheus. Swallowing past the lump of nervousness in my throat, I dig deep for some courage. “Perhaps you would articulate to me what I am to you?”

Staring at me in stunned surprise, I moved to get up from his lap and felt his arms tighten around my waist.

“I’m not looking for that answer right now, Solas. I know you care for me as I do you; I just want to understand in what capacity. Think about it for a while, I know there are considerations you must take into account.”

Kissing his cheek, he let me get up so I could leave the tent and walked towards Cassandra who stood next to the others staring at a map of sorts. When she saw me she gave me a watery smile.

“Me too,” I mumble before she lets me go. Glancing around at everyone, I noticed their uncertain gazes. Cullen held my gaze for a moment and I saw a dark bruise on his jaw and raised my eyebrow at the sight.

“How did you get that?”

“It was deserved,” was all he would comment on the matter, and I let a sigh of annoyance out when he wouldn’t elaborate. I looked at the others and none of them would meet my gaze.

“Well, that is curious. What the hell happened?

“So, by the loud arguing I overheard, we are at a standstill on what to do?” By everyone’s nods of
agreement, I glance around the area. I saw that my team sat around the fire and caught Varric’s wink at me and gave him a soft smile. I glance back at Cullen questioningly.

“Do we know where we are?”

Cullen shook his head as he stared down at a makeshift map.

“Not entirely. We are aware of where Haven used to be but unsure of where we should go from here.”

Giving him a slight smile I nodded my understanding. This would be where I seriously wished I remembered the game better and not just snippets. Damn it, I know they all go somewhere.

“Well, homeless is not an option. We need to find another place to call our base, and soon. After what happened in Haven, I do not believe we are going to find any willing landlords anytime soon and I would prefer to not have that thing find us out here.”

I felt his aura reach out for mine tentatively and I turned to look at him.

“A word please.”

I nod and follow after him walking a short distance away from the others. His aura is a swirl of confusion, and I hid a smile by tucking my head. Words are his thing, he will think hard about exactly what he wants to say, …silly man, he could just say he loves me and I would be good. He cleared his throat lightly and I glance up at him. His posture is of his teacher mode, with his arms folded behind his back, and I suppress a sigh for what was to come.

“The orb Corypheus carried, the power he used against you, it is Elven. Corypheus used the orb to open the Breach. Unlocking it must have caused the explosion that destroyed the Conclave. I do not yet know how he survived, nor am I certain how people will react when they learn of the orbs origin.”

Shaking my head, I glance out over the snowy landscape. Must have? I know what it is, whose it belongs too…and how he got it. Yeah, if they knew you let him take it they would shit kittens. Rubbing my face, I tried to keep from showing a knowing expression.

“How do you know what it is?” I finally asked him.

I saw his features slightly tighten, but when his eyes would not hold mine and preferred to scan the snowy scene, it was telling.

“They were foci, used to channel ancient magic. I have seen such things in the Fade, old memories of older magic. Corypheus may think it Tevinter. His empire’s magic was built on the bones of our people.”

Our people? That is an interesting statement coming from you and your love for the Dalish. Ugh…I just want to slap you with this useless ‘I saw it in the Fade’ crap. Sighing heavily at the damn game they played, I rubbed my face again.

“Okay, well thank you for the history lesson but what do you suggest we do about it?”

“There are steps that we may take to ensure the safety of the Inquisition. If we scout to the north, there is a place where we may go, where the Inquisition may grow.”

“Well, if you’re sure it is still there.”
“It is,” his tone was absolutely confident, his eyes reassuring.

“Then that is what we will do, we cannot stay here.”

Turning from him back towards the camp his hand clasped mine and I turned back towards him. His eyes held mine for a long moment questioning and reaching up I let my hand run over his jaw. *How can he not know he means everything to me?* Letting my hand slide away from his face, I walked towards the others to tell them of the plan as he followed quietly behind me.

*****

Talk about a fucking hike, by the third day I was starting to think that whatever place he had ‘*seen in the Fade*’ had fallen apart. It wasn’t long before I saw that I wasn’t the only one starting to lose hope at finding this place. *We need a distraction, something to lighten the mood.* Grabbing a handful of snow, pleased that no one was the wiser, I threw the nicely rounded ball of snow at Leliana’s cloaked back.

She turned quickly looking at the back of her cloak and her blue eyes finally looked at me as I smiled at her playfully scooping up another handful of snow, my intent clear. Leliana smiled just as wickedly and followed my action by grabbing a handful of snow herself.

It did not take long for the impromptu snowball fight to begin between everyone, I even saw Vivienne throwing one at Josephine. It was a free for all, and I almost lost my footing because I was laughing at Cassandra’s expression when Cullen got her in the face. When I smacked Solas in the back of his bald head it was definitely game on when he gave me a wicked smile that promised retribution.

“No cheating with using your barrier, Dorian” I call out laughing when one of my snowballs bounces off of his barrier.

Sera lobbed a snowball at my chest, and I slid sideways, and it barely missed me.

“It is not cheating my dear; it is called a tactical evasion.” He replied flippantly as he chucked another snowball towards Cullen.

I was not paying attention to where Solas was and I felt snow suddenly melting down my back and let out screech at the cold rushing down my spine.

“Well, that was refreshing…I hope you sleep lightly *hahren.*”

His answering laughter made my heart race. Cresting the next hill was when we all saw it and stopped suddenly – it was a fabulous sight.

“It is here,” I mutter and hear his quiet snort.

“You had doubts?” he questioned with a raised eyebrow at me.

“I had concerns,” I answered him with a cheeky smile as others stopped and looked out at the valley with the enormous castle.

“Is that?” Josephine pointed at it in speechless surprise.

“Skyhold” Solas answered her before leading us down the hill towards our new home.

*****
Our new home was structurally sound but required a crap load of clean up. For weeks we were dragging out debris, sweeping, and mopping. The best part was even though we were smack dab in the middle of the Frostbacks, the Castle, and its grounds had some sort of magical thermostat that kept the place at an even seventy. The only time I actually felt the bite of the cold mountain air was on the battlements.

Josephine had designated a very large room up two flights of stairs, off of the main hall for my quarters. Bull helped me with moving out the broken furniture and debris. The view from the two balconies was beautiful. I could see the large mountain range, with its snowy peaks. One I could look out over the valley where a lovely river ran next to it. It would take a little while to make it habitable, but I could see myself sitting here drawing for hours. My suggestion was for everyone to salvage what we could from the old furniture to Vivienne’s utter disapproval, but at the moment we were on a very strict budget and that included my room too.

After little more than a month, pilgrims from Haven started arriving in Skyhold and it was interesting to see how quickly everyone pulled together to help fix up the old castle. Bull, Varric, and Sera took charge of getting the tavern set up, and they started brewing some sort of concoction that smelt like dirty feet. I don’t know how they drank that shit, but I would not. I would wait for the shipments from Orlais and Orzammar to reach us.

Dorian and Solas took care of the library and set it back into a semblance of order. When they had finished it, it looked quite nice. The shelves didn’t have a lot of books in them, but that just meant there was room for more. There was a surprising amount of books in elven and this is where Cassandra found me, looking through what books had been left in the castle.

“I’m glad I found you.”

“Oh, what do you need?”

“Come with me,” she gestured towards the stairs. We walked down the long staircase leading from the library to the rotunda towards the main hall and there were many new pilgrims that had made their way to Skyhold working in the main keep.

“They arrive daily from everywhere, Skyhold is becoming a pilgrimage.”

We walked through the main hall and she looked at me carefully.

“If news of Skyhold has reached these people, it will have reached the Elder One. We have the walls and the numbers to put up a fight here, but this threat is far beyond the war we anticipated.” She looked at me knowingly and I nodded my head in agreement.

“But we now know what allowed you to stand against Corypheus, what drew him to you.”

I snorted and held up my hand and wiggled my fingers.

“He came for this, and now it’s useless to him so he wants me dead. That’s it Cassandra, nothing more than the anchor.”

Cassandra stopped and stared at me for a quiet moment.

“I disagree, Fenlin. The anchor has power, but it’s not why you’re still standing here. Your decisions led us to heal the sky, your determination and self-sacrifice brought us out of Haven. You are the creatures rival because of what you did, and we know it, all of us.”

She had led me out the front doors where Leliana stood holding a very large Cullen sized sword.
“The Inquisition requires a leader, the one who has already been leading it.”

Looking at her now, I shook my head.

“You do not mean…”

“You, Fenlin.”

“You must be kidding,” I say slightly backing away.

“All of these people have their lives because of you, they will follow you. I will not lie, handing this power to anyone is troubling but I have to believe this is meant to be. There would be no inquisition without you. How it will serve, how it will lead, that must be yours to decide.”

Staring at her for a moment, I finally turn my gaze towards Leliana and the outstretched sword she held towards me. I really never liked being the one in charge, too much responsibility. With this damn thing on my hand, I also did not have a choice in the matter anymore. With a hesitant step, I walked towards it and took it from her grasp. *Yup, heavy as a mofo,* it was at least pretty with its ornate dragon carved around the head of the blade onto the hilt.

“Corypheus will never let me live in peace, he made that clear. He intends to be a God, to rule over us all, we can’t let that happen.”

Cassandra smiled at me. “Have our people been told?” she called down to Josephine. This is when I finally saw that there was a large gathering in the courtyard below us.

“They have, and soon the world,” she answered her back.

“Commander, will they follow?”

Cullen turned to look at the soldiers and crowd behind him raising his arms as he rallied them.

“Inquisition, will you follow?”

“YES”

“Will you fight?”

“YES”

“Will we triumph?”

“YES”

The cheering got louder, as he raised them into an excited frenzy. Pulling his sword, he turned and gazed up at me.

“Your leader, your Herald – YOUR INQUISITOR.” He yelled out over the loud cheering as he raised his sword in the air.

I lifted the sword I held, high above my head as the cheering grew even louder. When the impromptu ceremony was complete, I handed the sword back to Leliana as Cullen and Josephine walked up the steps towards us.
Walking back into the main hall followed by Josephine, Cullen, and Leliana, I had a few questions.

“Do we know anything about Corypheus? Could he be allied with Tevinter? Is this a prelude to war?”

Cullen shook his head at me.

“I get the impression we are dealing with extremists, not the vanguard of a true invasion.”

Josephine nodded her head in agreement.

“Tevinter is not the Imperium of a thousand years ago. What Corypheus yearns to restore, no longer exists. Although, they would not shed a tear if the South fell to chaos.”

“Well, of course, they wouldn’t, but someone out there must know something about him.”

“Well unless they saw him on the field, most won’t even believe he exists,” Cullen said simply, and I rubbed my face in agitation at the truth of that statement.

“We do have one advantage,” Leliana pointed out, and I looked at her through my fingers waiting. “We know what Corypheus intends to do next. In that strange future you experienced, Empress Celine had been assassinated.”

“Imagine the chaos her death would cause, with his army…” Josephine began.

“An army he’ll bolster with a force of demons, or so the future tells us” Cullen pointed out his tone full of disgust.

“Corypheus could conquer the entire South of Thedas, God or no God,” Josephine said looking at everyone uncomfortable.

Leliana pinched the bridge of her nose in frustration and let out a sigh.

“I’d feel better if we knew more about what we were dealing with.”

The clearing of a throat behind Cullen made everyone turn, and I saw that sound came from Varric.

“I know someone who can help with that.”

Varric walked towards us hesitantly and looked a bit nervous as he spoke.

“Everyone acting all inspirational jogged my memory and I…sent a message to an old friend. She’s crossed paths with Corypheus before and she may know more about what he is doing. She can help.”

“Well, I will take all the help I can get Varric. Introduce us when she gets here.”

Varric nodded his head at me and turned to leave.

“I can tell you this, if Varric has asked to come who I think he has, Cassandra, is going to kill him,” Leliana said softly as we watched him leave the keep.

I raised my eyebrow at her then followed Varric’s progress as he walked out the door.
Beneath the castle, we set up the dining hall since it was close to the kitchen. Beneath that was the dungeon and a huge waterfall that could be seen by the broken part of the structure. According to Gatsi, a dwarven builder, it was not so much broken as designed to be open, like the smithy area. The only structural issues were with some of the cells, and the walkways next to them. Interesting how everyone around has started telling me ‘don’t worry about that’. Okay, fix it, and I will stop worrying about it.

The waterfall was actually the water supply for all of Skyhold, and thankfully, I was told by Gatsi that it would not cause the whole castle to fall. The castle was a work of military art, or at least that was what Cullen and Leliana told me. There were barracks for the men beneath the castle with a sophisticated tunnel system that led outside the back of the castle down to the valley below that was hidden by the front of the castle.

All in all, we were fortunate that Solas knew of this place. Only one thing that was bugging the hell out of me and that was the mysteriously locked door across from the kitchen. Interestingly, the door was also warded against trespassers. The pattern to the ward was unlike any I had seen before or read anywhere and my curiosity was killing me to find out what was behind the door. I bet Solas knows how to open this, and with that thought, I ran back up the stairs to find him.

Crossing the main hall, I opened the door to the rotunda and found him staring at a wall fixedly. His long beautiful fingers tapping his dimpled chin lost in deep thought. Letting a little sigh of wanting out, I went to stand next to him and look at the wall trying to see what he was seeing. I saw absolutely nothing but blank wall and then heard his soft chuckled from beside me.

“What are you doing lethal’lan?” he asked me staring at me.

I smile cheekily up at him and shrug my shoulders.

“I don’t know, I guess I was trying to see what was so interesting about a blank wall?” I replied.

“Ah, well it will not be blank for long. I will begin painting your journeys on these walls.”

“Well that should be a short story,” I joke with him.

He glances at me startled.

“Why do you believe that your story would be short?”

“Why would you want to paint my story at all?” I said with a touch of annoyance lacing my tone.

He raises his eyebrow at me for deflecting his question, and I held back a sigh as he folds his arms behind his back now in full teacher mode. Well here comes the lecture.
“I shall answer yours if you will answer mine.”

“Okay, if you must know. I don’t believe that I have done anything that would be mural worthy.”

He narrowed his eyes at me just slightly and shook his head.

“I disagree; you have done a great many things that are worthy of the year since you arrived. You acquired the mages and helped them obtain their right to freedom. You saved a great many in the Crossroads and in Haven. You have fought a would-be God and survived. You have done many deeds worthy of note.”

Shit! Have I already been here a year? Thinking quickly I realized he was right, this month would make my arrival to Thedas a year. No wonder Josephine was digging for the date of my birthday. Focus...

“I see you killed two birds with one stone there. Argued and answered my question how very talented of you," I said folding my arms. "I did not gather the mages on my own, Solas; I was not the only one to help those people at the Crossroads, I had help. I got the idea on how to help the people of Haven from Fen’Harel, so again not on my own, and I did not fight Corypheus so much as he just tossed me around like a fucking rag doll.”

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I realized I had just puked up an entire ball of angst on him and it had nothing to do with some fucking mural and everything to do with him and me and the distance that has grown between us since arriving here.

“Ir abelas fenor, you will do what you will always do. I came to hopefully get your help not argue with you.”

He shook his head slightly, and I could see he would like to press the matter further.

“Then we shall continue this…discussion at a later time. What would you require of me, lethal’lan?”

“Follow me there is something I want you to see, maybe you can figure it out.”

He looked at me curiously before following behind me back to the warded door. Stopping in front of the door I looked at him and gestured at it.

“Magically sealed in a way I have never seen before, but I am not as skilled as you, so I am hoping that you know a way we can open it.”

Solas gazed at me for a moment with an unreadable expression, and something in my stomach twisted. He turned back to the door and appeared to be studying the pattern for a few moments. His aura warbled and dimmed before I felt him pull it tightly around him, completely shutting me out.

“I am unaware of this pattern; I will need to study it before I may attempt to unlock it.”

He is lying to me…why is he lying to me? What could possibly be behind this damn door?

I stare at him for a long moment, then nodding my head in understanding moving away from the door and him.

“Well that’s that then, curiosity always did kill the cat. I guess I’ll let you get back to staring at your wall.”

Before I could move far he grabbed my hand and pulled me back towards him.
“Perhaps you will explain to me why you are now upset with me.”

*Perhaps you will tell me why you are lying to me?* I let out a sigh and shook my head unwilling to hold his gaze.

“You have mistaken my disappointment with not being able to open this door for being upset with you.”

*God, I am a terrible liar, even I could hear it in my voice.* Mentally cringing at knowing he would as well, I waited and caught the slight narrowing of his gaze before he caressed my cheek and then kissed my lips gently.

“I shall see you later than, lethal’lan.”

I walked away from him and knew that this conversation was far from over. If anything my determination to get in that fucking room just doubled with or without his help.

I took the stairs towards my finally finished room slightly excited because tonight would be my first night of sleeping in there. Josephine wouldn’t let me see it until it was completely finished, and now I was curious about what all she did. Getting to the top I glance around at the fully lit room. The large circular handwoven carpet in deep red and green tones sat on polished wooden floors, another of the saves from this room. The French styled balcony doors had long, thick, deep maroon drapes to keep out light and keep heat in on the sides. In the corner sat a desk, already stocked with reports I needed to read and letters I needed to answer. Ignoring those, I step further into the room. There are bookshelves full of books, probably on etiquette and protocols I would bet, but the bed is what grabbed my attention.

Turning towards its beauty, it was a four poster king sized bed that included a daylight curtain around it. It was done in dark maroon and had tons of pillows on it. I walked towards it and ran my fingers over the headboard and posts that were intricately carved with leaves. The wood was a dark mahogany polished to a bright shine and it felt warm beneath my touch. It was the original frame that Bull and I found in the room when we came to clean it and it was…stunning. Why Josephine thought someone as small as I would need something so big was beyond my comprehension, but I was definitely looking forward to getting lost in it. Turning away with a smile I take in the rest of the room.

In front of my fireplace, there was a lovely sofa and coffee table, another beautiful salvage with a tea set placed on the shiny surface. An armoire that was rescued from another room that the roof was being repaired in stood in another corner and I knew if I opened it, it would be fully stocked with clothing. Walking through the room I found the door that led to my private bathroom. I would never stop thanking the Gods for indoor plumbing as I gazed at the large beautiful tub, privy and sink appreciatively. It was nothing like I had before, but it was definitely better than a bucket, basin and a slightly large copper pot I had back in Haven.

I felt the soft caress of his aura as I heard my door closing, pulling my attention from my inspection and turned towards my stairs. When I saw his bald head, my heart sped up. Our time in Skyhold had been somewhat strained since our leaving Haven. A small part of me thought he was still angry for what I had done, but the other part of me told me it was him putting a distance between us since my question. He stopped at the top of the stairs and gazed at me for a moment before walking towards me.

“Greetings are in order first,” he said as he finally reached me and pulled me into him. I couldn’t help
the small smile that lifted the corners of my mouth as I gazed up at him.

“Yes, you wouldn’t want to be rude.”

He softly chuckles as he bent his head towards mine and captured my lips. The gentle touch made me pull him in closer so that I could seduce him for a moment. If this is the only moment I get to let him know that I have missed him, then I was not going to play fair. His soft moan at the maneuver made my heart race and when he pulled away, I gazed into his stormy blue eyes that held a wealth of desire and smiled. Oh yes, I know whose there under that mask my love…maybe someday you will let him come out and play.

He took my hands and walking backward, pulled me towards the couch to sit.

“You asked me to ‘articulate’ what you were to me, and I believe I have finally found the words I wish to use.”

I sat silently waiting for him to continue, my heart racing and my stomach in knots. This could either go really, really well, or horribly wrong. He held my gaze, and still holding my hands he took an unsteady breath and I felt his thumbs glide over my knuckles in a nervous manner that was so unlike him.

“You make me feel possessive, irrational, and a thousand other maddening senses and sensations all at the same time. When you smile, my heart races, and when you laugh, my stomach becomes tied in knots. Most times I am unsure if I can speak a complete sentence when around you. The sound of my name on your lips sounds to me is as if it has never been said before. Your scent…it brings this constant need and want and a thousand things come to mind with it, and none of them are wise, but you make me reckless and foolish and want it all. When I thought you lost to me forever, I no longer wanted to exist without you at my side. Ar lath ma vhenan; that, is what you are to me.”

I slightly laughed as I wiped at the tears sliding down my face his words had caused. I had never had anyone say such beautiful words to me, let alone actually mean them. Pulling him towards me, I rubbed the side of my nose against his before placing my lips gently on his. Kissing him was always like chasing a thunder and lightning storm. You found yourself counting between the strikes and booms with each caress of his tongue. Each tiny nip of his teeth on my lip sent shocks of lightning racing over my skin, stealing my breath as simply as he had my heart.

When I pulled back I held his gaze. “So you’re saying I am your insanity?” I said softly teasing him.

His laughter as he tightened his arms around me, and began nuzzling against my neck sent me into a hormone overload.

“Yes vhenan, you are indeed my insanity.”

"Ar lath ma Solas,” I whispered against his jaw before his lips captured mine.

*****

“It appears our missing soldiers have been found…in a bog called the Fallow Mire,” Leliana said with a slight wrinkle to her nose.

“A bog, well sure why the hell not,” I mumble to myself absently. “Okay, how did they end up in a bog?” I ask her as I was bent over and staring at the zone on the map lying on the large table with a marker on it.

“They were on a scouting mission looking for rifts in the area. They are being held hostage by Avvar
who are demanding to meet the Herald of Andraste if the Inquisition wants to see their people again.”

Straitening, I look at her with a raised eyebrow.

“This is what fame gets me…a trip to a bog.”

Cullen chuckled and rubbed his neck smiling, while Josephine and Leliana waited for what I wanted to do. God, I never wanted to be in charge of this kind of thing. I can already feel the stress of the position settling on my shoulders heavily.

“Well, I guess I am going to the Fallow Mire to get our men back. We wouldn’t want to be rude and ignore their invitation to such a…charming place. I will leave in the morning,” I tell them and look at Cullen. “Can you make sure our horses are ready for a dawn departure?”

“On your order,” he answered quickly and left the room. I glance at everyone else and let out a sigh.

“I will go and gather the team and let them know about the new and exotic vacation we are taking.”

With that, I left the room after Cullen while Josephine and Leliana laughed softly. Oh, my guys are going to fucking love me for this one.

*****

We crested a small hill that led to the Fallow Mire and the stench immediately permeated my nose and I slightly gagged as my eyes watered. Oh, my God, that is awful. The instant smell of damp, rotting animal mixed with ammonia and dead fish permeated my senses making it hard to breathe.

“My dear we must discuss perhaps your perception of exotic. This is nothing but fields of atrocity, smelling mud,” Dorian teased me covering his mouth with a handkerchief and I winked at him.

“This is like the Fade, but wetter,” Cole said quietly from beside me.

“Yeah, well your Fade smells like an arse here,” Sera commented from behind us and I chuckle a little when I saw that she had her arm over her nose and mouth.

We rode into the Inquisition camp and I watched Lace walk towards me. The more I interacted with Scout Harding, the more I really liked her.

“Thank you for coming, maybe you can solve this mess. Our missing patrols are being held hostage by Avvar, barbarians from the mountains.”

“Do we know what they are doing here?”

“That’s the thing. Their leader…he wants them to fight you because you’re the Herald of Andraste.”

“Does anyone even listen when I tell them I don’t believe I am the Herald? Oh well, Barbarians you say? So what do they have against Andraste?”

“Well, the Avvar think there are Gods in nature. As in, the sky has a God, and the forest. The Avvar say you’re claiming to be sent by one, and they’ll challenge the will of your God with their own. I think their leader is just a boastful little prick who just wants to brag he killed you.”

I clap my hand on her shoulder laughing, I really like this woman.
“I guess no one told him how difficult that might be.”

Lace smiled and shook her head. “No, I don’t think anyway gave him that information. We have your gear and supplies ready for you.”

“Lace, you’re a fucking gem,” I tell her with a large smile before turning to look at my group.

“Well, guys, gear, and supplies are over there. I suggest we get a good night’s rest because I don’t think we will get another one until we leave.”

I heard grumbles and mutterings from Sera and Dorian and I shook my head at them. Prima Donna’s, I muttered and felt his aura wrap around mine. Glancing at him over my shoulder, a soft sigh escapes. My heart rate speeds up when he gives me that soft half-smile of his that only makes me want to climb him like some crazed monkey in a zoo.

Chapter End Notes

Ir abelas fenor - I am sorry precious
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
vhenan - my heart
Dinner was a small affair of stew and hard bread. Sitting around the fire, I glanced at everyone with a little smile. It was such a diverse group that laughed and joked with each other. *Never in my life would I have imagined having such friends like these.*

“Where do you get all your arrows, Sera? You have hundreds,” Dorian commented and took a bite of his stew.

Sera just glanced at him and then snorted.

“From your arse, that’s where.”

Dorian glanced at her with a raised eyebrow, placing his spoon back in his bowl.

“My arse should open up a shop. It’s apparently quite prolific.”

She gave him a cheeky smile and went back to eating her stew. I chuckled from across the fire and Dorian glanced at me and then Solas and then back to me. I could already see what he was about to do and held my hand up to stop him before he could speak.

“Don’t,” I tell him chuckling and moved to clean my bowl.

“What? I have not said anything, my dear,” he replies with false innocence and I chuckle turning back to look at him.

“Yet,” and shaking my head, I grab the canteen so that I can wash my bowl ignoring his laughter from behind me. With my back turned, I did not see that Sera had chosen to join in on the fun.

“What are you talkin about? Oh, you mean them,” she said pointing from me to Solas.

Sera’s eyes narrowed on Solas.

“So, you and the Lady Inquisitor. Interesting.”

I heard his annoyed sigh and placed my freshly washed bowl back in the pack. Turning back around, I went and sat back down next to him and gave him a wink while poking his aura with mine. I felt his soft return of the gesture and softly smiled at him.

“Your interest is not my concern,” he replied to her and moved to wash his own bowl.

“That’s all right because I meant boring. The elf always takes the elf so that banging bits will mean something.”
“Well my dear, it did take them long enough. Don’t you agree?” Dorian said to her behind his hand loudly.

I rubbed my face and wanted to laugh. *That banging bits part requires actual nakedness and I am definitely not opposed to that idea.*

“It is not a topic for discussion,” Solas replies coolly and places his own clean bowl in the pack and returns to where I was sitting.

“Oh, come on Droopy, drop ’em and rebuild the empire. Phwoar!” She poked at him making rude humping gestures and I saw his ears turn slightly pink as did my own.

“Sera! Just…to much…please stop.”

Covering my face now, I want a rift to swallow me. The more I thought about her words the worse my embarrassment got and the dirtier my morbid mind got.

She looked at me with a cheeky smile and shrugged.

“Hmph! Fine. Whatever.”

“Don't concern yourself, vhenan. She is… apart from herself.”

I should have known that this moment and my quick embarrassment would be the beginning of a long chain of pranks. I got up from the bench and saw that everyone was now staring at me with huge smiles and I felt the sudden need to go hide in my tent.

*****

“The mud wants my feet to stay,” Cole said pulling his leather covered foot out of the mud.

Glancing over at him, I chuckle as we make our way to the broken wooden bridge that led to a house.

“Oh, look, signs of a plague, how lovely.” Dorian pointed out at the piled bodies. Shivering, I threw a ball of mage fire at them, incinerating them immediately before more spirits could inhabit the bodies.

“A cheerful addition to any self-respecting swamp,” I mutter as I walk by.

Dorian slightly chuckled.

“It must have been a terrible illness; no one has come to reclaim the land. No one living at any rate,” Solas said quietly as we moved past the dilapidated cabin.

“Just everyone, be careful of stepping in the water, it seems to bring the undead out like spiders on a web.”

Bull held his large ax and glanced around at the area.

“That and anything poking up from the water could be a horrible monster acting like a stick.”

“Lovely,” Dorian quipped as he passed by him.
The first beacon we found held Veilfire, and a rune inscribed on the back side of the large rock pillar. The rune made no sense, but when we lit the beacon it drew the undead to us. To Bull’s delight, he was just glad to fight on solid ground.

When the fight was over, I glanced around and made sure everyone was okay.

“We could use these, lure those corpses out of the mud and fight on solid ground.”

I glance up at Bull with a smile.

“Then I guess we should look for more of them.”

Finishing with the last beacon, I heave a sigh of relief. We now have a clear path back to camp and with the last rune deciphered it proved to be a recipe for a poison.

“They are notes on how to make a poison? What kind of crazy asshole made these?” I asked completely confused.

Dorian and Solas both stood next to me studying the rune.

“Someone who has lost his mind, my dear” Dorian answered.

“Agreed, whoever inscribed these to the beacons was not of right mind,” Solas stated while still studying the glyph.

“Lovely,” I mutter and turn towards the others. We had noticed that back at the previous beacon there was a good-sized cave for us to use for the night, and I glanced around at everyone. We were all tired, dirty, covered in muck and smelled horrible.

“Let’s head back to that cave we found and make camp for the night.”

My suggestion brought many agreements as we turned and headed back over our now clear of the undead, path.

The cave was a perfect place for the night since it was easy for us to ward the front of the cave against the undead. After we had a fire built, I removed my armor and leaned against the rock wall. Dinner was what I would call hiking food. Jerked meat and a mixture of nuts and dried berries. Solas moved to sit beside me and I ripped a piece of the jerky off and chewed on the leather meal. We ate in silence for a long while until obviously, Sera couldn’t take it anymore.

“So, Bull. What are your women like?”

He chuckles and takes a drink from his canteen. “The Tamassran’s? Terrifying... and inspiring. They teach you everything you need to know. Give your life purpose.”

She shakes her head at him. “No, I mean, are they like you? Big and... phwoar.” Her hand gestures make it quite clear on what she meant.

Bull smiles at her, “Oh, shit yeah.”

Sera giggles as her eyes take on this faraway look and pops another nut in her mouth. “Wow”
I shook my head at the conversation and she looks at me.

“What?”

“If you find that type of woman attractive, then what are you doing with the barmaid back at Skyhold?”

Her face blushed as everyone chuckled at the tables suddenly being turned on her.

“That’s…that’s just…oh, shut it you.”

I laugh and throw a nut at her.

“Oh…so it’s okay to discuss my sex life but not yours. I get it, so I take it you’re not dropping your pants to rebuild an empire, I see,” I tease and see that her ears redden even further.

I felt Solas’ elbow slightly poke my side and glancing at him he has a little smile on his face.

“Is it the one that wears the red apron?” Bull questions her quickly, and Sera’s blue eyes dart to him as she bit her lip. By her look, it would appear it is the same one and Bull shook his head.

“Damn, she’s hot,” he said ripping off a piece of his jerky.

“Sera, what do peaches have to do with Leah?” Cole asked her quietly, and I burst out laughing with Bull.

“Get out of my head creepy.”

*****

“Is it just me, or is it interesting that we have seen no signs of the Avvar that want to kill me?”

Bull shrugged his shoulders as Cole came up next to him.

“I like your horns, The Iron Bull.”

Bull glanced down at him and gave him a small smile.

“Thanks, kid,” he said as he watched where he was walking.

“But their dragon horns, not bullhorns. You could have named yourself The Iron Dragon.”

Bull stopped and stared at Cole for a moment with a look shock.

“Oh, shit. That would have been better.”

I smile at the simple banter, but soon my smile left when my mark fired warningly as we approached a broken down cabin with an unopened rift behind it. There was a very large man standing with shocking white hair, grey and white ash-painted armor and a huge maul slung absently over his shoulders next to it, studying it carefully. As we approached he turned to glance at us.

“So, which one of you is the Herald of Andraste?”

I walk cautiously towards him as he stares down at me.

“Tiny little thing aren’t you. My kin wants you dead lowlander, but it’s not my job. You’ve no need to fear me.”
I felt a small measure of relief with his words and give him a tentative smile as I quietly studied his face. It was half obscured by a mask-like helm that was the same color as his armor. The dark brown eyes behind the mask studied me as I did him.

“I thought all the Avvar wanted to fight me?”

The large man nodded his head in agreement.

“Aye, our Chieftain’s son wants to fight you. I’m called in when the dead pile up. Rites to the Gods, mending for the bleeding, a dagger for the dying, that’s what I do. I don’t pick up a blade for a whelps trophy hunt.”

Chuckling slightly, I nod my head in understanding only grateful this Avvar had honor.

“What are you doing out here then?”

“Trying to figure out this hole in the world, never seen anything like its like. They spit out angry spirits. Endless. What the sky’s trying to tell us, I don’t know.”

“Yeah, they are caused by the Breach that was in the sky. A magic that went horribly wrong.”

He snorted as he looked at me with irritation.

“I know that, lowlander. I’m talking about the Lady of the skies. Do you not know her? Can’t you see the warnings she writes through the bird flocks in the air?”

I know I must look confused as I heard Dorian speak up from behind me.

“You use the patterns of flocking birds as an augury, then?” Dorian questioned him curiously.

“We don’t "use" them. They’re sent. You see it, or you don't.”

I shrug my shoulders and realized I’d heard people believing in weirder things in my time.

“The other Avvar took an Inquisition patrol. Are they all right?”

The Avvar looked down at me and nodded his head.

“A few were injured in the skirmish, but they were alive last I saw them.”

I let out a relieved breath and smiled. We have gotten here in time then.

“Someone’s trained them well. They killed more of us then I thought they would.”

I will tell Cullen that later.

“Thank you for taking a moment to speak with me, I am relieved to hear my men are okay.”

“Watch the water, lowlander.” He offered before taking a few steps away.

Turning back towards the rift as everyone pulls their weapons.

“Well let’s get rid of this and be on our way.”

With the demons dead and the rift closed, it was time to move on to hopefully where they held our
“Lady of the Skies! You can mend the gaps in the air!” The Avvar man said with surprise.

“Great isn’t it,” Bull said as he slid his ax onto his back.

“Maybe you do have a God’s favor,” he said solemnly.

I smile at him and glance at Solas beneath my lashes before walking past the large man. *Something like that.*

“Stay safe,” I tell him and see his small nod as I pass.

The fight to the old ruined castle led us to two groups of Avvar, and after them was a full path of undead between us and the castle entry.

“Well, what fun would it be without a gauntlet of undead to get the blood pumping?”

Everyone groaned at the sight.

“There’s too many of them, Boss, let’s just get to the castle.”

Barriers up, we ran for it. Dodging, dancing between the thankfully slow walking corpses, we rushed through the castle entrance only to be greeted by Avvar archers. Bull charged up the steps with Cole hot on his heels while Solas laid a barrier over them.

“Get to the gates closing mechanism,” I shout to Sera after throwing a barrier over her, and she stealthed out of site while we focused on the archers.

Soon we heard the creaking, scraping sounds of groaning metal as it slammed in place effectively locking the undead out. With the first group of Avvar finally handled, I look around and make sure everyone is okay. Solas is healing a small wound on Bull’s arm to stop the bleeding and Dorian is slipping his staff onto his back.

“Don’t worry about scars Solas, I really like scars,” Bull told him with a deep chuckle.

I watch Sera slide down a wobbly banister with a cheeky smile and waved. *God this group is freakin crazy, a good thing too. I don't think I could have gotten anyone else to come to this cesspool.*

“Well, are we good to continue?” I ask everyone and see their nods of agreement.

“The sooner the better, I would like to leave this ‘exotic vacation’ you have taken me on,” Dorian quipped dryly.

I glance at Dorian and give him a cheeky smile before walking towards the steps.

Walking up the long broken stairs, we keep the barriers going in case they think to ambush us and finally reach the top of the landing. I notice the Chieftains son sitting at the top of another small set of steps on a broken throne.

“How fitting,” I mumble as we walk forward.

“There must be some mistake,” the Avvar yelled from his perch as we drew closer.
Holding up my hand to halt everyone, I felt Solas’ cool barrier lay over me as I stepped forward.

“Oh there is no mistake, I am Inquisitor Lavellan,” I yell back at him with a smirk, watching him slowly walk down the steps towards me.

“You are but a child,” he joked as his men around him laughed.

“And you are but a bully,” I answer sarcastically as I cross my arms.

His helmet obscured more than half his face. His leather gear covered in white and grey ash-type paint, but the double-edged ax that he had slung on his back was taller than me.

“They sent a lowlander child to face me?”

I laughed and shook my head. *Keep it up asshole, this 'child' is about to wipe the floor with you.*

“You asked for the Herald of Andraste, did you not? I am she. Now if you would please, refrain from calling me a child, before I am forced to hit you so hard your dog will bleed I would appreciate it.”

The Avvar’s brown gaze narrowed at me slightly as he looked me over from head to toe.

“I will not fight a *child*; there is no honor in that,” he said sarcastically.

I raised my eyebrow at him and shook my head. *I did warn him.*

The Avvar unexpectedly flew backward, hit with a fade fist that I thrust from my hand to land unceremoniously on the steps he had just come down.

“I warned you *boy*, stop calling me a damn child!”

Scrambling to his feet he roared loudly, pulling his large ax as he charged towards me. Holding my place until the last moment, I Fade step to the side, as he ran over the frost rune I had laid on the ground beneath my feet and froze solid. With a quick twirl of my staff, I slammed the blade into the ground and called a veilstrike from the Fade slamming it through the Avvar’s head, brutally shattering him.

Glancing around the ceiling less room at the other Avvar, I wait to see if they will attack. One by one they stepped forward dropping their weapon and knelt before leaving. As the last one left, I turned toward the others as they watched the rest of the Avvar leave and glance at Cole.

“On it,” he said running for the door that held our patrol.

“That was kick ass, Boss” Bull praised, his tone full of surprise.

With the door open, I walk in and saw our men and woman sitting on the floor all with different expressions ranging from surprise to grateful.

“Herald of Andraste!” A woman called out to me from the back as she stood.

“We’ve dealt with the Avvar. Is everyone alright?” I ask her quickly looking around the room as she walked towards me.

“Yes, your Worship. The injured need some rest, but we can return on our own.”

I glance at Solas, and he gave me a small nod as Dorian followed to help him.
Let us make sure that you do, all of you, return.”

She nods her head and smiles at me gratefully. I overhear a man in the corner speaking to Dorian quietly as he looked over his injuries.

“I can’t believe she came for us.” The other man that Solas was healing looked over at the man who spoke.

“I told you she wouldn’t leave us.”

I turned away feeling overwhelmed at how much faith they had in me and how easily that kind of faith could be broken.

“They are happier now because of you. You shouldn’t worry that you will let them down, you won’t,” Cole said from beside me startling me.

I glance up at him and see that he is looking right at me.

“I might,” I said unsure of his reassuring words and myself when I felt his hand on my shoulder.

“You won’t.”

I give him a quick nod and walk from the room; maybe someday I would believe his words, but right this second not so much. Turning the small corner I saw the Avvar man that I had seen out by the unopened rift walking towards me.

“Your God looks after you Herald,” he commented with a large smile.

He glanced at the frozen shards of the Chieftain’s son and his face hardened angrily.

“There lies the brat. His father, Chief of our holding, would duel me for the loss if he cared enough.”

“Perhaps the Inquisition has a purpose your Chief lacks.”

His brown eyes studied me carefully as he spoke almost quietly to himself.

“Is this why the Lady of the Skies led me here, to help heal the wounds in her skin?”

He nodded his head sharply and set his extremely large maul down looking at me fixedly.

“Aye, I’ll join you. Let me make peace with my kin, and I’ll find where you set your flag.”

I smile up at him and held my hand out, watching as his larger one dwarfed mine.

“Thank you, I hope you won’t mind me asking questions about your people. I know very little of your culture, and would not like to offend when meeting more like you.”

He nodded his head and picked up his maul with a pleased smile on his face at my wanting to know more.

“I will be pleased to teach you.”
vhenan - my heart
All New Faded For Her - Part 1

Chapter Notes

*****NSFW*****

Thank you, everyone, for your continued comments, kudos and reading. You guys are truly the best!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We left the Fallow Mire for the Hinterlands after escorting the men back to the main camp. What I needed right now was a real bath, new clothes, and somewhere not a bog.

“We will want to launder our clothes later. Or burn them,” Solas said from beside me and I glanced at him.

“I’m all for burning,” I answered and heard the others agree. “We should look into that at the nearest town we run into. At this point, the smell is so horrible I am not opposed to burning them now and riding naked.”

His eyes held mine for a long moment and I saw the soft blush rush his cheeks and I winked at him. Yeah, you think about that for a while like I have.

“Boss, I am not opposed to watching you ride naked,” Bull teased from the other side of me earning him a very disapproving glare from Solas.

“Me either,” Sera spoke up and my face went red.

I turned in my saddle and looked at the two taking in their cheeky smiles.

“You two are a menace,” I joke back and turn back around ignoring everyone.

“It is not something I believe, I would be opposed to either, vhenan.”

My eyes dash to his quickly and see he too holds a wicked smile and my stomach dropped to the ground. Shaking my head as I feel the heat rush over my entire body with his teasing words, and my eyes stare at the saddle horn. Killing me...he is killing me with my own hormones.

It was a perfect summer day in the Hinterlands. The sun was shining, there was a gentle breeze blowing, and you could hear the birds trilling songs in the lush canopies of tree branches overhead as we drew closer to the Crossroads.

We arrived at the Inquisition camp just outside of the Crossroads and thankfully the town had clothing we could buy. We decided that after we had bathed we would make a party of burning the rotten clothing away from the camp. Inside the small shop, I picked up clothing for myself and for Cole. I also ordered a small cask of Ferelden ale for our celebration.

It surprised me when I noticed he did not carry a pack of any kind or eat. When asked if he wanted...
dinner he had just looked at me with an almost bitter beer kind of face, and shook his head mumbling ‘blaah’. Walking out of the shop, I gave the clothing to Cole who looked at it curiously.

“What is this?” He questions me seriously unsure of what he was holding.

“Clothing Cole, we are going to burn the clothes you are currently wearing tonight and you need some that don’t smell after you take a bath.”

Solas stood off to the side trying to hide his smile at the spirits obvious confusion and mine.

“They come off?” he said.

I look at him now seriously confused and glance at Solas’ as he softly chuckled. Pulling my gaze back to Cole, I see he is looking at the clothing unsure what to do with them.

“Have you never changed into different clothing or bathed before?”

He looked up from the clothing in his hands and stared at me.

“No”

My mouth fell open with shock. Well, that is seriously about to change. I tried to cover up my surprise, but Solas’ continued soft laughter told me that I was not doing so well at it.

“Well, there is always a first then. I expect you to bathe tonight Cole with soap and water and change into these. When we return to Skyhold, you sir are getting some clothing.”

Solas finally walked towards them and placed a reassuring hand on Cole’s shoulder.

“Come with me Cole, it will be alright,” he said still laughing.

Cole followed after him and I just shook my head in stunned amazement while Sera moved up next to me.

“Well, there is always a first then. I expect you to bathe tonight Cole with soap and water and change into these. When we return to Skyhold, you sir are getting some clothing.”

Solas finally walked towards them and placed a reassuring hand on Cole’s shoulder.

“Come with me Cole, it will be alright,” he said still laughing.

Cole followed after him and I just shook my head in stunned amazement while Sera moved up next to me.

“Why do you keep it around?” she asked sounding disgusted.

I glance up at her not missing the disgust in her tone.

“Some have asked me the same thing about you,” I finally answer her evenly.

Her snort of annoyance and crossed arms warned me that her snarky reply was rapidly approaching.

“Yes? Well, I’m real and that…is just wrong.”

I shook my head at her and rubbed my forehead. I really liked Sera, but sometimes her narrow mind got in the way of the beautiful person beneath.

“Cole is real Sera, just like you and me. He helps everyone, just like you and me. Is it really so difficult to not appreciate that? You don’t like magic, but you and I get along. Cole is a spirit of Compassion that took a human form to help people. That is admirable considering it would be safer for him in the Fade than around humans full of greed, anger, and corruption.”

Sera held my gaze for a moment and I could see the wheels turning in there as she thought about it. Finally, she shrugged her shoulders and narrowed her eyes.

“Well if it steps out of line, it will get arrows in the face.”
Laughing, I give her a hopeful smile.

“I am sure he would thank you for making sure he didn’t do anything to hurt anyone. Now come on, I need to bathe.”

Sera gave me a cheeky smile and I shook my head at her.

“Oh yeah? Interested are ya,” she teased me and I laughed.

“Don’t you have a barmaid to get back to?” I joke back and see her small blush.

We gathered our soiled clothes and made our own pilgrimage to a small outlying field to pile the clothing. Once everyone had placed the gross smelling gear in the pile, everyone stood back and Dorian winked at me.

“If you would do the honors, my lady,” he said bowing with a flourish.

Laughing, I pulled a large ball of mage fire to my outstretched hand, hoping the putrid-smelling cloth would burn.

“With this fire, we burn our material belongings and offer them back to the land because…well, because they fucking smell horrid and no amount of soap is going to get rid of that smell.”

Everyone laughed as I threw the fire at the mound and we cheered as we watched it burn. Even the smell of the burning clothing was atrocious. Once we were sure that the fire was completely burned out and not a scrap of clothing left, we headed back to our camp.

Dinner is roasted ram and veggies, and everyone seemed pleased that I had gotten us a cask of ale to accompany it. Now that we were all pleasantly full, I listened to the conversations and laughter that echoed around us while drinking my ale. I saw Bull flirting with Dorian, and Dorian blushing while trying to ignore him. Sera sat making arrows, and Cole was sharpening his blades, and thank the Gods he had bathed.

“Will, you walk with me, vhenan?”

His softly-spoken request near my ear sent shivers down my spine, and I nodded slowly letting him take my hand.

We left the camp and walked through the forest towards the falls. I knew there was a nice, flat area they could sit at and knowing him, it gave a private view that overlooked the valley so we could observe the night's sky.

We reached the quiet area and he tugged on my fingers pulling me towards him when he stopped to lean against a tree. Glancing up, my breath caught on the hot desire that was reflected from his stormy gaze. Swallowing the sudden ball of nerves in my throat, I slid my hands up his chest and saw his nostrils slightly flare with the action as his hands settle around my waist. Taking a small step into him so that I pressed lightly against him, his eyes closed and he took an unsteady breath.

“Vhenan,” his endearment was a softly moaned warning that I ignored and directed my hand to gently touch his jaw.
“We didn’t come out here to look at stars then?” Gliding my hand down the exposed skin of his neck. Neither of us moved or breathed. We just…needed.

His lips were suddenly crushing mine, it was desperate, needy, it was…raw, his calm mask removed showing me the hidden wolf. Lightning flashed behind my closed eyes and my arms slid around his neck while he pulled me closer to him. His hand slipped along the skin of my ribs beneath my shirt and if becoming a puddle was an option, I would be one as a million sensations ran over my skin with the simple touch.

His thumb teased the skin beneath the swell of my breast and he swallowed the soft whimper that escaped me with the teasing touch. There was a low growl that came from him with my moaning sound that escaped when his hand finally cupped my breast. He nipped at my lips and down my jaw, and teased the hardened nipple by just rubbing his thumb over it. With each pass, it sent fire burning through my core, and I was wet and aching with a need for more.

He turned me around and pressed me against the tree, placing his thigh between mine as he took my wrists in one hand, pinning them over my head as he continued to devour me. Eyes closed, biting my lip to keep from crying out, I didn’t even feel the roughness of the bark against my back. I was only focused on his lips as they made their journey down my neck. A low moan of desire escaped when his teeth bit at my collarbone and then tenderly ran his tongue over the area.

His hand slid back down my side and I was a quaking mass of over-stimulated nerves. His tongue glided over my lips, teasingly nipping at the corners of my mouth while his hand tormented the skin beneath the waistband of my leggings. I whimpered at the touch, arching my hips toward him and heard his throaty laugh at knowing what I wanted from him. The feeling of his long, beautiful fingers sliding over the flesh of my hip was frustrating. He was toying with me, and I softly growled low, feeling my sex clench with his husky chuckle.

His lips moved from the corner of my mouth back down my throat. The silken glide of his tongue along my skin stopped to rest just above my breast, where he marked the flesh just above my heart just as his fingers finally found me wet and needy. He was unmistakably claiming me, and I didn’t care, I was already forever his. The glide of his fingers over my wet folds made my body tremble with shivers throughout while a low, moaning whimper escaped with his touch.

Each silken glide over that hidden jewel brought me towards a darkened edge that tightened me like an arrow pulled on the drawstring of a bow beckoning me to let go and fly.

“Garun sul’em ma vhenan,” he growled against my lips before capturing them with his own.

His deeply spoken words made everything fade to black as my body did what he demanded and he swallowed the cry of my release. His deep and passionate kiss stole my breath and took every moan I uttered while it devoured my soul. My eyes slowly opened to stare into his. The wolfish smile on his face as he licked my pleasure from his fingers was intoxicating and when he was finished, I pulled his lips to mine and tasted myself on him provoking a low moan of pleasure from him with the action.

_This was so much better than looking at star constellations._

****

When I awoke and left my tent, I found Solas sitting next to the fire with a cup of tea in his hand slightly shaking his head staring into the cup angrily. I walked towards him and placed my hand on his shoulder.
“Is there something wrong with your tea?”

He glanced up at me and I saw the look of despair dash across his eyes for just a brief moment.

“It is tea, I detest the stuff. But this morning, I needed to shake the dreams from my mind. I may also, need to leave for a bit.”

I sat down and look at him carefully, my heart suddenly pounding in my chest. Leave?

“Why, what is wrong?”

He glanced back into his cup and let a heavy sigh out, unlike anything I had ever heard from him.

“One of my oldest friends has been captured by mages, forced into slavery. I heard the cry for help as I slept.”

I felt overwhelming confusion at his words and shook my head slightly.

“When your friend was captured, how did he…she…”

He looked at me steadily.

“It”

“It?”

“My friend is a spirit of Wisdom, unlike the spirits clamoring to enter our world through the rifts. It was dwelling quite happily in the Fade. It was summoned against its will, and wants my help to gain its freedom and return to the Fade.”

Wisdom…oh no…no…not Wisdom.

“Do you know where she is? Where they summoned her?”

His head cocked at my use of ‘she’, and understanding came clearly to him as he held my gaze.

“Then you two have spoken.”

“Yes, and we can discuss that later. Where did they summon her, Solas?”

My panicked voice spurred him to answer me promptly.

“In the Exalted Plains.”

I moved from my spot and started rallying everyone up using a stick. I hit the poles of the tents as I went by.

“Everyone get up!” I yell as I went to my tent to pull my staff and pack from inside, I turned to glance at Solas throwing the stick.

“You are not going alone, she is my friend too.”

His look of surprise turned into a soft smile and he nodded his head and went to grab his own staff while everyone shuffled from their tents sleepily.

“What the hell?” Sera grumbled as she came out, her hair all askew.
“We are leaving for the Exalted Plains in less than five minutes. Either, be prepared to leave or I leave you.”

Everyone began to hustle at the urgency in my voice and I moved to help one of the soldiers saddle the mounts. I glanced at the soldier briefly as I cinched up Etta.

“Send a message to Commander Cullen. Make him aware that we are heading to the Exalted Plains, on personal business. Also, I want ravens sent to every camp between here and there prepared with fresh mounts.”

“Yes, your Worship,” he said quickly and took off at a run.

*Please…don't let us be too late.*

Our rush across Ferelden through the Dales was exhausting. Trading horses out at Inquisition camps as we went, and thankfully there were bags of food prepared for our stops that we could eat along the way.

We reached the Emerald Graves in three days of hard riding with four hours of sleep per night. I knew everyone in the group was ready to pass out and like it or not, we had to stop for a full nights rest.

“We can rest tonight; tomorrow we will be in the Plains.”

No one said a word as they dismounted and began setting up camp. I felt his aura reach for mine and I glanced at him restlessly. I was full of energy, fueled by anxiety and I could tell that he knew it. He didn’t know how much Wisdom had come to mean to me. She had become a true friend when all else around me seemed to go sideways. Her counsel was definitely appreciated, but it was her friendship that I appreciated more.

He took my hands, rubbing his thumbs over the knuckles gently and held my gaze.

“You need rest, vhenan. Come, lay down with me.”

I look up at him for a moment and gave him a slow nod as I realized he was right, and followed him to our bedrolls next to the fire. The minute I curled against him, listening to the steady metronome of his heartbeat echoing through his chest, I fell into an exhausted sleep.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Garun sul'em ma vhenan - cum for me my heart
I awoke at dawn. The eastern skyline filled with a pallet of rose-tinged pinks and soft sandy yellows. It was a beautiful sight that I could not appreciate; the anxiety running through my veins for Wisdom killed its beauty. Rolling up our bedrolls, we doused the fire and saddled the horses. Everyone seemed to understand where they were going was important to me and didn’t question. The bright sun slowly peaked over the tips of the trees after we entered the plains.

Hours of riding following the directions Solas had given, we passed a Dalish encampment.

“We are not far from where our friend was summoned,” he said.

I nodded and we pushed on, my stomach was in knots and I could taste the ashy bile-like flavor of fear in my mouth.

“Everything here is blurry, it wants to forget, but now the rocks are solid,” Cole commented quietly from his horse at my side.

We pulled to a hard stop when we saw bodies of mages with arrows sticking out of their backs, and slowly we dismounted.

“Mages killed by arrows it seems,” Solas said as he bent to inspect the body.

“Bandits, look at the angle, they were running away,” Bull said from behind him looking at the bodies as well.

We walked further and saw charred corpses on the ground and my stomach flipped at the sight. I muttered a quick prayer hoping it wasn’t caused by what I thought.

“These aren’t mages. The bodies are burned…and these claw marks.” Solas looked up at me with immediate fear. “No, no, no, no.”

I all out ran, following the trail of burnt bodies. Rounding a rocky outcropping, my feet slid to a stop as I gasped for air staring in horror at the Pride demon. Solas stopped next to me and his sudden, painful gasp of air hurt my heart confirming it was Wisdom.

“My friend,” he gasped painfully.

“They turned her into a demon,” I softly cried hitting my knees.

“Yes”
“How do we get her back?”

I look up at him silently pleading desperately that there was a way and saw the slow shake of his head. Turning with the sound of crunching footsteps approaching, I saw three mages walk towards us and I slowly stood, anger and hurt fueling my bloodstream.

“How do we get her back?”

“A mage! You’re not with the bandits? Do you have any lyrium potions? Most of us are exhausted. We’ve been fighting that demon…”

Solas’ face was instantly hardened as his tone reflected his disgust and anger at the mage's words.

“You summoned that demon! Except it was a spirit of Wisdom at the time. You made it kill; you twisted it against its purpose.”

“I…I…understand how it might be confusing to someone who has not studied demons, but after you help us, I can…”

Solas took a step towards him angrily; his voice menacing and I could hear the Dread Wolf’s growl in the words.

“We are not here to help you.” He spat that last word as if it actually had a taste to him that was gross.

I looked at the demon and then back to the mage standing before us.

“Stop trying to explain to us how demons work, we do not need the fucking lesson.”

The mage looked from Solas then back to me with annoyance.

“Listen to me! I was one of the foremost experts in the Kirkwall Circle…”

“Shut up!” we both growled at him.

“You summoned it to protect you from the bandits,” Solas snarled.

The mage looked at him for a moment, and then his eyes turned towards the ground.

“I – yes.”

“You bound it to obedience, and then commanded it to kill. That is when it turned.”

He suddenly looked at me and I couldn’t keep the horror of what had happened to Wisdom from my face. They…took my friend and made her kill…she wasn’t a killer, she was – beautiful.

“The summoning circle, we break it, we break the binding. No orders to kill, no conflict with its nature, no demon.”

The mage threw up his arms in frustration.

“What?! The binding is the only thing keeping the demon from killing us! Whatever it was before, it is a monster now.”

“That demon is not the only thing you should concern yourself with trying to kill you right now,” I spat at him angrily. I glanced at Solas before turning to look at the others who up until now had stayed back.
"We break the bindings. Dorian, keep with the rotation of barriers, the demon will try to attack us as we tear it down.” He gave me a small nod and I looked at Bull. “Keep her busy Bull, don’t kill her just distract her please.” He gave me a slight nod and I looked at Sera, who was eerily quiet through it all. “Sera, I would appreciate it if you would focus on the pillars at the far reaches of the corners first, Cole can take out the one directly behind her.” She nodded her head at me, and for the first time, I saw the saddened look in her eyes as she gazed at the demon knowing that it was twisted against its will. She may not like magic, the Fade or spirits/demons, but she did have a heart.

"Get away from me," I snarled at the mage who had done all the talking for the other two.

The mages scurried away from us, and I swallowed the lump of anger and hurt I felt as the Pride demon suddenly roared loudly into the air. I wiped at the wetness around my eyes and pulled my staff from my back as I squared my shoulders.

“We have to hurry guys,” I said quickly as we all focused on the binding pillars that surrounded the demon.

Bull charged in and kept the demon busy never pulling his ax, just using his large body to keep it distracted. Dorian kept his focus on Bull and keeping a barrier over him at all times as the demon swiped at him constantly while he aggravated it. The rest of us focused on the pillars and within in seconds the circle fell, and the Pride demon swiftly changed back to Wisdom in the middle of the area.

Bull stopped and stared in surprise at the sudden vision of the long-haired, elven woman in front of him kneeling and he backed up quickly as Solas and I ran forward.

I fell to my knees and grabbed her hands. She smiled at me tiredly as tears streamed down my face. Solas knelt, his expression full of grief.

“Lethal’lan, ir abelas,” he said his voice thick with unshed tears.

She looked at me and then to him and shook her head slowly, giving him a warm smile.

“Tel’ abelas ar sha, ir tel’him.”

She kept hold of my hand and then grasped one of his pleadingly.

“Ma melava halani, mala suledin nadas. Ma ghilana mir din’an ma falon,” she requested of him quietly.

Solas looked away and closed his eyes before giving her his slow nod of agreement.

“Ma nuvenin,” he said quietly as she squeezed his hand and let it go glancing at me.

“She son galin,” she said to me as Solas released her back into the Fade and the ashes of her form fell through my fingers.

“Dareth shiral,” I whispered brokenly as I stared at the ashes as they blew away from me on the gentle breeze.

Taking a shaky breath, I stood on unsteady legs and turned towards the mages that walked hesitantly towards us.

“All that remains now is them,” Solas said angrily a he turned to look at them his intent clear.
The other two mages were silent as the one that had spoken to them earlier stepped slightly forward. He looked unremorseful for any part he played in bringing a benevolent spirit to this world, and my disgust for circle mages grew with their ignorance.

“Thank you. We would not have risked a summoning, but the roads are too dangerous to travel unprotected.”

Solas slowly stalked towards them, and they began to walk backward with their hands up.

“You tortured and killed our friend,” he spat menacingly.

“We didn’t know it was just a spirit! The book said it could help us!” He pleaded as Solas got closer.

I turned away from them knowing what he was about to do, and God, help me, I wanted him to. The sudden thunder of fire roared behind me and I flinched slightly at the feeling of the heat against my back. I could hear his heavy breathing from behind me and I turned to see the burnt bodies that lie in front of him.

“Damn them all!” he said angrily his pain thick in his voice.

“I need some time alone. I will meet you back in Skyhold,” he said before walking away not even looking at me.

I stood staring at his back as he left while tears rolled unchecked down my cheeks.

Wait, I…I don’t understand.

I held a hand out towards him, but could not get my voice to work as he disappeared around a large rock and I slid to my knees staring after him. I felt Bull’s large hands help me to my feet and guide me back to where we left the horses.

I…I just don’t understand.

*****

I sat at the water’s edge in my forest knowing he would not come. Wrapping my arms around my bent legs, I cried as I turned a Crystal grace flower in my fingertips that I took from her garden. I had gone to place a small pinecone from my forest on her bench and picked the flower as I left.

Staring out over the water for a long moment I let the tears fall. I would miss her.

His walking away from me without a backward glance had cut me as effectively as her death. I had to learn how to be stronger, to withstand, if I was going to even remotely survive my love for him.

The shift in the air around me surprised me; it was not him, but I did not expect him to come. I stared at the flower as I twirled it absently in my hands when Mythal sat next to me.

She exuded a soothing presence and I took a shaky breath needing that connection of something calm.

“He was not the only one who shared the loss; why does he need to mourn alone?” I whispered brokenly. I heard her breathe in and then let out the long breath.

“It is the way he has always been lethal’lan. Only time will change his ways,” she answered while slipping a lock of my hair behind my ear.

I nod my head in understanding, it did not take away the hurt, but I did understand. I had always been alone in my times of grief, but this time I actually had someone I wanted to share that moment
of pain with. If he needed this time to himself, then I would give it to him, and cease being hurt with him for not wanting me with him. In time, he would want me there; I just had to show him that he could lean on me when he needed to.

Solas found the small pinecone on the bench and knew where it had come from, *she was here.* Sitting down, he picked up the small token and gazed around the garden that he had spent many nights conversing in. He was unsure how long Fenlin had been Wisdom's friend, but her grief had been as real as his own. *How had he not known? Why hadn't either one of them told him?*

Shaking his head he twirled the pinecone absently with his fingers. What was done he could not change and bring back his friend. He stared at the pinecone and felt his heart squeeze at the memory of her crying with Wisdom at the end. Her pain was as real as his own, and he had left her there to grieve alone. He knew that if he had the courage he would find her in her forest and explain himself. Rubbing his face, he closed his eyes.

For all the love he felt for her, he had walked mindlessly away from her to grieve alone. Shaking his head at himself and his foolishness, *I should never have left her alone to grieve.* Taking a heavy breath he placed the pinecone back on the bench. She would be halfway back to Skyhold by now. He already planned to use the Eluvians to get back quickly, but in the meantime, he would prepare for her justified anger towards him.

*****

The plains were really pretty if you could get past the Freeman trying to kill you, or the body pits that their group placed in the military holdings around the area. This civil war between Gaspard and Empress Celine was a fucking nightmare. They had turned the plains into an unlivable shit-shack and they didn’t seem to care.

I was grateful that the others had not said one word about Solas' leaving. Cole was the only one to approach me with seeking him out in the Fade, telling me that he was looking me. I had stubbornly shaken my head 'no' with his suggestion only aggravating him. Pushing my hair out of my face, I stared at my tent ceiling. *I hope he is okay.* He was in for a shock when he returned and found me not there. Sighing heavily it definitely wasn’t because I didn't want to be. Rolling out of my bedroll, I prepared for another day of fighting Freeman and picking herbs. Ignoring the ache in my chest at his absence, I focused on growing stronger. I needed to prove to myself and to him that I could survive if he walked away from me and I couldn’t change his mind.

Leaving my tent, I began braiding my hair as I approached the fire where Dorian sat.

“My dear, you are unfashionably early this morning. I have, however, prepared you a meager meal.”

I smiled at him and tied off the ends of my braid before I took the offered bowl of porridge with some dried fruit.

“Thank you handsome, you are too good to me.”

I heard his small chuckle.

“Of course I am, and it is good of you to notice.”

I turned at the sound of another tent opening and watched Bull climb out and stretch his big body
“Rub a dub dub, come and get your grub” I joke with him and hear his deep laughter.

He walked towards us and took the bowl Dorian offered him and sat down.

“What are we after today?” He asked me before taking a bite of his breakfast.

“Var Bellanaris, it is a sacred burial ground that is currently inhabited by some angry guests.”

Sera came out of her tent all wedge-headed and scratching her belly.

“Breakfast darling,” I call out and hear her grumble as she walked towards me, taking the bowl and sitting next to me. Her hair was getting longer I noticed and ruffled her hair making her smile.

“Let me help you with your hair Sera,” I offer and see her look of surprise.

“Why?” She asked me slightly wary as she took a bite of her breakfast.

“Because, I can help you keep it out of your face until I can get my hands on some scissors and cut it properly for you.”

“Yes, please let her help you. That mop on your head is crying out for someone to love it,” Dorian said sarcastically and Sera gave him a dirty look.

“Stick it,” she spat at him and glanced at me when she heard my patient sigh.

She gazed at me for a moment and finally shrugged.

“Okay”

It is a small victory. Sera is a beautiful woman with a good heart, she deserves attention and affection.

“Great! Let’s finish up and get our asses in gear then,” I tell everyone before moving to clean my bowl out.

Chapter End Notes

Lethal'lan, ir abelas - I am sorry
Tel' abelas ar sha, ir te'l'him - Don't be sorry, I am happy, I am me again.
Ma melava halani, mala suledin nadas. Ma ghilana mir din'an ma falon - You helped me, now you must endure. Guide me into death my friend.
Ma nuvenin - As you wish
Vera son galin - Take care of one another
Dareth Shiral - Safe journey
Clearing out Var Bellanaris of demons for the Dalish Keeper won me a fair amount of favor. Their merchant, Taniel, had a pattern she was willing to share with me on how to craft some better, sturdier armor. The vallis’lin I unwillingly wore, gave us a lot of leeway with the clan, though I had never lived with one and had no idea how to act within one.

Glad to get a raven off to Skyhold asking them to send some supplies to help out the clan. It was unfortunate that they found themselves stuck here until they could get through the area safely without Gaspard or Celine’s men trying to kill them. I had just turned away from Dorian when I was approached by Loranil.

“You are who they call the Herald of Andraste?”

I glance at him as he studies me carefully and I give him a welcoming smile.

“That is what they call me, now ask me if I believe it,” I tell him jokingly and saw his reciprocated smile.

“There is talk that with you being Dalish, it could mean good things for the clans.”

*Lovely, gossip is always the best.*

“Ah, talk. I’m sure it is entertaining at least.”

He ducked his head shyly and stared at the ground.

“I had asked Keeper Howen if I could join your Inquisition, but he doesn’t trust anything that has to do with the Chantry, Andraste or its Maker.”

“Would you like me to talk to the Keeper and see if I could convince him?” I can see he is nervous and then he looks at me and nods.

“Please, you and your people are the only ones trying to do anything. The old hate is a festering wound that needs to be cut out, and I want to help if I can.”

“I will talk with your Keeper then,” I tell him and see his grateful smile.

Approaching Keeper Howen I glance back at Loranil and take a deep breath before greeting the elder.

“If I may have a moment of your time Keeper Howen?” I asked him as I approached.

He glanced down at me and nodded his head, crossing his arms.
“Loranil approached me with wanting to join the Inquisition and told me that you do not agree. How may I convince you to change your mind?”

His eyes narrowed perceptively and he folded his arms.

“You have been around shems to long da’len. Have you forgotten where you come from, to so readily pull more of your own into a Shem war?”

I took a steady, calming breath and fold my arms behind my back like Solas would when in his teacher’s mode. It is a somewhat calming motion, I now think I understand why he does it so often.

“Did you not see the large hole in the sky Keeper?”

His expression held obviously irritated by my question as he looked at me.

“Of course I saw it da’len, it did not affect me.”

I stared at him in amazement at how he could just discard it so simply, and I am now thankful that I am grasping my hands behind my back as I promptly feel the urge to slap the Keeper.

“It would have swallowed the whole world, and you don’t think it affects you? Have you taken leave of your senses, Keeper? It affects us all, not just the humans.”

He shook his head clearly displeased with me. Well, there goes any good work I have done here because of this asshole.

“You are titled after one of their Gods, how quickly you have forgotten your own.”

I took a calming breath and found that I had no calm left, and my arms fell to my sides.

“I have no Gods Keeper Howen; I have only faith in humanity. I do not recognize someone by their ears hahren, but by their deeds. Our Gods have forgotten us and no longer care to pay attention as I can see neither do you.”

Turning from him, quitting the conversation before I got really angry, I walked back towards Loranil and pulled the map from my pack holding it out to him.

“This is where the Inquisition is located lethal’lin. When you decide to do what is best for you, you will find a good Commander named Cullen willing to accept your help.”

I watched as he took the map from my hands and stared at it for a moment before looking at me.

“If you give me a moment lethal’lan, I would like to leave with you.”

I gave him a quick nod and watched as he gathered his pack, bedroll, and bow. One thing about the Dalish – they packed light. When he had everything, he gave me a shy smile and we turned to leave seeing Keeper Howen rush towards us.

“Loranil, I have not given you permission…”

“Forgive me Keeper, but I must do what I think is right,” he interrupted.

I saw the Keepers stunned look as we walked past and out of the Dalish encampment.

*****
“What do you mean she is still in the Plains, Commander?”

Cullen rubbed his face tiredly. He knew this was going to be Solas’ reaction to the news and repeated himself.

“It is exactly as I already told you before, Solas. She is still in the Plains clearing up rifts and helping the people. We just sent a shipment of supplies to a Dalish encampment a couple of days ago. It appears she will be there for some time.”

Opening the drawer of his desk he pulled out the message and held it out to him.

“I was going to bring you this later, she sent this with the last Raven.”

Solas took the note from him and his stomach was tight as he held the closed parchment.

“I apologize, Commander, thank you,” he said quietly and saw Cullen’s nod before he turned and left his office.

Taking the stairs two at a time, he entered his room and closed the door quickly. Moving to sit on his bed he opened the note with unsteady hands.

“My love,

I am sorry I am not there to greet you on your return. There is much that needed to be done here and I thought since I was already here, I would do the work. You asked for time alone, and I freely give it. Take this extra time to realize that you do not have to go it alone any longer, that I am there for you as you have been for me. I think of you every night and miss you.

With all my love, Fenlin”

She was not angry with him, and his heart beat a little calmer with the knowledge. He ran his finger over the flowing elven script and smiled. Her sense of duty was one of the qualities he found admirable about her, but he was also not naive enough to think this was not also a form of punishment for leaving on his own. He smiled at the note and folded it before slipping it into his sketchbook. His vhenan was cunning and knew exactly how to get him to think and regret his rash decisions.

Rubbing his neck with a silly smile on his face, he turned and grabbed his brushes deciding to begin the fresco on Haven. It would appear that she would not be back in Skyhold for a while.

*****

We finished with the last rift on the plains and Dorian came to stand beside me as I caught my breath.

“My dear, we have been here for more than a month and a half. We have cleared out the Ramparts, walked through every ruin on this spot of land and worked ourselves almost to death. Can we please go home now for some much-needed rest?”

I glance up at him and smile.

“Yes, I believe we can. We cannot do anything else until the bridge is repaired and the path to Ghilan'nain's Grove is cleared and that will take months.”
Dorian gave me a grateful smile and I turned to see the others watching us. *Ah, they sent him to ask me.*

“Okay guys; let’s head home for a while.”

Bull picked up Sera and she scrambled onto his shoulders holding onto his horns. I couldn’t keep my smile hidden at the picture I would draw later of the two, they looked so adorable. I noticed that Sera’s hair was dusting across her shoulders and couldn’t stop thinking of how unnaturally fast Sera’s hair grew, and I had given her pigtails to keep her hair out of her face. To my surprise she really liked them, and was talking about keeping her hair, she said they were like soft horns on her head.

Loranil had of course taken to following me around, and at first, I thought it was that he was nervous around the others, but as Bull pointed out it was more of a crush than nervousness. Shaking my head, we headed back towards camp. I would need to figure out how to convince the young man I was not interested in him without stepping on his feelers before Sera shot him with an arrow. Sera had made it quite clear she did not like the ‘elfy-elf’, but at least Cole and he got along, so that was a plus.

While I had been her, I was careful when entering the Fade. Hope and Harmony had happily shown me how to get to the Vir Dirthara, and I was researching wards and glyphs. I would figure out how to open that door – without his help. As usual, my thought turned to him and I didn’t know how he felt, but it was killing me to not talk with him or have his simple touch on my hand. By now, he was probably angry with me for not returning sooner, and for evading him in the Fade. Many times I had felt his presence until Harmony showed me how to shield myself from discovery. Every time I felt him close and then cast the shield, it hurt to sever that connection with him.

Reaching our camp, I saw Keeper Howen and another young Dalish woman waiting for us by the fire and my thoughts of Solas were pushed back to think about later. I walked towards them after dropping my pack at my tent.

“It is good to see you Keeper Howen, what has brought you today?”

I watched the elder stand as did the young woman.

“Emalien requests to join you and your Inquisition.”

I looked at the woman who wore Elgar’nan’s vallis’lin, dark brown, shoulder length hair and wore two daggers at her side. *For a man who didn’t want Loranil to join, he is now bringing me another?*

“Is this true?”

She nodded her head yes. “My brother is dead, and I do not wish to stay here any longer. If my skills can be of use to your Inquisition then I would like to come with you.”

Loranil stepped towards her smiling.

“Good thing you came to today Emalien, we are leaving for Skyhold tomorrow.”

The way she had glanced at Howen to make sure she had said it right was glaringly obvious. I glanced back to Howen and nodded my head in acceptance of her. *He must think me stupid. It is quite apparent she is to spy on what we are doing.*

“I would be pleased to have her along, I am sure Lady Nightingale can use your skills.”

I turned towards Bull when I heard him clear his throat and he motioned me towards him. *Of course, my Ben Hassrath would notice.*
“Excuse me for a moment,” I said to keeper Howen before looking behind me at Loranil. “Loranil, please see that Emalien is settled for the evening.” He gave me a quick nod and I turned towards Bull who led me a short distance.

“Boss, you know she’s a spy right?” He whispered to me and I nodded my head in agreement.

“Yes, I do Bull, just like you. I have no doubt that Leliana would see her for what she is too, but if she can report back the good that the Inquisitions doing, it might give the Dalish some peace of mind not unlike the Qunari.”

He gave me a quick nod and I turned back towards Keeper Howen gesturing for him to sit.

“Would you like to share our nightly meal Keeper Howen?”

He smiled and shook his head, “no da’len, I should get back to my clan.”

He walked to his Halla and slid on easily and without a backward glance left our camp and Emalien.

*****

I could hear the horn heralding our impending arrival, and I wondered if Solas would be waiting for me. We rode steadily up the path and I listened as Bull and Sera talked about all the beer they were going to drink that evening, and all I could think about was a hot bath and my very large bed.

When we crested the small hill that led to the drawbridge, I breathed a little sigh at the picture. *I really do like this place.* The clopping sounds of hooves over the bridge were soothing in a way and I led the mount towards the barn. Cullen and Leliana greeted me as I approached and I slid off the horse and handed the reins to Master Dennett.

“I am glad to see you two,” I tell them turning towards Loranil and Emalien.

“Emalien, Loranil, please come forward there is someone I want you to meet.”

They both walked forward and giving them a reassuring smile, I began the introductions.

“Emalien, this is Lady Nightingale. She is who I spoke of that would best utilize your skills, and Loranil this Commander Cullen whom I believe you will enjoy working with.”

Loranil shook his hand and then glanced down at me.

“I will not be able to go with you out in the field?”

“Maybe, but I would like you to get yourself settled in here first. Get to know the place and the people you will be working with.”

Looking back at Cullen and Leliana I gave them a cheery smile.

“I would appreciate it if I could give a quick report before I call it a day because I am sleeping in tomorrow.”

Both nodded in agreement.

“I will show Loranil and Emalien to the barracks beneath the castle and meet you in the war room.” Cullen offered and gestured to the two young Dalish to follow him.

Grabbing my pack, I follow after Leliana towards the keep. *No sign of him,* I saw and let a
disappointed sigh escape while I followed Leliana down the hall leading to the war room.

“I’ve made some inquiries into the Imperial Court. The sooner we remove the threats to the Empress, the better. The political situation in Halamshiral is dangerously unstable, it will complicate matters.”

I look at Josephine and shake my head slightly as Cullen scoffed at the information.

“All in the Empire complicates matters. It’s the Orlesian national pastime.”

Laughing now at how true his words were, Leliana crossed her arms to look at him with annoyance.

“Turn your nose up at the Grand Game if you like Commander, but we play for the highest stakes and to the death.”

You had to appreciate how calm Josephine was when she just picked back up as if she hadn’t been interrupted.

“The Court’s disapproval can be as great a threat as the Venatori. We must be vigilant to avert disaster.”

“Exactly…what do you mean by ‘dangerously unstable’, Josephine. How is it more dangerous than usual?”

“The Empress is in the middle of a Civil War. Her cousin, Grand Duke Gaspard seeks to take her throne by force.”

“Well tell me something I didn’t know already. The Exalted Plains showed me that much.”

“Leliana reports that a group of elves has been sabotaging both armies, drawing out the hostilities. Orlais holds Tevinter at bay. All of Thedas could be lost if the Empire falls to Corypheus. Celine is holding peace talks under the auspices of a Grand Masquerade. Every power in Orlais will be there, it’s the perfect place for an assassin to hide.”

“A Grand Masquerade – I will need to go shopping,” I joke and saw Josephine slightly relax.

“Don’t worry Josephine; we will save the Empress if we can. Do we have an invitation?”

“Yes, Grand Duke Gaspard has kindly invited us as his guests.”

“How long do we have before this party?”

“It is at the end of this month, Inquisitor. I also still need your birthday.”

*Ugh… I hate it when she does that.* Nodding my head I glance around at everyone.

“I will put you in charge of getting everyone outfitted for this soiree, and my birthday is Molioris eleventh, now if you will excuse me, everyone, I am tired. We can discuss this further tomorrow after I have slept in.”

“Of course Inquisitor,” Josephine said quickly with an understanding smile writing down the day.

Picking my pack up off of the floor I slung it over my shoulder and headed for my room quite positive that Josephine would make a big deal out of the day. *I cannot wait to sink myself into that bathtub and hopefully after, track down that insufferable man and get a kiss.*
Chapter End Notes

da'len - little one/young one
hahren - teacher/elder
Welcome Back

Chapter Notes

*****NSFW*****

Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading. Your comments and kudos are awesome, and I am humbled that you are enjoying it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I felt his aura as I slowly trudge up the stairs bone ass tired and reaching the top step, I saw that the room was bathed in candlelight. Dropping my pack, I glance around at the closed curtains and the roaring fire. There was a bottle of wine on the coffee table with two glasses, and a plate of cheeses and cut up fruits. What in the hell is going on in here? The soft noise from the bathroom doorway pulled my eyes quickly from the coffee table and he held my gaze.

I drank him in while my heart sped up. Oh, how I missed him.
His tender smile sent the flutters buzzing and I just stared at him.

“Greetings are in order I believe,” he said calmly and my body vibrated with the rich baritone of his voice like a tuning fork and I swallowed nodding slowly.

His slow walk towards me made me warm all over as his eyes held mine. Holding my head in his hands he bent and kissed me gently, almost carefully, but after being away from him for so long it wasn’t gentleness I wanted from him, and I knotted my fists in his tunic and pulled him against me.

His throaty groan vibrated through his chest against me setting off fireworks as desire.

When his lips left mine we were breathless and I still craved more of him.

“I’ve taken the liberty of drawing you a bath,” he said roughly.

I unraveled my hands from his shirt and smoothed it out.

“That sounds lovely,” and I can hear the thick desire in my own voice.

He pressed against my lips once more and a small sigh of pleasure escaped my throat with the simple taste of him. Taking my hand, he led me towards the bathroom and I noticed that there were candles throughout the room in here as well. The tub was full of steaming water and smelled of the vanilla oil that I liked. He had laid out fresh towels, and my bathrobe. Someone has been very busy it would seem, now not quite so upset over his lack of greeting me when I arrived.

“The dinner I requested for you should be ready. I shall go and gather that and return,” he told me and I turned towards him.

“Okay,” I whispered and watched him walk across my room to disappear down the stairs.

If this isn’t the most romantic gesture I have ever experienced in my life. Peeling my clothes off, I threw them in the clothes hamper in the corner and stepped into the water making a groan of pure
delight as I sat. Working my braid loose, I ducked my head under the water and leaned back enjoying the heat as it relaxed my tired muscles.

While relaxing against the back of the tub, I felt the flare of subtle magic and let a small smile curl my lips knowing he had just warded the door. It would appear my mysterious man has plans, and with that thought, butterflies raced around my stomach making me suddenly anxious as to what was to come. The sound of the tray being placed on the desk softly echoed to me and I smelled the delicious aroma of fish and veggies while my stomach rumbled reminding me the last thing I ate was an apple.

I grabbed the bar of vanilla soap and began scrubbing it against the washcloth building up a good lather. Washing my legs and feet, I felt marginally better. Rinsing the cloth and repeating the action with the soap I worked on the rest of my body and step by step began to feel clean again. Once that was done, I slowly washed my hair – a couple of times and stepped out of the tub grabbing the towel to dry myself quickly.

Wrapping my hair in the towel, I picked up the lotion that I purchased in Val Royeaux and lathered my skin. Some of the simplest things that I use to take for granted were now luxuries for me. Trying not to laugh at myself when thinking that bathing and lotion were luxuries, I pulled on my robe and towel dried my hair as I left the bathroom. He sat on the couch and had our dinner portioned out onto plates in front of him. Dropping the towel in the hamper, I walked towards him and slid my hand over his shoulder to rest just over his heart while I bent and kissed the top of his head.

“Have I told you lately how wonderful you are?”

His deep chuckle sent shivers down my spine. Grabbing my hand he kisses the knuckles.

“Not lately vhenan,” he replied and pulled me towards the couch.

“Hmm, well I will have to do better,” I tell him teasingly and he turns towards me and lifts my hand back to his mouth.

“It is I, that should do better, not you.”

Oh, this man was smooth, and I smiled at him knowingly.

“Shall we eat?” He asks me after a long moment of me just gazing into his beautiful blue eyes. I realize he is talking about the food and I blush instantly. Solas knowingly starts laughing and I couldn't help but smile at him cheekily.

“Yes...food, before it gets cold,” I respond quickly and turn towards my plate. It never stops surprising me at how easy it was for him to just throw my body and my brain into chaos.

We talked about what I had accomplished in the Plains and I went to get my sketches of the Veilfire glyphs I found in the old ruins. The first one I found in the ancient bathhouse revealed symbols depicting a pair of hands cupped around the moon. The second glyph found in the shrine to Sylaise showed a hawk and a hare chasing the sun. The third I found in front of a collapsed tunnel showed what appears to be Dirthamen, the elven god of secrets, on the back of a large crow. The last one was in a collapsed building on a low wall revealing symbols that show two ravens. One grips a heart in its talons, the other a mirror.

“Look at these,” I tell him as I hand them over. “I found them in crumbling elven ruins scattered over the Plains.”
He studied the glyphs quietly and then looked up from the parchment.

“They are a map of sort’s vhenan; they will lead you to the Temple of Dirthamen.”

Smiling brightly at him, I took the papers back and lay them on the coffee table.

“Not today they don’t,” I said jokingly and picked up my wine before leaning back into the couch, tucking my legs beneath me.

He moved beside me and pulled me into his side, and I felt his soft exhale of breath against my back while I enjoyed the warmth of his embrace.

“Good, you were gone far too long and I have missed you.”

I felt the soft glow blossom with his words and I took a sip of my wine. He kissed the top of my head and I felt the puff of his breath over my hair as he spoke.

“I regret leaving you as I did.”

I tilt my head back so I could look at him clearly.

“I don’t. We all deal with grief in our own way, yours just happened to be alone, mine was picking herbs and killing Freeman.”

His gaze held affection as he kissed my temple. When he gazed at me again this time there was a hint of pain.

“Will you explain to me why you prevented me from visiting with you in the Fade?”

I pulled my gaze from his and took a sip of my wine.

“Oh, this is going to get tricky, I'm a crap liar. I didn’t want him to know that Hope and Harmony had brought me to the Vir Dirthara to research the ward on the mystery door.

“I needed time to, I guess. That – and you are a big distraction,” I teased hoping he would not push me for more; at least it didn’t sound like a lie. The vibration of his laughter and the soft nip at my ear sent shivers through every cell of my body. Damn this man does not play fair.

“Like that,” I whispered breathlessly.

He reached forward and took my glass and set it on the table before he started nibbling at my neck.

“You mean like this,” he whispered against the sensitive skin provoking a soft moan from my lips while I tilt my head so he had better access.

“Yes,” I reply huskily and feel his smile against my neck and instantly melted. That has to be one of the sexiest feelings I think I have ever felt.

“You have not told me if you have missed me as well, vhenan.” His lips were doing scandalous things to the skin behind my ear making it difficult to think.

“I haven’t?” I say with a panting breath as every nerve in my body was on sensory overload.

“No,” he said between kissing and nipping at my ear.

“Hmm,” is all I can think to say, completely focused on the pleasurable sensations he was provoking with his lips.
His soft chuckle made all my nerves sizzle as he nipped at the sensitive lobe.

“And?” he prodded before gliding his tongue over the shell of my ear.

“And,” I pant heavily, “I can’t think with your tongue in my ear,” I groaned.

His knowing laughter was wicked and I turned towards him and straddled his lap. Nipping at his lower lip, I felt his hardness nestled perfectly between my thighs separated by his breeches while I held his gaze.

“Perhaps, you will allow me to show you how much I missed you,” I tell him with a wicked smile of my own as I moved my hips and rubbed myself slowly over him, caressing his arousal. His pupils dilated with the action and a low moan of want escaped him.

“If that is your wish,” he said with a thickened voice.

I reached down and pulled the sash of my robe loose, and slid it off my shoulders. His eyes went wide with the action as I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him gently. I could feel the heat of the fire on my back and a flare of heat from him as I pressed myself into his chest.

His hands delved into my hair pulling me closer while he demanded more from my kiss. It was long, slow and deeply arousing.

“You are far too overdressed,” I panted against his lips when we finally broke apart. Moving off of him with a tender smile, I held my hand out to him. Taking my hand he stood with a fluid motion and I pulled him towards my bed stopping just beside it.

Sliding my hands beneath his tunic, my fingers touched warm skin as I slid them up, pushing his tunic along the way. His hands pulled it the rest of the way over his head while I placed open mouth kisses to his chest. His body was exactly what I had imagined it to look like. Soft alabaster skin, beautifully sculpted muscular definition, and all mine. Grabbing the laces of his jawbone neckless, I pull his head to mine. Kissing him passionately, as his hands grasped my hips while he returned the ardent kiss.

My hands memorized the feeling of his chest and it was magnificent. The softness of his skin covering the hardened muscles beneath was mouthwateringly sexy. I slid my hands over the ridged muscles of his stomach caressing the dips and curvatures of each muscle. He softly groaned when I finally reached my destination and I caressed the skin of his stomach with the back of my hand. Slowly untying the laces of his breeches his breath came in short pants.

Pulling my lips from his, I kissed at the skin of his chest. His panting breath echoed softly around me while I slid his breeches over narrow hips. By the glow of the candlelight, he was – breathtaking. The sight of him only made me hotter as he stepped from his pants and stood in front of me in naked impressiveness.

He pulled me to him and it was a euphoric shock to feel his skin pressed against mine. I held his stormy gaze as I absorbed the feeling of his warm skin. His hands memorized the curves of my sides, gliding up to cup each small breast. The slow and methodical way he teased each nipple with his thumb left me panting and shaky.

He slid his arm around my back and leaned me backward, taking one of my nipples into his mouth, bathing it with his tongue and sending my heart racing. He moved his lips along the small valley, stopping briefly to kiss at the scar the arrow had left behind before lavishing attention on the other. Gripping his shoulders as each slow, methodical glide of his tongue sent sparks shooting behind my
eyes tearing a low moan from my throat.

He slipped his other arm under my legs and picked me up and I was lost.

“Solas…” his sudden descent of lips to mine cut my words off quickly before he spoke sending lightening along my veins in response.

“I have thought of little else…and you are…everything I imagined,” he said breathlessly before taking my lips in a passionate kiss which I responded to enthusiastically.

Laying me down on the bed, I felt every delicious inch of him as he lay down beside me. My heart was racing in anticipation when he pulled the covers over the top of us and then – he kissed me and every nerve in my body lit up like the fourth of July.

My hands roamed the expansion of skin, touching everywhere I could reach as he drank from my lips heatedly. I felt the thickness of his arousal against my hip and slid my hand over his side to grasp him, swallowing his sudden moan at the touch. Just the feeling of him was exhilarating if not a bit overwhelming when through my fuzzy, desire-filled brain I comprehended that my fingers did not meet as I gently caressed him.

He reached down to still my hand and smiled at my questioning gaze. Growling, “my turn,” as he gently took my wrists with one hand and pulled them above my head as his other hand caressed my face

“You are so beautiful,” he groaned before he took one of my nipples into his mouth.

Arching my back, I softly moaned at the feeling of his tongue as it laved and suckled. Everything felt like it was on fire inside of me with each swipe of his tongue. My body hummed with his focused attention, and my sex tightened and grew wetter with each movement.

His hand gently touched the skin on my stomach and drew a lazy pattern while he just seemed to be enjoying the feeling. The simple touch was driving me insane and I bit my lip. Finally raising his eyes to meet mine they glistened with unshed emotion.

“It is impossible for me to deserve you,” he said thickly.

My wrists slid from his grasp and I put everything I felt for him into the meeting of our lips. The feeling of his body’s soft trembling before wrapping his arms tightly around me and pulling me closer so every inch of my skin was touched with his.

“It is not impossible Solas, please, let me love you,” I whisper against his lips.

He softly moaned at my words and my body throbbed as he trailed kisses from the corner of my lips to my jaw, burning a path down my neck to my collar bone. My soft, eager moans urging him on. He continued his path with tongue, lips, and little nips down to my stomach, and my muscles tightened as his tongue bathed my belly button. He nibbled at each hipbone and I couldn’t help the breathy moan that escaped with the sizzle it sent burning through my body.

He leaned up on one arm to watch me as he took his other hand and slowly caressed the delicate skin of my inner thigh. Tracing his fingers over the sensitive skin in a lazy pattern and it felt like warm fire running thick through my veins. His eyes held mine as his fingers ran the length of my wetness before he slid a finger inside. At the pleasurable intrusion, my eyes closed, my eyes rolled to the back of my head and I gripped the blankets as my hips raised towards his hand in a silent plea.

I moaned his name breathlessly as he slid his finger in and back out slowly, teasingly and a ragged
sob ripped from me as his tongue replaced his fingers and gently licked the silken folds. With each flick of his tongue, the moans grew more insistent; my breathing grew more ragged and I was sure that my body was going to rocket through the roof. He grabbed my hips and placed my legs on his shoulders settling himself more comfortably between my thighs.

My body was racing and reaching into that pleasurable abyss with every desperate breath I took. Clutching the covers tightly sobbing his name over and over and then lightning struck as he sucked the sensitive little gem, and I screamed his name as I came apart in his hands.

He trailed kisses along my inner thigh nibbling at the delicate flesh reigniting the fire in the pit of my stomach again and I moaned at the fiery sensation. He left a trail of kisses over my hip bones moving slowly up my body.

When he reached my shoulder, I pulled his head towards mine and kissed him fervently, enjoying the taste of myself on his tongue.

“My turn,” I whispered huskily pushing him onto his back.

My lips trailed their way down his jaw, licking and lightly biting at his neck and then his shoulder, enjoying the soft moans that escaped him. Delicately scraping my nails over his chest, elicited another low moan from him, I bathed his nipples with my tongue. The taste of his skin was like a drug that I would never get enough of.

As I had done earlier, he gripped the covers of the bed when my tongue meanderingly made its way down his ridged stomach. I let my tongue taste and lick each muscular curve before trailing lower to swirl my tongue around the head of him. The sound of a low groan of pleasure ripped from him with the slow action. It was his turn to moan my name and with each slow movement of my mouth encasing him, he did. Running my tongue from base to tip, he was a good whiskey and I would take my time drinking him.

I licked, nipped, and sucked at him until I heard him growling at me, begging for release. Increasing the suction of my mouth, I swirled my tongue around the crown and his whole body trembled beneath my hands as his release swept through him. I kissed his stomach, holding his gaze while I slowly crawled up his body, recognizing the feral side of him he held so closely in check.

He sat up and grabbed my waist, picking me physically up and rolling me beneath him. I could feel the wildness in him, just barely under the surface as he kissed me deeply and it excited me. My need for him was just as great and I loved that I had the power to make this normally restrained man become abandoned with his need for me.

He slipped easily between my thighs and I could see he was struggling for the last of his restraint. His gaze held mine as he slowly joined us together, and I felt myself stretch to accommodate his length and girth. Finally, my whole body seemed to breathe as I moaned his name.

On a breathy moan, with my nails digging deep into his shoulders, he breathed my name into my shoulder. Wrapping my legs tightly around his hips, he moved and I was lost. His slow thrust teasing that elusive place deep within me sent lightning flashes behind my closed eyes. His deep growl and the slow glide of his tongue up my throat as he thrust into me set every nerve ending on fire. He bit my shoulder while his thrusts grew deeper and my nails scored down his back at the intense pleasure.

Each movement he made, my body pulsed with the increase in pleasure and stimulation he created. My breathing grew ragged and I can’t focus on anything but this feeling he is creating. I am losing myself. Every muscle in my body tightened and I moaned with the intensity. My head was spinning and my whole body started to shake; overwhelmed with pleasure, I felt myself let go and fly into the
oblivion.

His loud shout of release followed mine, and we lie tightly wound together as we came back to ourselves. Nothing could have ever prepared me for the intense, almost religious experience making love with him would be like. I felt his head move from my shoulder to gaze down at me and I ran my hand over his face lovingly, memorizing this moment as I stared into those warm blue eyes.

“Ar lath ma vhenan,” he whispered before kissing me tenderly and my heart exploded with the emotion I could hear in his words.

“I love you too,” I whisper back and pull his lips back to mine. I would never get tired of his kiss.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
Chapter Notes

It is such a rush to see so many new readers, the number of comments and kudos given. You guys are the best!

Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I woke slowly by the soft touch of his finger running gently down my arm. My lips curved lightly and I felt the press of his lips against mine. *Now, this – I could definitely get used to*. Opening my eyes slowly to gaze into his, my whole body felt alive. If this is what it felt like to be irrevocably in-love, then I never wanted it to end.

“Josephine has knocked on your door twice now, vhenan. I believe it will be difficult for me to pass unnoticed from your chamber.”

I run my hand lovingly down his bare chest. The subtle play of muscle beneath skin enthralls me and I smile at him wickedly.

“Especially if you’re not wearing clothing,” I tease him and see his wolfish grin as he laughed. *He had been beautiful by candlelight, but he is mouthwatering and devastating on my hormones by daylight.*

“Well besides Josephine knocking, did you feel that you were missed adequately? I mean, I would be happy to show you daily how much I missed you.”

He slid a lock of hair behind my ear and kissed my forehead as he chuckled. There was knocking at my door again and we heard Josephine call out, “Inquisitor?” before he could even say anything.

Sighing, I shook my head in obvious annoyance. *I have the yummiest man in my bed, and they are going to pull me from it. I seriously hate my advisors right now.*

“I tell them I am going to sleep in, and does anyone listen? Nope,” I grumble as I start to roll out of the bed and feel him tug me back towards him. His arms tighten around me, cocooning me within his warmth as he nibbles on my neck playfully sending little sparks of delight to flush my skin.

“Then ignore it, and stay,” he said softly placing another delectable kiss on my shoulder.

The delicious shivers of desire snaked through my bloodstream like wildfire and I softly moaned. *There is nothing I want more than this man – right now.*

“I could possibly be swayed,” I tell him breathlessly as he suckers on my earlobe making my whole body shiver.

“Then I shall endeavor to be very - persuasive,” he growled close to my ear as one hand snaked around to cup my breast and the other slid teasingly over my stomach downward.

A soft moan escaped me as he found me ready, and his growl of pleasure from behind me only
intensified the heat I felt growing inside me. He bit the tendon on my shoulder and it was a painful type of pleasure that sent ripples of excitement through my body. His fingers were magical, and with expert strokes over me and the soft pulse of electrical magic, I was unhinged in moments and shuddering against him. *Oh hell with it, fuck the counsel, I have a lot of catching up to do.*

“Consider me convinced,” I breathe out huskily. Rolling towards him enjoying the deep rumble of his laughter as it vibrated against my chest before my lips found his, and we ignored the sounds of Josephine’s insistent knocks.

When I did finally enter Josephine’s office, which was sometime around noon, she greeted me with a harried look.

“Inquisitor, I know you said you were not to be disturbed this morning, but there is a messenger here to speak with you from Clan Lavellan that arrived this morning. He has been waiting for you in the garden.”

I watched as Josephine hurried from behind her desk towards me, and I felt a sudden anxiety wash over me at the news and took a calming breath.

“Did he say what he was here for?” I ask her curiously shoving the alarm of my lie coming back to bite me in the ass away.

“No, he said he would only speak with you.”

I gave her a brisk nod and turned on my heel to leave and find this Dalish messenger in the Garden. Opening the doors that lead outside, it didn’t take me long to find him. He was seated beneath the gazebo’s latticed arches in traditional Dalish warrior gear. When our eyes met, his green gaze narrowed slightly holding caution as I approached. He stood as I drew closer and I held my hand out to him introducing myself.

“Fenlin Lavellan,” I said calmly while he stared at my hand for a moment before grasping it.

“Towen of Clan Lavellan,” he said with a curious expression studying my face.

His dark, chestnut brown hair was held back with a leather strap. He had a bump in the middle of his nose that told me he had broken it a time or two. His face was quite angular, but strong looking with a slightly widened jaw. Long tapered ears that peeked past his head just a bit, but overall not a bad looking man.

“Have you had lunch yet Towen?” I ask him politely and see he is struggling to not show his impatience at having to wait for so long. It would be a cold day in hell before I apologize for being late. *I regret none of my actions this morning, especially the ones in the bathtub. Mmm, damn that was...shit he’s talking – focus.*

“No, I have not. But, I did not come all this way for lunch and pleasantries.”

*Ah, bluntness then...good, I can deal with that.* Sitting down on the bench, I motion for him to take a seat with me.

“Well, I would hope not. Our food is pretty decent, but not all that.” I tell him jokingly folding my hands in my lap. “So perhaps you will tell me why you did come then.”
“I was sent by my Keeper to request your aid,” he finally said after a momentary staring contest.

“What does Keeper Dishana require of me, that couldn’t be sent in a letter?” I ask him not missing the surprised expression on his face. *Ah, he didn’t think I knew who she was…good.*

He cleared his throat before answering with obvious uneasiness.

“She requests your aid with the Nobles of Wycombe. We have never had problems with them before, but it would appear that they are sending mercenaries now to try and remove us from the forest, permanently.”

I stare at him for a long moment. *There is much more to this than he is telling me.*

“Wouldn’t it just be simpler to move the clan elsewhere and avoid the confrontation?”

He laughed sarcastically and nodded his head in agreement.

“It would *lethal’lan,*” he said with a snide tone, “if they hadn’t killed all our Halla with the first attack.”

My own gaze narrowed at him with his tone and I couldn’t help myself at getting snarky back.

“Oh, it must chap your ass that you had to come all this way to ask for help from a *shem* army.”

His green eyes narrowed at me, as his jaw tightened with anger.

“That’s what I thought. I will see what can be done to help your clan. Let me extend my hospitality and offer you lodgings and food. I will speak with my counsel and see what can be done for Clan Lavellan in an expeditious manner.”

His look of hesitancy did not go unnoticed as I stood and gestured for him to follow. I heard his soft footsteps behind me as I walked across the garden towards Josephine’s office. She looked up as we entered and gave me a polite smile—*ah, the political smile.*

“Oh good, I am glad you were able to find him, Inquisitor.”

“Josephine, I will be putting our guest into one of the rooms we have for nobility for however long he requires. I would also appreciate it if you could gather everyone; I need to speak with them in an urgent manner regarding Clan Lavellan.”

“Of course Inquisitor,” she said and watched her leave on swift footsteps. I glance at Towen and gesture for us to continue.

“Would you prefer to join me in this meeting, Towen?” I ask him and see his look of surprise.

“If you would not mind,” he said hesitantly. My eyes dart to his and I stop for a moment.

“Of course not, they are your people, your family. I would not want to do anything that would not be agreeable. I am sure Keeper Dishana sent you because you speak for her in this matter.”

He stared at my vallis’lin and then my eyes carefully, unable to keep his curiosity at bay any longer.

“How did you come by the name Lavellan? I have never met you.”

“I chose it,” I answer him honestly and see his surprise. I held up my hand and showed him the anchor and he gazed at it nervously. “When they found me with this, they assumed I had killed their
Divine and destroyed their temple. I had no people, but they were insistent to know something about me so I chose the name.”

I fisted the hand and dropped it back to my side, walking again towards the dining hall and glanced up at him.

“I don’t believe I have brought your people dishonor by choosing the name, do you?”

He stared at me for a moment and then shook his head.

“No, lethal’lan, I do not believe you have. That is why the Keeper sent me to you; she appreciates the work you have done for the people and thought you honorable. But if I may ask, what happened to your own clan?”

I smile at him and open the door leading to the dining hall.

“They are gone. Now that we have that cleared up, let’s get some food and then I will show you to your room after our meeting.”

Solas sat at his desk staring at one of the frescos in a complete daze. He had not thought to ever be this happy again in his life. He smiled as he remembered the moment she had found out he was ticklish and became relentless in her pursuit. It had taken them almost as long to clean all the water off the bathing chamber floor as it had bathing.

Her spirit called to him in a manner he had not felt for a very, very long time. She made him question everything, and he was unsure he would be able to leave her behind when the time came for him to do so. Perhaps, I will invite her to come with me.

He was so focused on his thoughts about her that he did not hear Dorian’s approach.

“There are only two things that can put a look like that on a man’s face, and it is love and great sex, or both,” he said nonchalantly as he walked towards his desk and perched his hip on the edge smiling knowingly at him.

Solas glanced up at him and even his words couldn’t foul his mood.

“You have this little glow about you, Solas; it is hardly difficult to deduce how you attained such a satisfied smirk since our dear Inquisitor only returned yesterday.”

He pulled a book from the corner of his desk and remained indifferent to his prodding as he opened it. Glancing at him with a questioning eyebrow raised, he held the Tevinter’s blue gaze.

“Was there something you needed Master Pavus, or have you stopped to simply try to irritate me?”

Dorian smiled at him and shook his head.

“No, actually I thought we would dine together this afternoon.” By Solas’ raised eyebrow of surprise, he smiled at him wickedly. “I believe, I saw our beautiful Inquisitor leading a strapping young Dalish man down there and I thought you might like to come with me.”

Solas kept his mask calm and continued indifference, though an ugly roar of jealousy rose angrily in his stomach. He placed his book down and stood.
“That is very kind of you to offer, I believe I would enjoy your company for our midday meal.”

Dorian gave him a knowing look and slightly laughed as he followed after him out of the rotunda. He already knew why Solas would eat with him and it had nothing to do with his company, but the company of who was with their dear Inquisitor.

Solas kept his pace unhurried as they walked down the stairs that led to the dining area. Upon his arrival, he saw not one, but two Dalish men sitting with her and felt his stomach tighten. Possessiveness was a trait he was not proud of, yet he was unable to stop the feeling from spreading through his body.

“Ah, I stand corrected. It would seem she has two now. The one just to her right across from her is Lorani; she recruited him in the Exalted Plains, this other one though, I heard he is from her own clan.”

Solas glanced at him and then back to the young man sitting closer than he would prefer to her before they slowly approached, and when she turned to meet his gaze, the jealous knots flew from his stomach with her tender smile directed at him.

“Solas, Dorian, this is Towen of Clan Lavellan.”

Solas nodded his head towards the young elf noticing the Elgar’nan vallis’lin adorning his face and the large smile he was wearing as well.

“Pleased to make your acquaintance,” he said politely before focusing on the other.

“Oh, sorry you haven’t met Lorani yet. He is from the clan in the Exalted Plains,” she told him easily and he glanced at the young man with a Ghilan’nain’s vallis’lin who already looked in love and felt his feral side of himself growl warningly.

“And you as well Lorani, would you mind if we joined you, Inquisitor?” He asked her calmly and saw her smile brighten making his heart beat a bit faster.

“Of course not, the more the merrier.”

He sat next to her and Dorian across from him next to Lorani and he breathed slightly easier when he felt her hand squeeze his knee as she listened to Towen speak with her. Lunch moved along quite pleasantly up until the moment he heard Lorani request a walk alone in the garden with her later and his wolf snapped.

“I was hoping leth’lan that perhaps we could walk in the garden together this evening?”

His eyes moved to his, narrowing warningly and he saw that he was intently watching Fenlin for her answer. Anger rose in him swift like a grass fire, and his aura must have conveyed it as he suddenly felt her hand grasping his knee beneath the table trying to soothe him.

“That is kind of you to ask Lorani, but no thank you.”

He heard her answer and felt calm to some extent, but there was no reason behind her answer and his eyes moved to hers quickly, almost accusingly. Why did she not offer a reason, and why was she not even looking at him now?

Dorian did not miss the exchange and covered his mouth pretending to cough to cover up his laughter with the surprised look on Solas’ face. Soon he couldn’t stop his laughter from escaping when he listened to Towen also ask for a walk with her later. He waited for Solas to explode and by
the look of the poor man, it would not be a long wait. He watched in silent expectation as Fenlin
looked from one man to the other in surprise.

“I am spoken for gentlemen. If I am to take any garden strolls it will be with him,” she finally admits.

Solas felt the tension evaporate with her words. Loranil unwilling to give up so easily stared at her
expectantly.

“I have not seen another Dalish bloke around, who is this…other?” he asked sounding unconvinced.

Solas stared at the young fool quietly seething. *Yes, she would need to pair with another Dalish…* felasil! She squeezed his knee and glancing down at her, she held his gaze affectionately. He felt the
raw anger leave him as he gazed into the honey amber pools of her eyes and saw what he meant to
her. Even if her eyes did not reflect her feelings for him, her aura did.

“He is not Dalish,” she answers them while looking at him and he swallowed the sudden lump in his
throat. He would never deserve her type of devotion.

Loranil and Towen glance at him now and Solas pulled his gaze away from her to look from one
man to the other calmly, his face betraying nothing.

“Him…the…” Loranil began and stopped himself from saying flat-ear at the look he was receiving
from Fenlin that told him she would not hesitate to hit him.

“Yes, the Elvhen man beside me,” she said holding his gaze warningly. “Now if we are done
discussing my personal life, Towen and I have a meeting to get to.”

He felt his heart expand at the warm glow of knowing she was not ashamed to admit she was his. He
smiled at her tenderly as she stood and felt her warm breath on his ear as she whispered to him
sending shivers down his spine.

“I will see you in the rotunda when I am finished, my love.”

He gave her a subtle nod and his eyes followed her as she walked across the dining hall.

“Well that was certainly entertaining,” Dorian said quietly as he picked up his glass of wine watching
Loranil leave shortly after them.

Solas picked up his glass of water and took a drink watching Dorian.

“I was wondering when she would finally tell the boy she wasn’t interested. She tried every subtle
way to gently let the young man down. You should have seen how he resembled a puppy dog in the
Exalted Plains. Constantly following her about here and there, trying to get her attention. For a
moment, even poor Sera was going to shoot an arrow at the boy for his obvious fawning and Bull
even told the lad he was wasting his time.”

“Perhaps she thought the young man would grow weary of the chase,” he offered while tenting his
fingers.

Dorian raised his eyebrow at him and scoffed.

“My dear Solas,” he said with a burst of laughter. “Did you?”

Solas finally shared in his laughter and shook his head.

“Point taken,” he finally conceded as he stood. “I believe you were looking for the book by Genetivi
“Yes, I was,” Dorian said as he moved to stand regarding him curiously.

“I have it on my desk. There are some notes I would like you to look at that I made on some of the material.”

“Lead on,” Dorian said with a smile and fell into step with Solas towards the stairs.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
felasil - fool
While I stood on a raised little platform continuing to argue with Josephine, the seamstress walked in circles around me making little 'tsking' noises with her tongue as she took my measurements.

“It has to have sleeves Josephine; I don’t care what the fashion is in Orlais. I am only going to this farthing thing to stop an assassination plot, not kiss the Empress’ ass.”

Josephine held her clipboard close to her and I could see she was gathering her patience and her words to argue further.

“Inquisitor, what you wear, how you present yourself, is vital to our success with the Court, I cannot stress enough how extremely important it is.”

I stepped from the box to the seamstress’ dismay since she was taking my chest measurements and stomped towards Josephine needing to prove my point and stop this silly argument over fucking sleeves. She held a surprised expression as I bore down on her, quickly yanking the sleeve of my left arm up. The pinkish white scars from the anchor swirled and curled around my hand and wrist up to the middle of my arm, the intricate pattern shone brightly in the mid-morning sunshine through the window.

“I will not show this off to every noble in Orlais, Josephine. I will have enough to contend with just being a damn elf, so let’s stop arguing about fucking sleeves.”

Josephine stared at me in alarm and nodded her head with understanding shining from her hazel gaze as she looked at the scars with obvious discomfort.

“I apologize, Inquisitor; I did not know that the mark had done so much damage. Please forgive me,” she said quickly.

Taking a deep breath, I patted her arm before walking back towards the little-raised box. I had forgotten that for some people the sight of the scars might be quite off-putting. Solas always traced the patterns with his fingers when we snuggled, and I lost the sense of self-consciousness about them until the ‘sleeve or not to sleeve’ argument with Josephine.

“Quit worrying Josephine, I know you didn’t know and I’m sorry for getting angry with you about it.”

"It is quite understandable, Inquisitor," Josephine replied.

I looked at the young woman who had been hired to make my gown and give her a reassuring smile.

“Sorry I moved on you again. I promise to stand here for at least another hour, and then I have other things I really need to get done.”

The woman nodded her head and glanced back to Josephine.

“Have you a color in mind, my Lady?”

Josephine nodded, “a deep plum with gold trim and please make the sleeves from shoulder to wrist
tapered. We can discuss the design after you have all her measurements, as the Inquisitor just informed you; she is a busy woman today."

*****

I stare at the next correspondence and groaned before a disgusted snort escaped followed with a loud sigh of annoyance. The sound of Solas closing his book reached my ears and I glanced at him from across the desk. He still lay on the couch with his eyebrow perched up inquisitively watching my obvious expressions of disgust.

“I need to speak with Josephine about what is important for me to read and answer, and what is literary garbage.”

His soft chuckle reached my ears and I held up the badly written letter and gesture towards a larger stack than I cared to believe existed.

“These are all proposals for marriage. Badly – written ones at that,” I tell him slapping the letter I held down onto the pile while he rose from the couch and walked towards me.

“You would prefer well-written ones?” He asked me teasingly and I glance up at him seeing his small smirk.

“I would prefer none at all, but if you are going to ask for a woman’s hand in marriage at least don’t be half-assed about it. Write something meaningful, something that will at least capture her eye. Make her think you might be worth a second glance. You don’t tell a woman her hair reminds you of the void and her eyes are lovely twin globes on her face. One man actually compared my beauty to his hunting dog for fuck’s sake.”

His laughter echoed around the room as he picked up a letter from the stack and read it unable to hide the smirk that grew on his lips.

“I see,” he said and placed the letter back down.

“All these dinners with nobles, this pandering to them, and now this it is…ugh!” I growl and throw my arms up in defeat.

He took my hand and kissed the slight indent on my finger where my pen had sat for hours.

“Is that why you are hiding up here and requested that your dinner be brought up? You wished to not have dinner with any more of Josephine’s nobles?” He questioned me perceptively.

I nod my head yes. “If one more of them try to touch my hand with the anchor on it, I am going to stab them with a fork.”

He chuckled and bent to place a kiss on my forehead before tilting my chin up to hold my gaze tenderly.

“‘She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies; and all that’s best of a dark and bright meet in her aspect and her eyes; Thus mellowed to that tender light which heaven to gaudy day denies.’”

His words spoken tenderly were smooth as satin against my skin and I melted, and he knew it as he gave me a slow-growing smug smile.

“Now that is what I’m talking about,” I whisper huskily and hear his deep chuckle before pressing a
soft kiss to my lips.

*****

The Vir Dirthara was a treasure trove of information and I watched as Hope rushed towards me holding a book in her slim hand. Sliding the one currently in my hand back onto the shelf, I can see the excitement on the spirit’s face.

“I think I found it Fenlin,” she said excitedly.

I almost don’t want to get my hopes up, but as she places the book in my hand, I see on the leather cover the beautifully written elvish script.

“The Art of Glyphs, Wards, and Runes,” I said aloud sliding my fingers over the finely tooled lettering.

“Open the cover,” Hope whispered excitedly.

Opening the cover was the author of the book I held and it was none other than Fen’Harel, himself. A small smile started at the corners of my mouth while running my fingers over the name and raised my eyes from the book to Hope with a large, toothy grin.

“I think you might be onto something here, Hope.”

Her head bobbed up and down in agreement and she waved her hand for a bench to perch on. Sitting down together we flipped through the pages and I stop suddenly when I recognized the pattern.

“This is it,” I let out in breathy excitement letting my eyes devour the page. The more I read, I realized that the pattern was simple to unravel if you were ancient and knew it existed. I couldn’t help thinking, smug asshole. Memorizing the pattern, Harmony walked towards me holding paper and pen.

“If you draw it, it might help you remember it better.”

I smile at her grateful and took the tools and sketched it over and over until I handed the book back to Hope to hold and I drew it from memory. Putting the paper and pen down, I drew the glyph on the ground and watched the iridescent green flash and I smiled knowingly. Moving my hand in the backward pattern, I watched it flash again before disappearing.

“Ladies – we struck gold,” I told them excitedly. I look at Hope and point towards the book.

“Wherever did you find it?”

The spirit shrugged her slim shoulders and gestured from the way she had come.

“There are others?”

I stare at her open-mouthed before snapping it closed. “Please show me,” I ask her with a building sense of excitement and follow her to a section of the library I had not gotten to yet. She pointed towards the floor to ceiling bookshelves and I stared in awe. Oh my God, there are so many.

“He wrote – all of those?” I stare at the collection from floor to ceiling.

“Oh yes, Fen’Harel is the only Fade Mage of the Evanuris. It wasn’t until one of Mythal’s own Sentinel’s showed the same ability that he was no longer the only one.”
“What happened to the Sentinel?” I asked curiously and see her eyes saddened.

“She was brutally killed by Andruil. Assan was bound to protect Mythal. This also meant that she could not lay a hand on her daughter, Andruil. So, she offered her life in exchange for the one Andruil had originally come to kill.”

The air shifted around us before I could ask any more questions and I turned nervously towards the familiar feeling. Shit!

“Go,” I whisper to them hurriedly and sit down on the comfy chair in the corner holding a different book. I tried to portray an air of indifference, but I knew it probably wouldn’t work.

I watched as the large black wolf slowly walks down the long hall towards me, and I could feel his curiosity swirling around him as he approached.

“What has brought you to the Vir Dirthara, da’len?”

His voice softly growled at me while I study his slow steps down the corridor.

“This is the first I have seen of you in a couple of months, and that is how you greet me?”

His red gaze studied me carefully for a moment before taking another step closer.

“It was your choice to not visit with me, da’len, and you are evading the question.”

I smile as I stood and placed the book back on the shelf before I walked towards him. He stood as still as one of his statues I found in the Exalted Plains as I wrapped my arms as far as they would reach around his large chest, pressing my face into the soft fur of his chest.

“I missed you to hahren,” I teased him not missing the soft snuff of his breath around my neck as I release him and looked up into his large wolven face. “And to answer your question, I was admiring your many works. Impressive really, you’ve accomplished much in your time.”

I heard his soft chuff that resembled a snort.

“That is a polite way of telling me, I am very old, da’len.”

I laugh and pat his large shoulder glancing up at him wishing they could leave this game and just be honest with each other.

“Perhaps it was hahren,” I tease him running my fingers through his soft fur.

I stared at the mystery door with a sense of nervous excitement. Pushing magic from my fingertips, I closed my eyes and traced the pattern. A flash of iridescent green happened when I opened my eyes, and I smiled. Grabbing the handle, I turned it, and the door opened silently. Slipping through the small opening, I closed the door quickly behind me pressing my back against it.

With a crafty flick of my wrist, the candles lit and bathed the room with its soft glow. Looking around in curiosity, I saw that my mystery room was indeed a library, full of ancient texts in elven perfectly preserved and not a speck of dust or dirt in the room. In the center sat a desk with a large book lying open on a raised up platform. I could feel the soft hum of magic in the room and look around. There is more in here than books, I – felt it.

I moved around the small circular room and glanced at the open book on the table. It was open to a
Damn you, Solas. The magic I felt centered on and around the desk and I walked around it running my fingers around the edge. I felt the small notch under my fingers as I rounded the third corner and stopped. Pressing it, the desk abruptly slid forward towards the door and revealed a dark, circular staircase. Well, well, what have we down here?

Lighting a small mage light, I started down the steps. There was a long corridor and there at the end was winter traveling gear, a pack, a staff and a large mirror that was about seven feet in height. The magic I felt came from the large glassy surface. Running my fingers over its surface, I felt the magic pulse beneath my fingertips. This is an Eluvian...here? I ran my fingers over the surface again and let out a heavy sigh as I recalled the end of the game.

This is how he left...this is how he will leave and disappear without a trace. I suddenly want to break it so he cannot leave. Taking shaky breaths, I try to calm myself, restraining myself from the sudden violent urge. I stare at the mirror for a long moment and finally turn away from it. I will not give up – I can't let him go that easily.

I walk back up the long corridor and up the stairs. My shoulders drooped with a sense of impending defeat. Hitting the hidden mechanism, the desk slid back into place and I left the room making sure to place the ward back on the door.

I took the doors that led outside and breathed deeply into the early night air. Staring up at the twin moons, I took another breath and closed my eyes against the sudden hurt. I had to prepare myself for the possibility that I might not be able to change his mind.

“You look like you could use a drink.”

I jolted at the sound of Bull’s low voice and I dart a glance at him.

“Come on Boss, let’s grab a couple and see if you can’t relax.”

I give him a soft smile and a slow nod, following him towards the tavern.

After a few beers with Bull, Dorian, and Sera I left them for my own room. I had watched them play Diamondback and found it similar to Spades. I didn’t have a good poker face, and I found that out quickly after two rounds and three sovereigns later that Sera was pleased to take from me. Shaking my head at the stupid loss, I walked through the keep and through the door leading to my room warding it as I entered. Taking the steps slowly, I still couldn’t get the vision of the Eluvian out of my mind. Flicking my wrist, candles flared and I threw a ball of flame into the fireplace, which gave me a little satisfaction as I imagined it was that damn mirror. I will think on all that later - much later.

Toeing off my boots, I grabbed my sketchpad and flopped down on the couch. I started sketching Hope and Harmony as I let my mind empty. There was a large stack of papers on my desk that I blissfully ignored as I let my fingers fly over the page. Halamshiral was drawing closer, and I would endure one more fitting. Tomorrow there would be lessons for dancing, and I hated the idea. I was never a good dancer, so poor Josephine had her job cut out for her.

*****

“Stop looking at your feet my dear,” Dorian reminded me – again.

Raising my eyes to his again I stepped on his foot and grimaced.

“I am so sorry Dorian; I am just not a good dancer.”
“Nonsense, there is a difference between knowing how, and learning how.”

“Darling, you cannot make a silk purse out of a nug's ear,” Vivienne said from the side and I closed my eyes suddenly embarrassed. I know I shouldn’t let that old cow get to me, but in this case, she was right.

“Don’t listen to her, Fenlin. She lives off of cruelty and possibly the blood of her enemies now chin up.”

I chuckled just as I stepped on his foot again and stopped.

“Enough, I have stomped on your toes plenty. It is just logistically impossible to dance with someone so much damn taller than me.”

“Perhaps Master Pavus, it is the partner,” Solas said walking forward and I ducked my head in embarrassment even as his beautiful voice surrounded me.

“Don’t Solas, I don’t need to step on your feet as well.”

I missed the look that Dorian gave me and then him before bowing slightly towards Solas.

“I believe you might be onto something,” he said and my head whipped up to look at him.

“Whaa…” I stumble over my words as Solas replaced Dorian and took my hand. The flush of heat was always present when he touched me, and I blushed when his knowing soft chuckle followed the sudden soft color.

He bent over my hand giving my knuckles the barest graze of his lips, and with one hand held behind his back in an old world courtly fashion, he gazed into my eyes.

“Perhaps, I may have this dance, my lady?”

My stomach dropped at the blatant desire in his eyes and I stare at him nervously before finally giving in and placing my unsteady hand on his chest. His hand slides around my waist and there was an instant vibration of energy between us, as he pulled me slightly closer. It was as if my body knew where my home was and I instantly relaxed against him.

I couldn’t tear my eyes from him as he began to move and it felt like flying. I was suddenly floating as he led me around the floor to the soft strains of the music. I hardly recognized moving and his soft smile made me melt while I gazed up into his beautiful face.

He was worth fighting for, I swiftly realized. I will not let him walk away, not like the others; he is what I have waited for all my life.

The music came to an end and he smiled at me tenderly as the hand I had rested on his chest reached up to softly touch his face. Our gazes still locked, he spoke to Dorian.

“As I said Master Pavus, she just needed the correct partner.”

I blushed as I listened to his words and heard Josephine clapping; the soft click of her heels on the stone floor echoed as she walked towards us.

“Oh that was beautiful,” she gushed rushing forward.
This is just a small stanza from one of Lord Byron's poems.

“She walks in beauty, like the night of cloudless climes and starry skies; and all that’s best of a dark and bright meet in her aspect and her eyes; Thus mellowed to that tender light Which heaven to gaudy day denies.”
My stomach was a bundle of nervous knots as our carriage rolled towards the Winter Palace. My entire trip here had been lessons on the Great Game with Leliana, and lessons on behavior with Josephine. *Jesus, they must think me completely daft with all these lessons on how not to be an asshole.* I had yet to see anyone else but my counsel and by anyone else, I meant Solas. I could feel his aura as we rolled down the road, but I had not seen him at all and it was driving me nuts, also it was increasing my nervousness.

The beautiful dress was a little lower cut in the front and back than I would have preferred with my non-existent breasts, but I had to find a middle ground with Josephine since I did have sleeves. For all her fawning, I did like the color and how it tapered tightly to my body with a soft flare at the hips. She had chosen a design that definitely accentuated my slim build and with the make up her and Leliana applied, my eyes looked to about pop from my face. She had thankfully left my hair down to cover some of my exposed back giving me a small measure of peace. How she did it without magic, I don’t know, but she had successfully tamed my riotous curls into beautiful order. Josephine looked at me before everyone exited the carriage.

“*The political situation in Halamshiral hangs by a thread. The Empress fears our presence could sever it. The Grand Duke is only too happy to have us as his guests. Whether we act as his allies or upset the balance of power, he gains an opportunity…if not a clear advantage.*”

I give her a slight nod of understanding and swallow past the sudden lump in my throat. The exit from our carriage was quite the show. I was to be last, and Cullen would help me out. *Please just don’t fall on your fucking face,* I order myself grabbing a handful of the material so I wouldn’t step on it as I took Cullen’s large hand and exited the carriage. I had chosen to go mask-less as I explained to Josephine that my vallis’lin was enough of a mask and got her to finally concede.

Giving Cullen a nervous smile, I saw his own look of nerves reflected back at me. *Oh, that’s right, he doesn’t like this shit any more than I do.* I noticed the tall, closely shaven-headed man, with a gaudy golden mask on his face that made his nose resemble a cone, walk with a regal posture towards me and knew it must be the Grand Duke. Curtsying low, I greeted him with what I hoped was not a nervous smile.

“Inquisitor Lavellan, it is an honor to meet you at last. Bringing the Rebel Mages into your ranks was a very strategic maneuver. Imagine what the Inquisition could accomplish with the full support of the rightful Emperor of Orlais.”

“I could see many benefits to such an alliance. Perchance, would you please tell me *who* again the rightful ruler is?”

He chuckled low and it made me suddenly feel very uncomfortable as he bowed towards me.

“The handsome one, of course, my lady,” he said smoothly.
Ugh…yeah, no, not that fucking handsome with that metal plate on your face.

“I am not a man who forgets his friends, Inquisitor. You help me, I’ll help you.”

The Duke took my hand and placed it on his arm as we walked slowly towards the palace doors smiling down at me.

“Prepared to shock the assembly by appearing as a guest of a hateful usurper, my lady? They will be telling stories of this into the next age.”

I try to give him a charming smile as I look at him even as he made my skin crawl with how slimy his whole personality felt.

“I can’t imagine that they have seen anything better than us in their entire lives.”

He chuckled and patted my hand making me want to cringe.

“I knew you were a woman after my own heart, my lady. As a friend, perhaps there is a matter you could…look into this evening. This Elven woman, Briala – I suspect that she intends to disrupt the negotiations. My people have found these ‘Ambassadors’ all over the fortifications. Sabotage seems the least of their crimes.”

I stare at him directly and feel stiffening in my spine at the insinuations.

“Tell me there is more to your suspicion then ‘the elves are acting dodgy.’”

He looked suddenly and definitely uncomfortable with my question and completely unremorseful.

“That Ambassador, Briala, used to be a servant of Celine’s. That is until my cousin had her arrested for crimes against the Empire to cover up a political mistake. If anyone in this room my lady, wishes Celine harm, it’s that elf. She certainly has a reason.”

Yeah, sex will complicate things. Especially if you have your lover arrested to cover up you’re screwing her.

He let out a sudden sigh of annoyance pulling my attention from my own weird thoughts.

“Be as discreet as possible. I detest the Game, but if we do not play it well, our enemies will make us look like villains.”

He held my gaze for a moment and it sent chills of unease over my skin as his eyes scanned my form.

“I must admit, my lady; I was not told you were such a vision of beauty. I am pleasantly pleased to have you as my guest. Shall we go and not keep the Court waiting?”

I would give anything to be able to just show my revulsion for his lewd staring, but instead, I just nod my head at him and let him lead me up the staircase towards the largely decorated doors that led into the palace. Where in the hell is Solas? Glancing around covertly, I still was unable to find him.

Josephine approached us and looked at me with an obvious requirement of speaking with me.

“Inquisitor, a moment if you please?” She asked politely giving the Grand Duke a curtsy.

“I shall wait for you up there my lady.” Gaspard bowed towards us and motioned to the top of the staircase.
I give him a bogus appreciative smile and watch him ascend the staircase. Letting out a heavy breath of relief I finally look at Josephine.

“I must warn you before we go inside. How you speak to the Court is a matter of life and death. It is no simple matter of etiquette and protocol. Every word, every gesture, is measured and evaluated for weakness.”

I give her a reassuring smile and fold my hands demurely in front of me.

“Well don’t they sound delightful? I am shocked you hadn’t invited them to Skyhold for dinner already.”

Josephine stared at me masking her annoyance at my uncaring manner.

“The game is like Wicked Grace played to the death. You must never reveal your cards. When you meet the Empress, the eyes of the entire Court will be upon you. You were safer facing down Corypheus.”

I let out a soft, nervous chuckle and gaze around and see that others were indeed watching them curiously.

“You are just full of joy and light this evening,” I said letting a small sigh escape as I glance at her pointedly. “You might want to speak with Bull and Cole…they are not exactly – social sometimes and find Sera. If she has ‘Red Jenny’ duties this evening, make her aware that if we are implicated, the Inquisitor will shave her head bald.”

She gave me a small smile and nodded her head in understanding.

“I will do as you ask, Inquisitor. Everything will be fine,” she said more for herself than for me. “Andraste, watch over us all,” she muttered quietly and I barely held the smile back at her nervousness.

I walked up the long staircase, trying to catch a glimpse of Solas and still, he was nowhere to be found.

“Do not be so impetuous Briala and change the agreement we have already set in motion. The Inquisitor is not a woman that you can manipulate as you have Celine.”

Briala glared at him for a moment and then crossed her arms.

“If you want the passcode to the rest of the Eluvian’s that I have in my possession; then you will get her to endorse me.”

Solas glanced at her angrily and folded his arms over his chest.

“You are a fool. I will not influence her for your own selfish grab for power. There are much larger stakes at play here.”

She gave him an ugly look from behind her large silver mask and snorted.

“Perhaps I shall tell your Dalish tart, the Dread Wolf has found her scent?” she threatened with a raised eyebrow.
Solas felt his feral side rise to the threat and he had to restrain himself from grabbing her throat by folding his arms behind his back.

“Do not threaten me, Briala, it would be a waste of your time; better than you have tried and failed.” Shaking his head, his blue eyes narrowed at her warningly as his voice turned crisp and dripped with venom. “However, if you ever threaten me again, I will steal that breath from you before you take another,” he said with a menacing smile.

Briala took a small step away from him and eyed him angrily. He let out a sigh of annoyance and shook his head at her.

“If I must take the passcode or override it, I will, and you and your people will be left behind, Briala. Felassan cannot aid you further in your childish grab for power.”

Her look of shock was pleasing as he glanced around and finally gave her a tired look.

“I must go, but if you insist on continuing down this path then know…I do not suffer fools lightly.”

With his parting words echoing through her mind, he turned and walked away from her.

I met the Duke at the top of the stairs, and placing my hand on his arm we entered the large ballroom. I wanted to puke with as much nervousness that was running through my system. Swallowing past the large ball lodged in my throat, I held my head high and made sure my back was straight.

Gaspard let my hand go as he walked forward to give the announcer their names and I could feel the eyes of everyone on me as we entered. Plastering a smile on my face I awaited the introductions.

The announcer bowed to him and then walked towards me and I gazed at him hopefully with a look of indifference and not utter fear. He bowed deeply to me before turning back to the large room and rolling out a small parchment of paper.

“And now presenting: Grand Duke Gaspard De Chalons, and accompanying him – Lady Inquisitor Lavellan.”

At the introduction, I curtsied towards the woman at the far end that would be Empress Celine and saw her small head bow in acknowledgment before straitening and beginning my slow descent down the stairs with Gaspard.

“Vanquisher of the Rebel Mages of Ferelden; crusher of the vile Apostates of the Mage Underground.”

The announcer’s words echoed through the chamber and I heard Varric mutter from behind me before I took two steps.

“This guy writes better fiction than I do.”

I couldn’t keep my smile from growing as I walked slowly across the giant expansion of the dance floor.

“Champion of the blessed Andraste herself!”

Suddenly Gaspard chuckled from beside me as we walked.
“Did you see their faces? Priceless,” he whispered almost puffing out further at the attention they were garnering.

“Accompanying the Inquisitor, Seeker Cassandra Allegra Portia Calogera Filomena…”

And everyone heard her growl at the man.

“Get on with it!”

“Pentaghast. The fourteenth cousin to the King of Nevarra, nine times removed. Hero of Orlais, Right Hand of the Devine.”

I listened as he went through the list and was coming close to the stairs that led to the Empress when he spoke of Solas.

“Also, the Inquisitors Arcane Elven Advisor, Solas.”

I let out a small breath and ascended the stairs and heard Gaspard talking.

“Cousin, my dear sister,” he said bowing low towards her.

“Grand Duke, we are always honored when your presence graces our court.”

I listened to them and now got why Orlesian’s wore masks. It had to be to hide their true feelings from one another because I can see by the angle of Celine’s jaw she despises Gaspard.

“Don’t waste my time with pleasantries, Celine. We have urgent business to conclude.”

I watched as the woman kept a calm demeanor and cool façade. With a small feminine gesture with her hands towards the Ballroom, she pastes a smile to her lips.

“We will meet for the negotiations - after we have seen to our other guests.”

I watched as the Duke bowed again and nodded towards me almost expectantly.

“Inquisitor,” he said before taking the set of steps off to the side leaving me to stand in front of the Empress alone.

“Lady Inquisitor, we welcome you to the Winter Palace,” the Empress greeted me watching me carefully.

I curtsied again and gave her a pleasant smile.

“Allow us to present our cousin, the Grand Duchess of Lydes, without whom this gathering would never have been possible.”

I look towards the tall, butch cut blonde woman next to her and curtsy again.

“What an unexpected pleasure. I was not aware the inquisition would be a part of our festivities. We will certainly speak later, inquisitor.”

I watched her leave and focused on the Empress. If only I could remember what happens in the game. I think the Duchess is working for Corypheus, but I can’t be certain…ugh. Shit! Focus, she’s speaking. Chin up, shoulders back, make Leliana and Josephine proud.

“Your arrival at Court is like a cool wind on a summer’s day.”
I swallow my nervousness and smile pleasantly up at her.

“Let’s hope the breeze does not herald an oncoming storm.”

The Empress smiled down at me, as she gestured with her hands.

“Even the wisest mistake fare winds for foul; we are at the mercy of the skies, Inquisitor. How do you find Halamshiral?”

“I have no words to suffice. Halamshiral has many beauties, and I couldn’t do them justice.”

The Empress smiled, and I could see she was pleased with my answer.

“Your modesty does you credit and speaks well for the Inquisition. Feel free to enjoy the pleasures of the ballroom, Inquisitor. We look forward to watching you dance.”

I curtsy with her dismissal and take the steps that Gaspard had taken earlier and found Leliana waiting for me at the top.

“Inquisitor, a word when you have a moment.”

I gesture for her to lead the way and follow her to a small settee where we sat.

“Thank you, I was hoping to catch a moment. What did the Duke say?”

“He is putting the blame on Ambassador Briala.”

“The Ambassador is up to something, but she can’t be our focus. The best to strike at Celine is from her side. Empress Celine is fascinated by mysticism – foreseeing the future, speaking with the dead, that sort of rubbish. She has an ‘Occult Advisor’, and Apostle who charmed the Empress and key members of the Court as if by magic. I’ve had dealings with her in the past. She is ruthless and capable of anything.”

“How can Celine openly keep an apostate in the Imperial Court?”

“The Imperial Court has always had an official position for a mage. Before now, it was little better than Court Jester. Vivienne was the first to turn that appointment into a source of real political power. When the Circles rebelled, technically every mage became an apostate. The word lost much of its strength.”

“Well, she is definitely someone that should be looked into at least.”

Leliana nodded her head in agreement and stood.

“She is worth investigating, can’t be sure of anything here. Both leads point towards the guest wing, it’s a promising place to start. I will coordinate with our spies to see if I can find anything better. I will be in the Ballroom if you need me,” she said before leaving me to sit alone for a moment.
Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading and comments. Just letting you know that there is a lot going on in Halamshiral, so that means there are a few chapters of fun here.

I listened absently while nobles where introduced and their names echoed through the large Ballroom. This is so much like mother's dinners, it's disgusting. I took a steadying breath and jolted at the sound of Cole’s voice next to me.

“Don’t be frightened, I will stay with you. They can’t see me if I don’t want them to.”

I glance at him and give him a relieved smile.

“Thank you, Cole,” I said before standing and smoothing my dress.

I made my way to the balcony area that overlooked the dance floor and was unexpectedly stopped by a woman clearly in charge of the servants.

“I do not know what you think you are doing in that fancy get up, rabbit, but get your bony ass into the uniform you are supposed to wear and grab a tray.”

Her accent was thick like most of the Orlesian’s in the palace and a bit hard to make out clearly, but the hackles on the back of my neck rose with her assumption. I made allowances for Orlesian racism when Cassandra and I had shopped in Val Royeaux…but I’m not shopping today.

“Pardon me?” I ask her and I know my tone sounds not only surprised but clearly offended.

“You heard me, elf,” she spat at me and moved to leave and I grabbed her arm angrily turning her roughly back around to face me and all my five foot four fury.

“My name is Inquisitor Fenlin Lavellan. I am a guest of the Grand Duke’s, not a servant, madam. If this is how you treat elves in general or your staff, you are a disgusting human being.”

Her eyes grew wide when she heard my name.

“The Inquisitor is a Dalish?” she said with bewilderment.

“She is a living being, you craven dolt!” I was livid and positive that my cheeks were flushed bright with my anger.

“My apologies my lady…” she began and I picked up a drink from her tray and walked away from her holding my hand up not wanting to hear it.

Oh, stuff it you hag! This evening was going to be a fucking nightmare, and where the hell is Solas?

I wound my way through the Ballroom and through the Vestibule when I saw the large lion statues
that lined the wall below that led to the servant’s quarters and beyond that the large staircase to the Guest Wing. Both doors were obviously locked and I stood for a moment at the window staring out over the gardens in front of the Guest Wing’s door. *How in the fuck am I supposed to open the door?*

Making my way back down the steps to the Vestibule, I overheard a pair of servants talking and stopped halfway down to listen.

“*The package is in the guest wing, upper room…*” one woman whispered.

“*The one off of the garden with the statuettes?*” the other asked quickly and I noticed the first one give her a slight nod.

*What package?* I wonder as my eyes follow the two women go about picking up their trays from a side table and heading in separate directions. *They must be Ambassador Briala’s agents.*

Walking the rest of the way down, I turn a corner and found a large room that reminded me of a daylight room. The walls held the floor to ceiling windows, multiple marble statues and carvings and the marble tiled floor was buffed to a high sheen. Two sets of double doors that led out to a large outdoor balcony area, and every time the door opened, I could hear the soft strains of music from outside. Five steps into the room and I took an easier breath at the sudden feeling of his aura. I sent mine out making a quick poke and felt his return gesture. *Where in the hell is he?*

I was searching him out when an elven servant stopped next to me to offer me a drink from his tray, ignoring the half-full glass I was currently carrying.

“*Inquisitor Lavellan,*” he whispered hurriedly. “*The last two people that have entered the servant’s quarters have failed to return. I would not go in there if I were you; there has been a lot of activity from the Duke’s people in there.*”

I took the offered glass of wine and made sure my face was calm as I listened to his words, keeping an indifferent expression. *Okay, definitely one of Briala’s people.*

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“*Inquisitor Lavellan,*” he whispered hurriedly. “*The last two people that have entered the servant’s quarters have failed to return. I would not go in there if I were you; there has been a lot of activity from the Duke’s people in there.*”

I took the offered glass of wine and made sure my face was calm as I listened to his words, keeping an indifferent expression. *Okay, definitely one of Briala’s people.*

“Thank you,” I say downing the last of the wine I held and placing it on his tray to take the offered one he held out to me. Holding the glass up so others would think I was thanking him for the wine and with a small nod, he returned to move through the crowd.

*Sounds like a wonderful room to visit.* I listened here and there for tidbits of gossip to hopefully feed Leliana when I returned to the Ballroom when a woman whispered to another.

“*Is that the Inquisitor?*”

The second woman scoffed and shook her head.

“*An elven savage? Impossible,*” she said disgustedly before taking a drink of her wine.

Gritting my teeth, I resisted the urge to *accidentally* bump the woman so she would spill her wine on herself and moved on. I was trying to follow Solas’ aura when I entered a small room and an older gentleman gazed at me for a moment before approaching me. I looked at one of the large golden lion statues as I waited.

“*Well, well, the Inquisitor. Here as a guest of my nephew, no less. How curious,*” he said as he came to a stop next to me.

I glance up at him and see that he is not looking at me with disdain as the other nobles had been
doing since I arrived, but held an open expression of curiosity. *Maybe not all Orlesian's were like a penicillin-resistant STD with their viciousness.* I gave him a hesitant smile.

“I was unaware the Grand Duke, was your nephew.”

He smiled and took a drink of his wine and gazed at the statue with me.

“He is my brother’s eldest boy. Always a difficult child, Gaspard; never listened, never did what he was told. He was raised a Prince. All his life, we told him he would be Emperor. It was his destiny, his duty. What else should he do with his life, if not fight for his destiny?”

I could understand that mentality and why he was passionate if not willing to be extremely underhanded in getting his throne back. That still didn’t excuse either one of them for the shit they were causing in the Exalted Plains.

“That is understandable my Lord. By chance have you noticed anything odd about this evening?”

He glanced down at me quickly, his eyes now astutely observing me through his mask that was like Gaspard’s.

“My niece, Florianne has not had two words for me all evening, it is unlike her.” He took a drink of his wine and glanced around the small room. “I have heard of what you and your Inquisition accomplished in the Exalted Plains. War is brutal, disgusting and sometimes necessary. Perhaps your input this evening will put an end to this disgusting Civil War.”

“Perhaps, my Lord; I only hope that they will listen to reason before any further bloodshed.”

He gave me a warm smile and a small nod. “I shall pray for your success, Inquisitor, and if you should require anything, please get in touch with me. I believe that your success against the evil of that Venatori Magister is of utmost importance.”

I gave him a real smile with his words and a small nod. “I shall convey your wishes to my Ambassador, Lady Montilyet, thank you, my Lord.” I gave him a small curtsy as he walked away and suddenly I felt a little better about this evening. *Now if only I could find my sexy bald elf, this night might get a little more promising.*

Cole helped me get into the locked library and I found a plethora of incriminating documentation. Folding the papers, Cole slipped them into his jacket and we rounding the corner to another room where we found a Counsel Emissary dead on the ground with a dagger sticking from his neck. The incriminating documents that lay scattered around him looked staged.

“Who would set this up?” I mutter aloud and hear Cole’s soft reply.

“Mask over another Mask, orders were given and carried out. He didn’t know him.”

“Well that was helpful,” I tell him teasingly as he slipped the documents into his jacket with the others.

“We must go, they are looking for you?” He said to me hurriedly.

“Who is?” I ask him curiously.

“They,” was all he would say as he took my hand and led me hurriedly back the way we came.
We had just left the library and taken two steps as one of the Ambassador’s agents that resembled a servant ascended the stairs. I did not allow my steps to falter as I walked passed her acting as if I had not a care in the world.

“I advise caution Inquisitor; all eyes are watching you this evening.”

I heard the whispered words as I passed and felt a tingling in my spine as if it were an unspoken threat. Continuing down the long staircase, I heard the bells that indicated that everyone should return to the Ballroom and it was then I felt the prickle of another mage.

I turned and watched a dark-haired woman, dressed in Orlesian fashion descend the stairs, her yellow eyes watching me curiously. Not surprised that she and I both wore similar colors to accent our eyes, light skin, and dark hair, all in all, the woman did look very lovely in the gown. By the fifth step, I recognized who she was and felt an internal cringe with my memories of the first game. The woman was known to be manipulative and very mean.

Morrigan

“Well, well, what have we here? The leader of the new Inquisition, fabled herald of the faith. Delivered from the grasp of the Fade by the hand of blessed Andraste herself.” She stopped at the bottom of the staircase and placed her hands on her hips, with a smirk on her lips.

“What could bring such an exalted creature here to the Imperial Court, I wonder? Do even you know?”

Oh yeah, I forgot condescending…she could be quite the know-it-all bitch.

“Oh With Courtly intrigues and all, we may never know.” I finally tell her, eyeing her cautiously.

“Such intrigues obscure much, but not all. I am Morrigan. Some call me an adviser to Empress Celine on matters of the Arcane.”

She walked towards me and gestured for us to walk together towards the Ballroom and I fell into step beside her.

“You…have been very busy this evening, hunting in every dark corner of the Palace. Perhaps, you and I hunt the same prey?”

She suddenly stopped and gazed down at me still holding a curious expression. Her yellow eyes were a lot like Mythal’s with their piercing intensity and it was a bit unnerving.

“I don’t know, do we?” I ask her with a small shrug of my shoulders and saw the quick smile lift her lips before she chuckles.

“You are being coy.”

I raise my eyebrow at her knowingly.

“I am being careful, there is a vast difference.”

Morrigan looked at me calmly for a moment, and then gave me a perceptive nod of agreement.

“Not unwise, here of all places. Allow me to speak first, then.” She offered before gesturing for us to continue walking. “Recently I found, and killed, and unwelcomed guest within these very halls. An agent of Tevinter; so I offer you this Inquisitor,” she said handing me a key. “A key I found on the
Tevinter’s body. Where it leads, I cannot say. Yet if Celine is in danger, I cannot leave her side long enough to search. You can.”

I stare at the key for a moment before glancing back up at her.

“The Ambassador’s people have whispered of things happening in the Servant’s Quarters, perhaps this is where that key will lead.”

Morrigan gazed at me perceptively.

“The Ambassador does have eyes and an ear everywhere, does she not? Proceed with caution, Inquisitor. Enemies abound, and not all of them aligned with Tevinter. What comes next will be most exciting.”

I nodded in agreement and enter the Ballroom with her where we parted in separate directions.

I strolled around the balcony that circled the dance floor and approached Leliana with my findings and to tell her about my conversation with Morrigan. Tonight would prove to be very interesting.

Leaving Leliana, I went in search of some of the others to help me with the Servant’s Quarters. I found the large balcony with the musician playing to the small crowd standing around and was quickly approached by three women all dressed exactly alike, right down to their silver masks.

“My Lady, my Lady Inquisitor,” the one in the middle called out to me as soon as she saw me.

I walked towards them as now all three were intently focused on me and curtsied as I came to a stop.

“May we have a word? It is very important. The Empress has sent us with a message for you.”

“How am I to be sure this message is from the Empress?”

The one on the end gave me a reassuring smile.

“We three wear the masks of House Valmont. They signify that we are the public faces of the Empress. They are also extremely fashionable.”

Orlesian ideas on fashion reminded me of people back in my world that wore their pants under their ass so they could show their boxers. Ordering my features to reflect polite curiosity, I gave them a tentative smile.

“Then I am honored to hear from her Majesty.”

“Oh, she is the honored one, Inquisitor,” the middle one said smoothly.

Oh, my God, I wish they would just choose one spokesperson amongst them, instead of bouncing from one to the other like a jack in the boxes. I am just going to start calling them Larry for the speaker on the far left, Curly for the middle and Mo for the far right.

Larry folded her hands in front of her and cleared her throat delicately.

“Empress Celine is eager to assist the Herald of Andraste in her holy endeavor. She will pledge her full support to the Inquisition as soon as the usurper Gaspard is defeated.”

“That is a very generous offer,” I reply coolly as I gazed from one to the next having a very good idea what they were after.
Curly fixed the cuff of her gloves for a moment and finally gazed at me.

“The Empress believes wholeheartedly that the Inquisition is our best hope for peace in these difficult times.”

“She looks forward to cementing a formal alliance,” Mo finished and Larry picked up the conversation again.

“As soon as Gaspard is out of the way,” and Mo slowly curtsied towards me. “But we have taken enough of your time.”

“Please, enjoy the masquerade, Inquisitor” Curly advised as she and Larry curtsied and the three of them left.

I would be willing to bet Varric ten sovereigns that the Empress wanted our help with her pesky cousin. I gave the ladies a small, knowing smile and watched them leave.

After ten minutes of wandering the large balcony, I finally found Dorian standing near a water fountain and moved towards him to take with me into the Servants Quarters. He smiled at my approach and took my hand, bowing over it, giving my knuckles the barest of kisses.

“My Lady, you look absolutely ravishing tonight.”

I give him a slightly cheeky smile.

“Master Pavus, you look quite handsome yourself this evening.”

He gave me his ‘I know I do’, smile and slipped my hand through the crook of his arm and led us across the large decorated balcony.

“I do, don’t I?” He replied audaciously as we walked and I softly chuckled as he held the door open.

“Have you danced yet this evening, my dear?”

I took his arm again and gave him a nervous look and shook my head ‘no’.

“But, that is not why I came for you.”

He held his hand over his heart and glanced down at me with a smile. “Oh you wound me,” he teased and I couldn’t help smiling at his antics.

“Oh stop, I need you,” I offered quietly and he smiled at me.

“Oh, need you,” he said and then saw Bull leaning against a large pillar and gestured towards him. “Shall we, my dear?”

“Yes, we shall,” I said quietly walking towards Bull so we could head to the Servant’s Quarters.
I actually squealed with excitement when I saw that there are over 3000 hits on this story! Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading, kudos, and comments. You guys are the best!

Thank God for enchantments or my clothing would be ruined, I thought just as Bull slammed his double-edged ax into the head of a Venatori. The squishing, crunch and then brain matter and blood flew around him.

The Servant’s quarters were full of Briala’s dead agents, and I couldn’t understand why she just kept sending them here. There is no method to this type of madness; it was just like she just kept throwing them down here for no purpose.

We moved quietly through the sleeping quarters, finding more bodies, and shaking my head at the waste of life, we headed towards the large courtyard grateful to take a deep breath of clean air. I looked around for stairs that led to the courtyard below and saw none and my stomach clenched tightly as a cold sweat broke out over my body. Closing my eyes at the drop down to the courtyard below, I suddenly felt Bull patting my shoulder.

“Keep your eyes closed, Boss, I got this,” he said calmly before picking me up. Scrunching my eyes even tighter, he picked me up and thankfully ignored my sudden whimper of fear. The sound of gravel crunching under his boots echoed in my ears and I focused on my aura and the colors it showed me while I felt him hand me down to Dorian, who took me and set me on my feet.

“Open those beautiful honey eyes of yours, my dear,” he said teasingly and I did, watching Bull ease himself over the edge like the others as my stomach slowly began to unknot.

“Varric told on me,” I whispered and heard Dorian’s small chuckle.

“Yes, now take a few deep breaths and get some of that color back in those cheeks before anyone who sees you thinks I have bled you of a couple of pints with blood magic.”

I gave him a wan smile and did as he told me before moving around him to see the dead man lying in front of a large marble sculpture. Walking towards him curiously, my earlier fear was forgotten as I glance down at the dagger sticking from his chest curiously, and knelt down.

“This is no servant. What was he doing here?”

I look at the body and see that there was a suspicious lack of blood pooled around him.

“He wasn’t killed here,” I said quietly and heard Bull’s grunt of agreement.

“Is that the Chalons family Crest? What have you been up to, Gaspard?” Dorian commented sarcastically as he walked closer towards the body.

“I suppose I will have to have a word with the Duke,” I reply taking the dagger from the body.
Wiping it along the dead man’s clothes ridding it of any blood before handing it to Cole.

“Evidence for later.” I said and he simply nodded and slipped the dagger inside his boot.

As I stood, we all turned at the unexpected sound of a woman’s scream and saw a servant or one of Briala’s agents running towards us. Before we could do anything to help her, a Harlequin materialized behind her and stabbed her quickly in the back before dropping a smoke bomb and disappearing.

“Son of a…” pulling the fade to me quickly, wrapping us in a barrier and suddenly witnessed the Harlequin now standing on a balcony above us.

“How the fuck could he possibly get up there so quickly?” I mutter in astonishment and heard Bull’s calm reply.

“It’s a diversion technique. It isn’t the same one Boss that is a different guy up there.”

Well that makes sense, I thought when the gates of hell decided to break loose and Venatori rushed towards us like rats out of a flaming building.

“It’s the Venatori!” I growl out quickly and Bull laughed excitedly.

“Now this party is getting interesting.”

He charged forward yelling at them, “I’m gonna wear your skull as my fancy mask Vint!”

Just the thought of it as I cast a barrier over him made me cringe, and I heard Dorian from beside me, “well, that could be entertaining.”

Solas leaned against a large statue taking the offered glass of wine and proceeded to watch the crowd. They were unsure what to make of him, and it gave him an advantage over the human nobility. His eyes followed his agent as he moved through the room without hurry.

It was one thing that Briala hadn’t learned and that was he was always watching her movements. She was blissfully unaware that he had over half her staff working for him. Felassan had done great things in obtaining agents, now to get him to just stop meddling in Orlesian politics.

This grab for power Briala was pushing for was vexing and completely ridiculous. He knew where the thought had originated and felt the frustration simmer through his body. Felassan was no fool; he knew exactly how to play the game, but why he had chosen to play in this one was not something he understood…yet. He allowed himself a moment to feel the annoyance with his old friend before focusing on the task at hand.

Taking the small parchment and slipping it within his coat as the young elven man walked by, he hoped that the communication would be the passcode that Briala threatened to withhold from him. Moving from his relaxed position, he left for the garden to intercept another message. So far, this evening was proving to be quite advantageous. Just a few more contacts and communications, and he wouldn’t need to continue evading Fenlin. He had felt her searching for him and it was painful to stay away from her. Spirits help me; he did not like being away from her, it made him uncomfortable. Not a feeling he was used to feeling when it came to another.
We made our way back to the Servants quarters and headed upstairs where we had seen the other Harlequin appear. When we rounded the next corner, there was a large group of Harlequin’s and Venatori warriors.

Casting a protective barrier around us quickly, we brutally fought the rogues and warriors that came at us. I noticed a Venatori trying to get away, and with a flick of my wrist, I drew a Fade fist spell to my fingertips when suddenly he dropped like a rock by a blade embedded in his forehead. We watched an elven woman rounded the corner wearing a forest green dress and a large silver mask. 

*This must be Briala – great.*

“Fancy meeting you here; shouldn’t you be dancing Inquisitor? What will the nobility say?”

I kept my staff in my hand at the ready for just the subtlest of moves from her and gave her a smirk.

“No doubt there is a line of men and women breathless with anticipation for a dance with me, Ambassador Briala.”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if there was,” she said smoothly running her eyes over my form before holding my gaze. “You’ve cleaned this place out. It will take a month to get all the Tevinter blood off the marble.” She walked through the French style doors towards the balcony and I followed her out staying far from the edge and closer towards the door.

“I came down to save or avenge my missing people, but you’ve beaten me to it.” She glanced over the edge to the courtyard and turned to look at me. “So the council of Herald’s Emissary in the courtyard…that’s not your work, is it?”

“No,” was all I said and she watched me cautiously. I could feel her weighing me with her stare as much as I was her. *She could give two shits about all those people that she sent down here…they were expendable.*

“You may have arrived with the Grand Duke, but you don’t seem to be doing his dirty work.”

My eyes followed her movements as she paced back to the balcony railing and looked out over the courtyard. “I knew he was smuggling in his Chevaliers, but killing a counsel Emissary? Bringing Tevinter assassins into the palace? Those are desperate acts. Gaspard must be planning to strike tonight.”

“How are you so sure he is behind this?” *Everyone really wants to point the finger at the man.* Not that I was overly fond of the pompous prick, he was no innocent in all this bullshit, but the mastermind? *Yeah, I think not.*

Briala crossed her arms and turned to lean against the railing, gazing at me with a small smirk.

“Don’t let his charm blind you. He’s Orlesian, that smile is his mask.”

I watched as she unfolded her arms and stepped closer to me, and I subtly tightened my grip on my staff. Something about her just rubbed me wrong…like stroking a cat’s fur in the wrong direction, kind of wrong.

“I might have misjudged you, Inquisitor. You might be an ally worth having.”
I stare at her steadily with a look of indifference, though I am far from feeling that emotion after all the dead servants I have seen tonight.

“Really?” I reply with a slight lift of my eyebrow. No way would I trust this bitch as far as I could throw her.

“What could you do with an army of Elven spies at your disposal? You should think about it.”

“Good question, you do know how to make a pretty sales pitch Ambassador; I’ll give you that.”

She gave me a fake almost condescending smile.

“I do, don’t I? I know which way the wind is blowing. I’d bet coin that you will be part of the peace talks before the night is over. And if you happen to lean a little bit our way? It…could prove advantages to both of us.” She turned to leave and then stopped and turned back. Her blue eyes held a hard edge to them as she looked me over again and then stared into my eyes.

“One more thing, Inquisitor; you have an Elven spy in your midst already, you should be cautious with whom you bed.”

The implication of whom she was inferring to was understood. My eyes narrowed at her as they followed her retreat, while my heart pounded in my chest. How does she know who he is? What kind of danger is she to him?

I took a calming breath and began gathering the dark around my mind to quiet out the suddenly scared thoughts. I don’t have time for this right now and turned towards the others standing behind me and Cole moved towards me.

“She is no threat to him, only you,” he said quietly and I glanced up at him.

“Lovely,” I muttered letting out a small sigh of annoyance, I gestured towards the doors.

“Damn, even the Elves are trying to bribe you, Boss.” Bull chuckled and prodded an elbow at Dorian who snorted.

“This whole place makes me a bit homesick,” he teased, and I give them both a forced smile.

“Let’s get back to the ball before we are missed.” I need to find that bald elf for my own peace of mind and walked towards the stairs.

Solas followed her entrance back into the Vestibule from a darkened corner. He smiled as he knew she was aware of his presence when she motioned for the others to go ahead of her. He swallowed the sudden lump of desire in his throat as she walked towards him with a small sway of her hips.

The dress she wore for the evening hid none of her curves or her slim neckline and it was far from Orlesian fashion. His fingers longed to run through the long, curly tresses that they lay against her alabaster skin. Spirits, he loved the feel of the silky texture running through his fingers, just as he had the first day she had gotten sick at the destruction of the Conclave.

He was pleased to have conducted all the business that he needed to and gotten the passcode he required for the Eluvian’s from one of his agents. He only wished he could be there to see the
expression on Briala’s face when she realized that her passcode would no longer work and Felassan would be unavailable.

His eyes followed Fenlin's path as she drew closer and was never as grateful for the black of the Inquisitions uniform as he was now when she came close enough that he could pull her into the shadows with him and effectively block her from everyone’s view. Slightly pressing her against the wall he ran his fingers over her exposed collarbone and breathed in her vanilla scent that never ceased to excite him.

“Was your excursion productive?” he questioned her quietly pressing soft kisses to her collarbone.

Her hands slid up his chest teasingly, pretending to flatten out the edges of his uniform.

“Very,” she replied thickly and he curbed a sudden urge to press her fully into the wall possessively.

“I would have had you accompany me, but I couldn’t find you, only feel you. Where have you been?”

“Gathering information for Leliana,” he replied easily and heard her soft sigh.

“Perhaps you and I will have a chance to dance together, later than?”

He placed a small kiss on her neck and felt the instant shiver that ran through her body with the contact and felt his own sense of exhilaration race through his body.

“It would not do well if you were seen dancing with an Elven Apostate, vhenan.”

Her unladylike snort made him smile and he pressed another kiss just beneath her jaw.

“Like I give a rat’s ass what this pompous lot thinks of me, I am an Elven Apostate. Promise me,” she whispered and he felt her hands slide over the skin of his cheek drawing his lips to hers. The soft breathy sound that left her only inflamed him, and he did press her fully against the wall then, as she claimed his lips.

Her kiss was electric and made his whole body hum with the energy suddenly coursing through his blood. Delving into her further, he felt her body melt against him and it increased the fire he felt flowing through his veins. He would never tire of this feeling she stirred in him. Pulling away, he placed small kisses on the corner of her mouth as she whispered breathlessly into his ear.

“Promise me.”

He could do nothing but obey this softly spoken demand and kissed her deeply before replying.

“Ma nuvenin, ma vhenan.”

Her arms circled his neck and she smiled against his lips pleased with his simple agreement. This woman had disrupted and changed everything. Her intelligence, devotion, and love for him had undone all his careful planning. He was not yet sure how, but he would find a way to make her happy.

Entering the Ballroom sometime later, I was instantly approached by Gaspard.
“My Lady, I have been looking to ask if you would gift me with a dance.”

I felt an internal cringe at the idea of letting this man touch me as I placed a small smile on my lips and held my hand out for him to take as Josephine instructed.

“You, of course, Grand Duke. It would be an honor,” I force the words out politely as he took the offered hand and kissed it before placing it on his arm and leading us towards the dance floor.

YUCK!

I suddenly prayed to whoever would listen that he wouldn’t try to dance too closely and I didn’t step on his feet and make an ass out of myself.

He directed us around the floor, and thank you, God, it was a simple waltz. Which meant he could discuss whatever crossed his mind and it appeared that my marital status was to be the topic of discussion.

“How is it that such an exquisite creature, as yourself, has escaped marriage, my Lady?”

I gaze up at him for a moment and can’t keep the thought of ‘gross pig’ from entering my mind, and delicately clear my throat.

“I have not found a man worthy of me yet, Grand Duke.”

My answer seems to surprise him and he twirls us around the floor.

“Marriage is about alliances, contracts, bettering your station – those are the qualities that make a marriage worthy, my Lady. I am sure that after tonight, there were will be many ‘worthy’ suitors.”

I did not refrain from the unladylike snort that escaped and I subtly shook my head holding his blue gaze steadily.

“Maybe for you, that is what marriage is Grand Duke. For me, it is about friendship, partnership, passion, and love.”

“You are romantic – and naïve,” he said with a soft chuckle.

“Perhaps,” I offer, ignoring him as we made the last turn on the floor.

When the dance came to an end, he bowed and I curtsied before walking to where Leliana was standing ignoring the Duke's traveling gaze. I breathed a small sigh of relief that he had not followed me and pressed the conversation any further.

“You have done very well this evening, Inquisitor. The nobles of Orlais are surprised at how well you are playing their game, especially for a Dalish. It is good to hear that they respect you.”

I gave her a cheerful smile with her news.

“I am glad that I have not been a disappointment for everyone who has worked so hard to polish me up for this affair.”

Leliana leaned forward and whispered quietly into my ear.

“Don’t discount yourself, Fenlin, we did not polish anything. You were already a beautiful diamond that deserved to be shown; we just gave you the means.”
I couldn’t stop the sudden blush at her words and she smiled reassuringly at me.

“Now, tell me what transpired in the Servant’s Quarters, Bull informed me that there was fighting.”

I told her everything that happened, leaving out the part of Briala’s warning and you could see the twinkle of excitement in her eyes. It was hard to miss how different my Spymaster was when placed in the thick of the game. I could tell that she truly enjoyed the intrigue and gossip.

“I agree with you,” she said quietly. “I do not believe it is Gaspard behind it all, but I will not say he doesn’t have a hand in the chaos.”

I took a drink of wine and glanced out over the dance floor watching the many couples twirl and swirl around the floor in different graceful turns. “Agreed, there are many players on the field but only one is using the chaos to conduct the ultimate deceit. Time will tell us who it is.”

We stood in silence, drinking our wine when I overheard Cullen’s mortified tone from the table beside us.

“Did you just…grab my bottom, Madam?”

Followed by a giggle and a not so subtle reply. “I would like to grab more than that, Commander.”

I felt instant anger with the assault on my Commander and set my glass down. Leliana’s raised eyebrow and slight smirk told me that she had overheard the brief conversation as well. I walked towards him where the nobles had him cornered between the table and wall. He looked absolutely uncomfortable and unsure of what to do with the advancing masked woman. Clearing my throat a few of the woman turned to glance at me with annoyance including the handsy noble advancing on Cullen.

“Pardon me, I hate to take my Commander away from everyone, but I require his assistance.”

His sudden grateful look was enough to make me feel better for the obvious lie.

“Oh, please do hurry Inquisitor,” one woman pleaded shamelessly as Cullen moved cautiously away from the wall.

“Inquisitor, what can I help you with?” He asked me quickly as I walked with him away from the table.

I gave him a sly look and he immediately looked tense.

“No,” he said adamantly.

“Come on Cullen, I just saved you from that woman sliding her hand down your trousers, just one turn around the floor. Don’t make me dance with another noble prick.”

His slight smile told me I was winning and he finally held his arm out and I gave him a cheeky grin.

“You’re the best, and besides I have a present for you,” I say quietly and see his raised eyebrow.

I slipped the small, pen-knife into his hand and he looked at it in surprise before slipping it beneath his jacket swiftly.

“Do I even want to know how you got that in here?”

I smile up at him as we begin to slowly waltz around the floor, and it was nice to dance with
someone just as inept as I was.

“No, but you will thank me later if one of those nobles gets a little too handsy for you again. One swift poke and voila, problem solved.”

He chuckled and gave me a winning smile. *Eeegads! No wonder the nobles were on him like white on rice.*

“My lady, thank you for the rescue and the resources to protect my virtue. I am forever in your debt.”

“Consider your debt paid for all my sword lessons,” I tell him easily and he gave me another of his rare smiles as we slowly made our way around the floor.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ma nuvenin, ma vhenan - as you wish my heart
Chapter Notes

What a wonderful little break!

With Christmas finally complete, the family finally is gone, I am able to return to actual writing. I hope that everyone had a wonderful holiday, celebrating however you chose to do so. 2018 is just around the corner and I am hoping for wonderful things to happen.

Again, thank you, everyone, who is still following this little story. Those who have left comments, critiques and generally just encouraged me or helped me continue to grow and become a better writer - Thank you!

My eyes followed Grand Duchess Florianne’s smooth steps of her approach, and my stomach clenched into nervous knots. There was a slow swaying of her gown from side to side with each step from the obvious stiffened petticoat beneath the layers of silk.

“Inquisitor Lavellan,” she said politely as she stopped in front of me.

“We met briefly. I am Grand Duchess Florianne De Chalons, welcome to my party.”

I curtsied towards her and hoped I didn’t vomit with how nervous I suddenly felt. Josephine had warned me that both men and women danced together in Orlais, and I had a sudden dropping feeling that she was there for that purpose.

“Why am I not surprised that you want to see me now?”

She gave me a knowing smirk.

“This is Orlais, Inquisitor. Nothing happens by accident.”

She pulled the side of her gown down just slightly. “I believe you and I are both concerned by the actions of…a certain person.” She slowly backed away from me and my stomach clenched even tighter and then dropped with her words. “Come, dance with me. Spies will not hear us on the dance floor.”

I stiffened my spine and held the woman’s cool blue gaze as I squared my shoulders.

“Very well, shall we dance, your Grace?” I held my arm out to her and she smiled down at me with a pleased look. Swallowing past the nervous lump, I hoped I was projecting nothing but absolute confidence.

“I’d be delighted,” she replied placing her slim hand on my arm. I led her towards the dance floor where I held up my hand for her to take as we started the beginning of the couples dances.

“Have the Dalish gained a sudden passion for politics? What do you know about our Civil War?”

Each with an arm outstretched, I was mentally counting the steps before I answered.
“I can assure you, your Grace. The effects of this war reach far beyond the borders of the Orlesian Empire.”

The Duchess glanced at me and gave me a condescending smile as we took three steps forward.

“Perhaps it does, I should not be surprised to find that the Empire is the center of everyone’s world. It took great effort to arrange tonight’s negotiations. Yet one party would use this occasion for blackest treason.”

My God this woman was a noble twatt. Taking a calming breath, I glanced at her counting the steps, one…two…three…as Florianne continued her blathering. It would seem that every Orlesian loved the sound of their own voice.

“The security of the Empire is at stake, neither one of us wishes to see it fall.”

Okay, now turn towards her and assume the males position, I reminded myself as I bow to her first before placing one hand behind my back and keeping the other up as we move from one side touching our wrists and repeating the move with the other.

“Do we both want that, Lady Florianne?” I replied.

“I hope we are of one mind on this.”

As our clasped hands just barely skimmed over her head, my mind breathed a small sigh of relief. Okay take her hand and slowly twirl her…thank baby Jesus, she isn’t a fucking amazon.

“In times like these, it’s hard to tell friend from foe, is it not your Grace?”

I ask her this quietly, as her back is to me while I hold her one arm behind her and we walk forward. One…two…three…one…two…three…turn and begin the waltz.

“I know you arrived here as a guest of my brother, Gaspard. And have been everywhere in the Palace…you are a curiosity to many, Inquisitor, and a matter of concern to some.”

One…two…three…turn – “Am I the curiosity or the concern to you, your Grace?”

“A little of both, actually; this evening is of great importance, Inquisitor. I wonder what role you will play in it. Do you even yet know who is a friend and who is a foe? Who in the Court can be trusted?”

We twirl around the dance floor two more turns before I answer her.

“If I have learned anything, your Grace, it is to put my trust in no one.” Slowly swinging her out to bring her back in towards me, she gave me an appreciative smile.

“In the Winter Palace, everyone is alone. It cannot have escaped your notice that certain parties are engaged in dangerous machinations tonight.”

We made a few more turns and I suddenly realized that we were the only ones left on the dance floor. My face and ears suddenly heat with embarrassment as my eyes took in the crowd that stood off to the sides watching us.

“I thought ‘dangerous machinations’ was the national sport in Orlais.”

She laughed softly and I swallowed the nervous lump in my throat as I bent her backward to dip her and heard the round of applause from those watching us dance. I brought her back up and she wore a
surprised expression that was visible from her eyes and beneath the bottom half of her mask. *I am stronger than I look, lady,* my mind snarked while my face held a neutral expression.

“You have little time,” she said as we moved to repeat the walk of the last six steps exactly as we had begun the dance.

“The attack will come soon. You must stop Gaspard before he strikes. In the Royal Wing Garden, you will find the Captain of my brother’s mercenaries. He knows all Gaspard’s secrets. I’m sure you can persuade him to be forthcoming,” she finally said as she curtsied and I bowed towards her.

“We will see what the night has in store, won’t we?” I tell her before bowing and walking away from her.

*It is going to take me a month just to scrape Orlais’ bullshit off of me.* Taking a handful of my dress’ material, I walk up the stairs and found Josephine’s pleased face waiting for me.

“You will be the talk of the Court for months, we should take you dancing more often,” she exclaimed excitedly wagging a finger at me.

“I will do anything else, Josephine, just no more dances please.”

She was laughing as Leliana and Cullen approached. “I promise to find other ways then to introduce you to nobility.”

“Were you dancing with Duchess Florianne?” Leliana asked her sounding very pleased.

“More importantly, what did she say?” Cullen asked and I glanced at them with a small smirk.

“The Grand Duchess tried to convince me Gaspard is the Traitor, but I’m not sure I buy it. He is not innocent by any means, but I don’t think he is the mastermind behind this whole mess either.”

Leliana nodded her head in agreement.

“Florianne and her brother are thick as thieves, but she would give him up in an instant to save herself.”

Cullen looked at her and folded his arms with a grim expression.

“Then…the attack on the Empress *will* happen tonight.”

Josephine gazed at them and shook her head looking grave.

“Warning Celine is pointless. She needs these talks to succeed, and to flee would admit defeat.”

Leliana held Josephine’s gaze with an annoyed look.

“Then perhaps we should let her die,” she stated simply ignoring mine and Josephine’s surprised expressions.

*Now I am completely confused…what the fuck?*

“Perhaps I missed the memo, but I thought we were here to *stop* the assassination, not allow it to happen.”

Leliana looked at me and crossed her arms, her face stern but understanding.
“Listen to me carefully, Fenlin. What Corypheus wants is chaos. Even with Celine alive, that could still happen. To foil his plan, the Empire must remain strong. This evening, someone must emerge victoriously.”

Cullen was listening very carefully, and then looked at me.

“And it doesn’t need to be Celine, she’s right.”

Josephine had a horrified look on her face at the discussion while my mind was mulling over what they were saying.

“Do you realize what you’re suggesting, Leliana?”

Leliana held Josephine’s gaze steadily, her face a complete mask of uncaring. “Sometimes the best path is not the easiest one.”

I wanted to hide my face as the three of them finish their arguing and turned to me for a decision.

“Hold on, I can’t decide this…not yet,” I tell them sounding uncertain as I chewed on my lower lip.

Leliana’s eyes slightly narrowed as she gazed at me.

“You must. Even inaction is a decision, Fenlin.”

“That is true, but not looking before you leap can get you killed just as damn fast,” I retorted frustrated.

“You could try talking with Celine in the ballroom, but she won’t act not without proof.” Josephine offered, sounding uncomfortable with the conversation.

I let out a sigh of annoyance. This whole place is a bag full of crazies.

“What fucking good will it do to talk with someone who won’t listen, Josephine?”

Cullen held my gaze for a long moment and unfolded his arms.

“If Gaspard is guilty, he’ll admit nothing. If he’s innocent, he knows nothing. We need the truth.”

“What did Duchess Florianne tell you exactly?” Leliana asked me curiously. Finally, the woman is willing to gather all the information and not just go straight to killing them.

“She said Gaspard’s mercenary Captain is in the Royal Wing Garden. That he knows about the assassination.”

“That sounds like a trap,” Cullen said and I gave him a swift nod of agreement.

“Or a lead,” Josephine pointed out and I was suddenly tired of the whole circular conversation.

“Then get me access, and in the meantime, get your soldiers in position. I want to get this night over with and begin with the detox of scrubbing Orlais from my hair, this place is a disease.”

Cullen chuckled and gave me a quick nod.

“At once, be careful, Fenlin.”

I turned away from them and went to gather a group to go through the Royal wing. Sending my aura
out searching for him, I needed him with me. I didn’t trust Briala to not try something.

“I will get him,” Cole abruptly said from beside me and I smiled. “Thank you, Cole,” I whispered and suddenly he was gone.

We walked up the stairs that led to the bedrooms in the Royal Wing and heard a loud scream from behind a thick door. Bull rushed the door, breaking it in half where we observed a Harlequin attacking a young Elven girl who had fallen on the floor and was desperately trying to crawl away backward. Bull rushed forward again. Grabbing the Harlequin, he snarled at him before throwing him through the open window. Giving the young girl on the floor a reassuring smile, he held a hand down to her.

“Thank you,” she breathed gratefully taking his large palm and letting him effortlessly pull her up.

“I hope you’re not disappointed that I stole your dance partner,” Bull joked as he helped the girl to stand.

She laughed nervously and shook her head as she rubbed her shoulder. “No, not at all; he was all hands,” she joked back making him laugh.

I walked towards her and she looked at me with instant recognition on her face.

“Inquisitor Lavellan,” she said her focus now on me. “No one is supposed to be here…Briala said…I shouldn’t have trusted her,” she said more to herself as she continued to rub her shoulder.

“Briala told you to come to this wing of the Palace?”

The young girl looked at me and tilted her head as if she were thinking.

“Well not personally. The ‘Ambassador’ can’t be seen talking to the servants. We get coded messages at certain locations, but the order came from her. She’s been watching the Grand Duke all night. No surprise she wanted someone to search his sister’s room.”

“Is there anyone else who knows the code and the drop location who could have written those orders?”

I could see she was contemplating the idea and then shook her head.

“I…don’t know. Any of us could do it, but…no, no one else would send me here; it had to be Briala.”

“So this is Duchess Florianne’s room?” I asked her suddenly curiously glancing around the lavish quarters myself.

“It used to. This had been her private room in Halamshiral since she was a child. But this part of the Palace was damaged, and the Royal Family moved to the Guest Wing.”

“What were you hoping to find in this room?”

Her sudden look of confusion was a little surprising to me.

“The message didn’t say…I should have known it was a set up from the start,” she said rubbing her face.
“This wing has been sealed – how did you get in here?”

“Easy, the door was unlocked. One of the others probably handled it.”

Shaking my head at her, I gave her a teasing smile.

“Well, you must have some seriously courageous lady balls to come here unarmed,” I told her with a touch of admiration lacing my voice.

She laughed and shook her head at me. “It’s not ‘courage’ to blindly follow Briala’s orders into a trap. I knew her. Before, when she was Celine’s pet,” she said disgustedly.

“Now she wants to play revolution. But I remember, she was sleeping with the Empress when she purged our Alienage.”

“Would you be willing to testify to that, if I asked?”

She straightened her shoulders ever so slightly as she held my gaze.

“Absolutely. If the Inquisition will protect me, I’ll tell you everything I know about our ‘Ambassador’.”

I smile at her pleased and held my hand out to her.

“Done; go to the Ballroom and find Commander Cullen. You can’t miss him, six foot six, blonde hair, muscular, surrounded by nobles on the northern wall. He’ll keep you safe just tell him I sent you.”

“Thank you and Maker protect you, Inquisitor” she breathed gratefully and dashed by us.

“Some would say that is Celine’s scandal, not Briala’s,” Dorian commented watching the girl run from the room.

“What she is implying Master Pavus, is that Briala warned no one in the Alienage of Celine’s plans. Briala stood by, complacently allowing it to happen,” Solas said quietly with a touch of anger in his tone.

“Well that’s just messed up,” Bull said roughly.

“Come on, let’s check the other rooms.”

We left Florianne’s old room and the next one we found was locked and required some type of specific mechanism to open it. Cole slipped to the other side and opened the door from inside. There were two desks in the room, one on either side of the lower room and in the middle a small staircase that led to the sleeping area. I started up the stairs and stopped on the second step when I heard a man’s thick Orlesian voice.

“Hello?”

Shit, someone is here? Too late to act like it was a mistake now and I continued up the steps and abruptly stopped. The bubbles of laughter started to roll through me, and soon I was bent over with tears slipping down my face unable to stop laughing. The soft steps of the others walking up the carpeted steps stopped next to me as the men stared at the bed.

The man I had heard earlier, was tied to the four posts of the bed tightly, wearing nothing but his helmet. Naked as the day he was born, he pulled on the ropes struggling to free himself.
“Well, this place just gets more interesting by the minute,” I joked and heard Dorian and Bull’s combined laughter.

“Well, I’ll say,” Dorian said under his breath and I wiped at my face.

“It’s not what it looks like! Honestly, I would have preferred if it were what it looks like. The Empress led me to believe I would be...rewarded for betraying the Grand Duke. This...was not what I hoped for.”

Covering my face and laughing again, I glanced at Solas over my shoulder and raised an eyebrow.

“Care to try this sometime?”

His quick teasing smile and soft blush on his cheeks made my stomach flutter with a sense of excitement.

“Ma nuvenin,” he said quietly his tone holding promise and now it was my turn to blush.

Holding his gaze for just a minute more, I turned back to the tied man and shook my head at him, keeping my eyes focused on his face.

“I’m sure we all know what you thought your reward would be.”

“Please, I beg you, don’t tell Gaspard! The Empress beguiled me into giving her information about...plans for troop movements in the Palace tonight. She knows everything. The Dukes surprise attack has been countered before it ever began. She’s turned it into a trap. The moment he strikes, she’ll have him arrested for treason.”

“Clever Celine,” Dorian quipped with a chuckle.

“Classic ‘Honey Pot,’” Bull said and I started laughing again.

“I’ll protect you from Gaspard if you’re willing to testify about Celine’s trap,” I offered unable to remove the amusement of the situation from my face and tone. The man suddenly looked very relieved with the offer.

“I’ll do anything, anything! Please, just untie me.”

I glance at Bull and Dorian and they moved to untie the man. He scrambled off the bed quickly and yanked the sheet from the bed to wrap it around his waist.

“Meet with Commander Cullen in the Ballroom, he is along the northern wall. If you fail to do this,” I pointed at Bull and gave him a cold smile. “He will be your reward for breaking our deal, understood?”

He looked from me to Bull and nodded quickly, nervously swallowing as Bull cracked his knuckles menacingly.

“Y-yes, my Lady, understood. I will find your Commander, and thank you.”

We turned away, leaving the room and his aura brushed against mine. Glancing over at him I smiled, *damn it is unfair that he is just so handsome.* Clearing my throat and pulling my focus back to the task at hand, I look around.

“Well let’s find out what’s down those steps...hopefully no more tied up, naked people.”
Dorian cleared his throat and glanced at me, giving me a wink.

“I would not mind my dear.”

I give him a bright smile and took the first step down the darkened staircase.

We went down the steps and came to a room under construction. I glance around at all the lumber and stone piled up. *I wonder if the rumor I heard about Gaspard attacking the Palace was true.* We passed by a large, blue double door and the anchor flared surprising me and the others. *A rift in the Winter Palace?* I looked at Solas questioningly and he took my hand and looked at it for a moment.

“There must be a rift nearby,” he said sounding as confused as I felt.

I turn and open the door to see the unopened rift in the middle of a small courtyard. We walked forward and a movement on the balcony caught my eye and I looked up. There on the balcony stood Duchess Florianne, smiling down at me as archers came from behind the manicured bushes and pillars surrounding the walls and us. My eyes drift around the small courtyard, recognizing that we are completely surrounded.

“Inquisitor, what a pleasure; I wasn’t certain you would attend. You’re such a challenge to read, I had no idea if you had taken my bait.”

I slid my anchored hand behind me to keep the glare out of my eyes while I glanced up at her and gave her a small smirk.

“I had a feeling you were the one pulling the strings behind the curtain.”

She smiled at me pleased.

“Such a pity, you could almost be Orlesian if you were just a little quicker. It was kind of you to walk into my trap. I was becoming quite tired of all of your meddling. Corypheus insisted that the Empress die tonight and I would hate to disappoint him.”

I shook my head in confusion.

“You’re Orlesian Royalty, why would you help Corypheus attack your Empire?”

She let out a small giggle and gestured around the courtyard.

“You think so small, Inquisitor. Why settle for an Empire, when Corypheus will remake the world. I admit, I will relish the look on Gaspard’s face when he realizes I’ve outplayed him. He always was a sore loser.”

“But why kill the Empress? What could Corypheus hope to achieve?”

“Celine’s death is a stepping stone on the path to a better world. Corypheus will enter the Black City and claim the Godhood waiting for him. We will cast down their useless Maker and usher in a united world, guided by the hand of an attentive God.”

*The woman is fucking stupid is she thinks Corypheus is going to honor any deal he made with her worthless ass.*

“What exactly is in this for you?”
She laughed and looked at me with pity.

“The world of course; I will deliver the entire South of Thedas, and Corypheus will save me. When he has ascended to Godhood, I will rule all of Thedas in his name.”

_Crazy and stupid – lovely combo._

“You’re not being kind to him Florianne, he really has to get used to disappointment.”

She gave me a haughty look and shook her head ever so slightly.

“But not today, I think. In their darkest dreams, no one imagined that I would assassinate Celine myself. All I need is to keep you out of the Ballroom long enough to strike. A pity you will miss the rest of the ball, Inquisitor. They will be talking about it for years.”

Florianne looked at the archer standing next to her and gave him a sharp nod.

“Kill her, and bring me her marked hand as proof. It will make a fine gift for the Master.”

My eyes followed her retreat and I watched as an archer stepped forward to follow her orders.

I felt the cool embrace of Solas’ barrier before the archer shot his arrow and with a short Fade step, the arrow missed me, digging into the ground where I once stood. Throwing my hand up, the rift cracked open with a loud boom. Her mercenaries scattered quickly to fight the demons that suddenly poured out over them and began attacking. In the chaos, we were able to pick them off, and then the demons before I could close the rift.

Cole moved to the man tied to a pillar and began untying him as he began cussing up a storm.

“Andraste’s tits! What was all that? Were those demons? There aren’t any more demons coming, right?”

I slightly chuckle as I walk towards him eying the obviously shaken man.

“Very observant of you, those were definitely demons.”

“Maker, bless me, demons? How could there be demons in the fucking Winter Palace? I knew Gaspard was a bastard, but I didn’t think he’d feed me to fucking horrors over a damn bill.”

I looked at him in shock.

“Duke Gaspard lured you here?”

He looked at me and snorted.

“Well, his sister, but it had to come from him, didn’t it? And all that garbage she was spewing doesn’t mean anything. Gaspard had to be the mastermind.”

_Again, these people give that man much too much credit._

“How is it you got to be here in the Winter Palace?”

“The Duke wanted to move on the Palace tonight, but he didn’t have enough fancy Chevaliers. So he hired me, and my men. He had to offer us triple our usual pay to come to Orlais…stinking poncy cheesemongers.”
“You want a new job? One that pays quite a bit better? The Inquisition can always use a good mercenary company.”

He looked at me in surprise and then smiled understandingly.

“You hiring? I’m game, anything is better than this bullshit. You want me to talk to the Empress, or the Court, or sing a bloody song in the Chantry, I’ll do it.”

I held my hand out to him and he took it quickly with a large smile.

“Deal,” I tell him with a large smile. “Minus the singing part, it’s not needed.”

He laughed and gave me a quick bow before walking from the courtyard. I turned to look at the others just thankful that everyone was okay.

“Well this has been exciting and all, but we still have to stop her from killing Celine.”

Looking down at my dress, impressed with the enchantment, I straighten out the front a bit and tug on my sleeves.

“Does my hair look okay?” I ask looking at Dorian and he smiled at me.

“My dear you are a vision,” he said calmly.

“Good, I have a Duchess to embarrass,” I said walking out of the courtyard.

Chapter End Notes

Ma nuvenin - as you wish
We entered the Grand Ballroom and my eyes sought out Florianne’s. She saw me from across the room and the lower half of her face visibly paled. *Good, I hope the bitch sweats.*

Approaching my counsel, who at the moment looked extremely harried, and I gave them a reassuring smile, only Cullen didn’t seem to feel reassured.

“Thank the Maker you’re back, the Empress will begin her speech soon. What should we do?”

I patted his arm and smiled. “Wait here Cullen; I am going to go have a friendly chat with the Grand Duchess.”

His face registered shock at my words. “What?! There’s no time, Fenlin. The Empress will begin her speech any moment!”

“Well then stop talking to me, Cullen, and just trust me.”

I left them to watch me walk down the stairs leading to the dance floor. The Empress saw me and tilted her head at me curiously as I curtsied deeply towards her, before continuing my path towards Florianne who had her back to me.

“We owe the Court one more show, Your Grace,” I said pitching my voice loud enough to be heard over the sudden sounds of shock that rumbled through the crowd.

Florianne turned abruptly and stared at me coolly.

“Inquisitor,” she said calmly and I gave her a pleasant smile in return as I stopped at the bottom of the stairs.

“The eyes of every noble in the Empire are upon us, Your Grace, do try to remember to smile,” I tell her as I grab a handful of my dress material and began walking up the steps towards her. “This is your party, you wouldn’t want them to think you had lost control now would we.”

I could have cut glass with how cold and sharp her blue eyes were as they followed my path towards her.

“Who would not be delighted to speak with you, Inquisitor?” Her tone smooth and calm like a lake only contradicted what her eyes were saying. Gaspard and Briala who had been speaking with her up until then, slowly backed away watching the interaction interestedly.

“I seem to recall you telling me earlier, *all I need is to keep you out of the Ballroom just long enough to strike.* I believe those were your exact words.”

She paled even more than I thought possible at the sounds of the Empress, Gaspard, and Briala all gasping at the same time.

“When your archers failed to kill me in the garden, I feared you wouldn’t save me this last dance.”

I started to walk around her, watching her still form carefully for any sign of movement.
“It was so easy to lose your good graces; you even framed your own brother for the murder of a Council Emissary.”

Gaspard visibly stiffened with the information and there was the barest flicker of a grimace around Florianne’s lips as I came to a stop in front of her where I held her cold blue gaze. “I must say, it was an ambitious plan. Celine, Gaspard, the entire Council of Heralds…all your enemies under one beautiful roof.” I counted off the people on my fingers and held a personal amount of joy at each one I counted off, Florianne physically flinched.

Florianne slowly began to back away from me, and I smiled at her coolly. *Now, who’s the rabbit trying to run, hmm?*

“This is very entertaining, but you do not imagine anyone believes your wild stories?” Florianne’s voice would have sounded the perfect Orlesian snobbery if there wasn’t the barest of a wobble in her tone.

“That would be a matter for a judge to decide, Cousin.”

Florianne looked up wildly towards Celine on the dais and saw the Empress’ anger clearly written with the hard line of her lips pressed together. Turning towards Gaspard, she began pleadingly.

“Gaspard? You cannot believe this…you know I would never…” Florianne began and her eyes grew wide as Gaspard turned away from her.

Gaspard shook his head as he turned away, throwing his hands up as if to say ‘*not my circus, not my monkeys*,’ while Briala fell into step beside him. Florianne turned to look at me and her anger and fear were clearly written in her eyes and posture before turning back around at the sound of metal boots clanging loudly over the marble floor. Her eyes grew larger at the sight of the guards walking towards her.

“You lost this fight ages ago, Your Grace. You’re just the last one to find out.”

“No” she cried out and started sobbing as the guards took her by the arms and began leading her away. I watched them as they practically drag her up the stairs, and when she was out of sight, I looked up towards Celine on her balcony and gave her a brief curtsy before I spoke.

“Your Imperial Majesty, may we speak in private?”

I saw her swift nod as she gestured towards the side stairs. Reaching the top, I followed her, Gaspard, and Briala towards her private balcony. Once through the doors, a pair of guards closed them behind us and I swallowed my sudden ball of nerves in my stomach as I kept close to the doors.

The circular arguments that began before we entered the small balcony between Gaspard and Briala were making my head spin, and thankfully Celine finally gestured with her hand to cut it out as she snarled at them.

“Enough! I will not stand here and listen to the two of you bickering while Tevinter plots against our nation. For the safety of the Empire, I will have answers.”

Celine looked at me suddenly and my spine stiffened at what I was about to say. *Go big or go home,* I thought and took a calming breath.

“All of you are guilty; you all schemed to allow this to happen.”

Celine’s blue eyes narrowed through her silver mask, while both Gaspard and Briala crossed their
arms and gazed at me indifferently.

“That’s a bold claim, Inquisitor. I do hope you are prepared to justify it.”

I gave her a slight smirk and raised my eyebrow at her before curtsying towards her.

(Of course, Your Majesty.”

She watched as I took a tentative step towards them and stopped before my fear of heights made me dizzy.

“First, Gaspard brought hired mercenaries into the Palace for a coup; I have the statement of his Captain and he is more than happy to provide it to you, and the Court.”

Briala softly laughed and gazing at Gaspard she spoke with sarcastic pity, dripping from her words while a large smile adorned her lips.

“Oh, Gaspard, so predictable; brutality really is your only talent.”

I glance at her and laugh.

“It’s not like you hold the moral high ground here, Briala. You murdered their Ambassadors and forged documents to prolong the fighting between them.”

She shrugged and looked at me uncaring of what she had done and my loathing of the woman grew exponentially.

“So, what if I did? Take me down and Elves will riot in every city across the Empire.”

I held her gaze and I know she couldn’t miss the disgust I held in my expression because I was not hiding it. This woman truly did disgust me with every definition of the word.

“They won’t, not when they learn you were sleeping with the woman who purged Halamshiral’s alienage and did nothing to stop her.”

Turning my gaze towards Celine she looked overly pale in her dark blue gown and more than just slightly worried about what would come out of my mouth next, but I was not done.

“Celine, you knew of Gaspard’s plans for his coup and let it go far enough to hang him for treason. I found your…man, I believe he was expecting another type of reward.”

Celine took a step towards me and I thought for sure the woman was going to slap me as her cheeks were now flushed an angry red.

“You’ve made your point, what do you want?” She said her tone dripping with anger.

“If you don’t want your secrets exposed to daylight, then I suggest you do as I ask and work together.”

Briala stiffened and clenched her fists.

“You realize this can only end in disaster?”

I shook my head at her and gave her a saccharine-laced smile.

“For you perhaps, if you choose to not work together, but again, the choice is yours to make.”
I could see that if Briala had the opportunity, she would indeed put a knife in me, and I gave her a
dark smile that told her I would be glad to return the favor. Celine’s guards opened the doors and
stepping aside, I let them pass listening to their grumbling as we headed towards the large balcony to
address the Court. Briala gazed back at me a couple of times with hot anger in her gaze and I kept
my smile in place.

_Suck it, bitch,_ my mind snarked at her as I watched her stiffly follow behind the others.

Gaspard and Celine approached the railing and the Court suddenly quieted at the sight of them as I
stood back for them to make their announcement. Celine held her hands up and glanced around the
room.

“Lords and Ladies of the Court, we are pleased to announce that an accord has been reached. Our
cousin, Gaspard, will now hold a place of honor in our cabinet.”

The sudden sounds of surprise echoed through the chamber, and I swallowed the sudden urge to
laugh at the reaction. Gaspard stepped forward to stand next to Celine and smiled at her before
addressing the Court. I really had to give it to them; they knew how to give the appearance of a
united front.

“Friends, we assembled are the leaders of the Empire. We must set the example for all Thedas. We
cannot be at war with each other while the Fade itself challenges our borders.”

Celine nodded her head in agreement and gestured with her hands to encompass the room.

“We must stand united, or surely we will fall alone.”

She turned towards me and gestured me forward, and I took a calming breath as I approached. _Do
not look down, pick a spot straight ahead._ I stopped a foot from the railing and pitched my voice so
that it could be heard.

“We will save Thedas from disaster, but only together may we achieve this.”

Celine smiled at me and then addressed the Court while I stepped back, away from her and the
railing.

“We will heal our wounded country. A long road of reconstruction lies before us, but tonight, we
celebrate the arrival of peace. Let the festivities commence!”

Celine turned from the railing studying me for a moment before walking away from me and Gaspard
stopped to stand next to me.

“I would be honored if you would stay as my guest in my chateau outside Halamshiral for the next
few days, Inquisitor. I would like the chance for all of us to sit down and discuss what path you
envision now that we are to work together.”

I curtsy towards her at the offer.

“I would be honored, Your Majesty.”

“Very well,” she said and walked away from me and Gaspard stopped to stand next to me.

“I believe I should thank you for not allowing me to be hanged for treason. You play the game as
well as any seasoned Orlesian my lady, well done.”

I wanted to puke at the idea that I could be just as devious and be backstabbing as this lot, but I
pasted a smile to my lips and curtsied as he kissed the back of my hand.

“You are most welcome Grand Duke.”

My eyes followed his retreat and I stared at Briala who looked at me with disdain before walking away without a word. Definitely not going to be the last time I run into that deceitful box. I turned to walk towards my own council and inform them of our lodgings for the next few days.

Finally finding a moment that I could slip away unnoticed from the Ballroom, I walked through the Palace towards that large garden area Dorian had been in earlier to find a quiet place to sit now that everyone was in the Ballroom. I passed nobles that held their glasses up to me in toasts as I walked by. Smiling as I passed, I pushed open the door and saw that the garden was indeed empty and let out a sigh of relief. As soon as the door closed, I was suddenly startled by Morrigan’s voice from behind me and I turned quickly surprised that I had not felt her aura when I entered.

“The Orlesian nobility makes drunken toasts to your victory, and yet you are not present to hear them? Do you tire so quickly of their congratulations, Inquisitor? Tis most fickle, after all your efforts on their behalf.”

I held her gaze for a moment and gave her a tired smile.

“Yes, well…the punch ran dry, disgraceful.”

Morrigan chuckled and gave me a curious gaze.

“Indeed, let us see if you take this piece of news just as poorly.”

I watched as she fidgeted with the cuffs of her gloves before finally looking at me again.

“By Imperial decree, I have been named the liaison to the Inquisition. Celine wishes to offer you any and all aid – including mine. Congratulations,” she said with a slight smile.

“I had no idea that you were interested in joining the Inquisition.”

She held my gaze for a moment and I could tell that she didn’t want to join. It was either take this or don’t, but she was expected to leave.

“The assignment has been given to me, regardless of my personal interest. Celine knows you face an opponent who wields great magical power, which is far more important than her own curiosity. You will require my knowledge if you are to defeat such magic. Regardless, Corypheus is a threat to Orlais, and to myself; thus I am not opposed to the appointment.”

“What skills do you have that you believe would benefit the Inquisition?”

She gave me an arrogant smile that reminded me of Vivienne.

“I have knowledge which falls…beyond the realm of most mages. I suspect this is also true of Corypheus. Thus it behooves you to add to your arcane arsenal, yes? Mundane knowledge will not bring you Corypheus' defeat, after all.”

It is always astounding how the woman can start a conversation somewhat pleasant only to end it at making you sound like an inept baboon’s ass.

“You are very confident in your abilities; I’ll give you that, Morrigan. We shall see if it is false or
Turning away from her with obvious dismissal, I heard her small huff of indignation and smiled as I
headed towards one of the benches. I sat, preparing to enjoy the warm night and saw thankfully,
Morrigan was gone from the garden. I let out a small sigh and closed my eyes while taking a deep
breath. A small smile flittered over my lips when I felt his aura approaching, pleased he hadn’t
forgotten his promise.

“I am not surprised to find you out here,” he said as he walked towards me and my eyes opened to
enjoy his slow, easy strides that reminded me of him in his wolf form. The black of the uniform made
the alabaster of his skin contrast sharply and his eyes dance. *Damn that man is beautiful in black.*
The outfit was similar to a Nehru or Mandarin collar design in that it accentuated his neck with the
slightly higher collar. The single pleated fitted pants, hinted at the strength beneath them while he
walked confidently and just the thought of his thighs made my mouth water.

“Thoughts?” he asked me as he sat down next to me and I laid my head against his arm.

“Besides how handsome I think you look...well, we achieved all our goals. I am just enjoying a
moment’s peace while it lasts.”

I felt the soft vibration of his laughter against my cheek before his arm slipped around me to pull me
into him even closer.

“You should, they’re fleeting enough. Hang onto them when you can,” he said kissing the top of my
head.

“Now, I do believe I promised you a dance this evening.”

I leaned up and watched him stand and hold his hand out for mine just like he had in the main hall of
Skyhold. Bent at the waist, one arm behind his back and one hand held out for me to take and my
heart skipped a beat at the sight of his twinkling blue eyes gazing at me.

“This is the best part of my entire night,” I told him taking his hand and standing as the shivers of
pleasure ran up my arm with the soft press of his lips to my knuckles before he pulled me in closer.

He smiled down at me and my heart double beat in my chest.

“Mine too, vhenan.”

Laying my face against his chest, he moved us slowly around the garden to the soft strains of music
that could be heard from inside.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
I was never so glad to see the gates of Skyhold in my entire life. Halamshiral had been an absolute nightmare with its politics and double-dealings. Josephine and Leliana thought it was ‘embracing’, I found it to be more embarrassing. It was not surprising that Thedas’ politics was not unlike what I would have witnessed in my own time. As Solas once said to me, ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely.’

I left my carriage listening to the others still talking around me and moved to grab my bags from inside. I watched while Josephine was stopped by one of the Chantry sisters when I took the first bag handed to me by our driver Bill. Smiling up at him, I waited for the other to be handed down.

“The matter is urgent, Lady Josephine,” she said quickly.

“I am well aware of the urgency, Revered Mother.”

“I am glad that news reached you on your travels. We will need them to return to Val Royeaux as soon as possible. There are ceremonies – ordinations, Maker’s mercy.”

Josephine shook her head pleasantly at the Revered Mother, her political smile in place.

“That is quite impossible at the moment. However, I will see to this matter as soon as possible.”

I had both of my bags and hefted one over my shoulder as I carried the other and tried to slip by unnoticed by the Chantry Mother.

“My lady Inquisitor,” she said quickly as soon as she saw me.

Crap

“Please, may I have a word with you?” Her tone pleading; I stopped and took a calm breath for patience before turning towards her.

“Just when I think I could just sneak off and get in a long hot bath and a decent meal.”

The Revered Mother did not appreciate my joke and narrowed her gaze at me.

“I am sorry to place this burden on your shoulders, but you are the only one who can help. With the political turmoil put to rest, our minds turn to a single question: the next Divine. We cannot answer it without the Left and Right Hands of Divine Justinia V.”

Josephine looked at the Revered Mother with a touch of annoyance, but her voice sounded polite as
Could be.

“I have already told you, Revered Mother: Lady Leliana and Seeker Cassandra cannot be spared from their duties at this time.”

“But surely with the support of the Empire, the Inquisition will not be harmed by the loss of just two souls?”

I look at the woman as if she is off her rocker.

“These aren’t just ‘any two souls’, Revered Mother. They are key members of the Inquisition, part of the backbone.”

She held my gaze and there was a hardened glint in her eyes.

“For the sake of Thedas, we must ask you to make this sacrifice.”

Josephine must have noticed my jaw clench with instant anger with the Revered Mother’s words and cut in diplomatically to save me from slapping the crap out of the woman.

“This will have to be settled later. The Inquisitor has only just returned and has important business to attend to. You must excuse us Revered Mother.”

We watched the Revered Mother walk away from us with obvious frustration and I wanted to do nothing but set her robes on fire as I clenched and unclenched my fists angrily.

“I must make this sacrifice…they don’t even support our efforts. I almost die for them and yet I must make the sacrifice, are you kidding me? Is she kidding me?” I said heatedly with angry exasperation and Josephine placed her hand on my arm comfortingly.

“Don’t let them detract you from your victory in Halamshiral. Leliana and Cassandra know what the Chantry wants from them, and they have both spoken on the matter that decisions would be made once Corypheus is defeated. Now go, and relax Inquisitor as you expected to do when arriving. We shall discuss this tomorrow during our morning meeting.”

Damn this woman was fabulous.

“Josephine, I don’t know what I would ever do without you.”

She blushed at my compliment and glanced around.

“Thank you, Inquisitor.”

Cresting the top of my stairs, I stared at the mounds of boxes everywhere blocking my way into my actual room and dropped my packs in surprise.

What the fuck is all this? I took a hesitant step forward and saw that they were gifts from different nobles in Orlais and felt my nose wrinkle with distaste. Winding through the path of boxes I saw that my desk also held four large stacks of letters and I let out a knowing groan, rubbing my face.

I moved further into my room and found that there was not a space to be had except for the bed and the narrow path between the boxes and shook my head in exasperation. Well, fuck me! Moving towards my desk, I dug through the piles of correspondence and found a blank piece of paper and a pen. With my goods in hand, I turned towards the stacks of boxes and took a resigned breath before
grabbing the first one and opening it.

The card on the top told me it was from Lord Merimond of Lydes, and I wrote his name down then digging into the box, I found wine, hardened cheese, and a lovely cutting set.

“Sweet baby Jesus, this is going to take forever,” I mutter aloud and noted what he sent and set the gifts on the bed before moving to the next box of whatever. “Well, at least I can get drunk while doing it,” I grumble.

It was hours later and over fifty boxes opened, when his cool aura slid over mine before he opened the door at the bottom of the stairs. I felt his subtle magic as he warded it and I continued with unloading the current box of wine as I called out to him.

“Thank God my knight in shining armor has come to my rescue. Please help me with all of this will you?”

I saw his look of surprise as he crested the top of the steps holding a pack. I raise my eyebrow at him and gesture towards his bag, my hand still holding a bottle of wine.

“Are you going somewhere?” I ask him and see his eyes finally move from the mess to me and then glance down at the forgotten pack in his hands.

“Oh, this, no…actually it is clothing. I had hoped…” he stopped and I smiled at him following his thoughts and shivered with my own thoughts of tangled sheets and slow kisses. But first…this shit had to be taken care of.

“Brilliant, now put that down and come over here and help me.”

He gave me a tender smile that spun my stomach full of flurries and dropped his pack next to mine before walking towards me.

“It appears you have suitors,” he said calmly taking an unopened box and sitting on the floor next to me.

“Unwanted as they are, it would appear so. I am keeping a list here of who sent what so that I may at least send them a thank you card, and a polite no thank you as well.”

He softly chuckled and looked at the long list for a moment before he looked at me.

“You have not greeted me properly yet,” I reminded him and his lopsided smile made my blood simmer.

He leaned towards me and wrapped his hand around my neck pulling me into him. The kiss was tender, and I was only slightly breathless when we parted.

“Much better,” I whisper and feel his smile on my lips before he leaned back and held my gaze.

“Have you eaten?” He suddenly asked me, and I shook my head no.

“Not unless you count a bottle of very nice Antivan wine as food,” I offered jokingly and saw him shake his head at me before he abruptly stood and gazed down.

“Then I will gather us some dinner and return.”
I watched him move through the stacks of boxes and smiled at the view as my heart bounded when he turned and smiled at me. *Damn that man is dangerous on hormones.*

Over half my body was in a box pulling things out when I heard his angry mumblings from behind me a couple of hours later. Pulling out a box of chocolates and a bolt of Royal Sea Silk, I turned towards him as he pulled out a large, carved wooden box. The top of the box was carved with the Chalons family crest and I felt an internal cringe at the sight of it. *Gaspard*

He didn’t even offer me the letter that came with it like he had with the others, and I should have known something was up then. He ripped open the envelope and read the contents. I watched the normally unruffled mask swiftly change from annoyed to angry while he glared at the folded parchment. His aura suddenly expands and encompass my large room, slightly ruffling my hair with the unexpected power, somewhat startling me. The energy lashed around him and thus me, in angry whips as he dropped the letter and opened the box as papers flew with the flicks of his angry aura.

There inside lie a set of daggers and throwing knives. Each handle made with Halla horn and blades of Ironbark. Inscribed on the handles of the weapons was a rabbit. I had no idea how to use daggers or throwing knives, but it was a beautiful set.

“Well those are pretty; too bad I have no idea how to use them,” I tell him with a bland voice.

His stormy blue eyes moved from the weapons to mine and his anger and coldness radiated from him as he looked at me sending a small shiver to race down my spine.

“They are a gift from the Grand Duke, with an offer to teach you himself. I am sure he meant the rabbit symbols to *not* be offensive.” His voice dripped with sarcasm as he handed me the letter and I took it from him reading the words that were fairly straightforward as he declared his intent for my hand.

*Why in the hell would this man think him worthy of me? Orlesian’s don’t even like elves… what does he hope to gain?*

I looked at the letter and kept my face neutral as I felt Solas’ aura pulsate angrily. *Oh, this has not pleased the wolf at all.* I raised my eyebrow at him and let the letter drop uncaringly.

“This is the one that pisses you off, out of all of them, this is the one?” I ask him simply as I gesture around us at the opened mounds of bullshit that was sent to me with multiple offers of marriage.

He had the good graces to actually blush with the realization and I crawled towards him, shoving the wooden box out of my way as I climbed into his lap.

“Solas,” I speak calmly wrapping his pendant around my hand and gently tug on it making him look at me. “I have given you the one thing I have never given another man, and it could only ever belong to you.”

His blue eyes softened, and his aura slowly started to calm as his eyes held mine attentively.

“You have my heart, Solas. Only you and no fancy knives, mounds of silks, multiple bottles of wine and boxes of chocolate could ever convince me that it shouldn’t belong to you. You aren’t just a flicker of a beat, you *are* the reason it beats at all.” I told him honestly and saw his eyes slowly widen with the honest confession. It often scared me knowing that he could crush me with his rejection. His arms slide around me securely as his lips quickly claimed mine and I wrapped my arm around his neck tightly, hoping that I conveyed everything with this single meeting of our lips. *I love you, you old fool.*
“Ar lath ma vhenan,” he said softly against my lips and I smiled at the smooth sound of his baritone voice gliding over my senses seductively.

“I love you too,” I answered back tenderly before pulling away and holding his gaze. My expression must have shown that I had an impromptu idea as his expression turned curious.

“I wonder if Cole could use a new set of weapons,” I said with a cheeky smile and felt his answering laughter rumble through his chest pressed against mine.

“Cole is fond of rabbits,” he offered with a large smile of his own.

*****

With the morning meeting over, I exited the War Room and found Varric loitering in the hallway waiting for me.

“Hey Sketch,” he said watching the other’s walk around them and I saw that he was very uncomfortable.

“Are you waiting for me?” I asked him teasingly.

He nervously cleared his throat and I watched him fidget. This is so not like him; I wonder what could be the problem.

“Yeah, I was. You remember when I told you about someone I wanted you to meet?”

He finally held my gaze and I nodded my head. “Is she here?”

I saw him take a large nervous swallow and just nod his head ‘yes’.

“Then let’s go Varric.”

He led me to the battlements past Cullen’s new office and I saw who he spoke of looking out over the courtyard. I hated being up here knowing I was over fifty feet from the ground. Sticking to the middle between the railings helped me convince myself that I was safe even as my stomach still clenched with anxiety and my hands dug into my arms to keep me from running down the path.

“You know I don’t like heights and yet you chose to bring me up here. What the hell did I ever do to you?” I growled out nervously sticking to the middle of the stone pathway.

“I’m sorry Sketch, this was the only place that would keep away the prying eyes and ears.”

I stop which makes him stop and I cross my arms.

“Varric,” I say warningly and he suddenly starts to study his boots and I heard him mumble, “she is going to kill me.”

I stare at him a moment knowing exactly who ‘she’ was and shook my head quickly realizing that the woman waiting for me was the Champion of Kirkwall.

“I am not taking another step until you get her,” I tell him and see his scared shocked look.

“Sketch…you don’t understand…if I just…” and I held up my hand.

“Go Varric, and hurry. I don’t have all day.”
I saw his eyes widen and then suddenly he left me on the Battlements and I felt the wind whip over my face and tease my hair to dance around me. I slipped a loose lock behind my ear to keep it from lashing into my eyes as I focused on the colors of my aura. The sound of the door opening and Cassandra grumbling loudly made me turn to look at them.

“What have you done now?”

Cassandra stopped suddenly at my being there and then looked at me to him and then back to me. I pointed towards the woman waiting and saw Cassandra’s face turn to stone cold as she recognized the woman.

“Is that...” she started and then looked at Varric accusingly.

“The Champion of Kirkwall,” he answered her and watched her warily.

“You conniving little shit,” she growled at him.

“Just try to understand, Cass. You were interrogating me on orders from the Chantry… I couldn’t just hand her over, she is my friend.”

“We needed her and you... you kept her from us,” she spat angrily her face a mire of hurt and anger mixed together.

“Don’t give me that nug shit, you didn’t need her… you wanted answers and you wanted someone to pull the mages back inline so they would follow the Chantry like good little sheep.”

Cassandra growled at him and I stepped between them hoping I wouldn’t be the one to get hit by her. Holding my hands up, I held her angry brown gaze, somewhat nervously.

“Cassandra lets meet with her and find out what she knows before you pummel Varric into a paste.”

Her brown gaze stared fixedly into mine and I watched her visibly calm, almost like she had flipped a switch… it was unnerving. The sudden look of unease that took over Varric’s square face told me it was unnerving for him as well.

“Of course Inquisitor,” she said her tone still full of hot anger.

I gave her an understanding look and a quick nod, before gesturing for Varric to lead the way.

I saw the Champion of Kirkwall stiffen at the sight of Cassandra as we approached. She moved her hand deceptively to her back where it would be easier for her to reach for her staff.

“Hawke,” Varric called out in greeting with a large smile on his face conveying reassurance.

“This is the Inquisitor,” he said gesturing towards me and then he gestured towards Cassandra. “And this is Seeker Cassandra Pentaghast, you remember me telling you about Cassandra.”

Hawke eyed Cassandra carefully for a moment and then started chuckling before holding her hand out to me.

“It is good to finally meet you, Inquisitor,” she said evenly and then glanced from Varric to Cassandra.

“You sure do like to live dangerously Varric,” she teased and I saw Cassandra slightly blush at the implication.
“You’re never more alive than when you are about to get your ass handed to you by a beautiful woman,” he joked and I didn’t miss the soft look Cassandra slid towards him. *Ah, so he did convince her to finally give him a chance…that is just so adorable.* My obvious look of romantic happiness caught Cassandra’s eye and she glared at me.

“My lips are sealed,” I said pantomiming as if I were locking my lips and throwing the key over my shoulder. I turned back to look at Hawke and smiled.

“Perhaps we could have this discussion somewhere…closer to the ground, the tavern perhaps. I’ll even buy,” I offered and saw the instant smile blossom on the Champion’s face.

“I could definitely do with something to rinse the travel dirt out of my mouth.”

Varric cleared his throat and then took a healthy drink of his ale after we sat down and looked at Hawke.

“I thought that you might have some friendly advice about Corypheus since you and I did fight him.”

Both Cassandra and I looked at him in shock and I quickly held my hand up to Cassandra’s obvious beginnings of questions and she snapped her mouth closed, glaring at Varric while Hawke took a drink and then fiddled with her mug.

“I don’t know how much help I can be; you’ve already dropped half a mountain on the bastard. I’m sure anything I could tell you would pale in comparison.”

I gave her a slight grin and shrugged my shoulders before leaning back in my chair to study the Champion. Hawke was a beautiful woman, of that there was no doubt. Dark, chestnut brown hair braided tightly against her head, clear sky-blue eyes that swirled with mischief fringed with long, full lashes and full raspberry red-stained lips.

“Oh, I’m sure you got something to offer. According to Varric, you saved a city from a horde of rampaging Qunari,” I joked and saw the reciprocating smile on her face.

“I don’t see a horde of rampaging Qunari now, so I don’t see how that could apply.”

I chuckled and picked up my mug of ale and took a drink.

“Well, there is a Qunari that might just qualify as a horde all by himself, but he is on our side,” I tease enjoying her easy laughter. I watched Cassandra out of the corner of my eye as she quietly listened and drank her ale. *Thank God the woman was going to calm down and give this a chance.*

“So, then, what can I tell you?”

“Varric said you fought Corypheus before, and I find it difficult to believe with your reputation that he survived the encounter.”

Hawke’s eyes turned steely as she set her mug on the table, her body stiffening with a show of outward anger.

“Fought and killed the asshole, or so we had thought. The Grey Wardens were holding him, and he somehow used his connections to the darkspawn to influence them.”

Varric sat forward and slightly twirled his mug on the table slowly shaking his head.
“Corypheus got into their heads, messed with their minds and then turned them against each other.”

Hawke nodded her head in agreement with Varric and Cassandra leaned forward slightly uncomfortable.

“If the Wardens have disappeared, then perhaps they have fallen under his control again,” she interjected saying everyone’s thoughts aloud.

“Well if the Wardens have fallen under his control again, do you think it’s possible to free them from him?”

“It’s possible,” Hawke said with a sigh of frustration. “But we need to know more first.” She took another drink of her ale and held my gaze steadily.

“I’ve got a friend in the Wardens. He was investigating something unrelated for me. His name is Stroud. The last time we spoke, he was worried about corruption in the Warden ranks, since then, nothing.”

“Corypheus would certainly qualify as corruption in the ranks. Did your friend disappear with them?” Varric questioned Hawke sitting forward in his chair.

Hawke shook her head, “No. He told me he would be hiding in an old smuggler’s cave near Crestwood.”

“If you didn’t know about Corypheus, what was Stroud looking into for you if you don’t mind me asking?” I saw the slight shake of her head as she swallowed her ale and held her mug loosely between her hands.

“Not at all. The Templars in Kirkwall were using a strange form of lyrium, it was red. I’d hoped the Wardens could tell me more about it.”

I sat back slightly stunned and then ran my hands over my face before sharing a knowing look with both Varric and Cassandra.

“The Templars that descended on Haven were corrupted with red lyrium.”

Hawke looked a little horrified with the information. “Hopefully my friend in the Wardens will know more.”

“I appreciate your coming here, Hawke. I’ll take all the help I can get at the moment.”

Hawke smiled at me and shook her head.

“I’m doing this as much for myself as for you, Inquisitor. Corypheus is my responsibility. I thought I’d killed him before, this time I’ll make sure of it.”

I down the last of my ale and stand holding my hand out to her.

“Stop with the Inquisitor stuff and just call me, Fenlin. Now let me get you a room with a private bath and be our guest for a couple of days. I will need to speak to my counsel and bring them up to speed before I can set out for Crestwood.”

Hawke stood with a large smile on her face grasping my hand.

“Thank you, Fenlin, it’s just Marrian, and I will definitely take you up on that. It will be nice to get in a bath and catch up with this dodgy rogue for a bit before going back on the road.”
I laughed and left them in the tavern to catch up. I would need to speak with Josephine about a room for Hawke and gather the group. The information I had learned from her was invaluable and almost unbelievable.

Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma vhenan-I love you my heart
Thank you, everyone, for your wonderful comments, kudos, and general support. You the readers are the freakin bomb!

I had put together little baskets full of wine, cheeses, chocolates and the odd trinkets here and there for my entire inner circle and many of the main people that helped Skyhold run like the well-oiled machine it was. For this morning’s meeting, I delivered one for Leliana, Josephine, and Cullen. There shared looks of surprised pleasure at the gifts was a wonderful reward.

“Is all of this from the gifts you received, Inquisitor?” Josephine questioned as she ran her hands over the bottle of Antivan wine in her basket.

“Yup – spoils of war,” I joked and heard Cullen’s chuckle as he eyed the chocolate.

*I would have never thought he had a sweet tooth, good to know.* I heard Josephine’s slight sigh and I could already tell she was compiling reasons to return the gift and I held up my hand.

“Josephine, please take the small offering. There was so much crap sent to me that if I drank all the wine, ate all the cheese, and then ate the chocolates I would weigh as much as a Druffalo before I died from alcohol poisoning. Not to mention I am *not* going to accept any of their proposals, so why shouldn’t everyone benefit from their gifts.”

“Inquisitor, they will expect a response,” Josephine pointed out and I gave her a cheeky smile while the others laughed.

“And I will give them one. Some will be more polite than others, but I promise Josephine, I will reply to each and every one until my fingers fall off.”

Leliana laughed and plucked out a decadent piece of chocolate covered fruit and popped it in her mouth. Her soft moan of pleasure with the sweet made me giggle, and I watched Cullen copy her action and do the same, moaning with delight at the sweet.

“I agree with the Inquisitor, Josephine. Now taste one of those chocolate covered fruits, they are to die for,” Leliana teased and Josephine looked down at her basket and took one hesitantly.

I watched as she took a bite and her eyes suddenly closed as she chewed slowly, savoring every morsel. **Okay, they all have a sweet tooth...I can use this.** I thought about how Solas liked his little frilly cakes that reminded me of petit fours, and now I am wondering if I have missed the most basic pleasures of the people around me. I would have to see if our kitchen has the ingredients as an idea began forming surrounding cinnamon rolls.

“Okay, I concede, but when you return from Crestwood you must sit in judgment of those waiting in the cells below. We cannot house anymore and you cannot ignore it any longer,” she finally said after she finished the treat and smiled at me while I laughed.

“Okay Josephine, I promise to sentence those waiting when I return. But for the record – I really don’t like this part of my job.”
After my meeting updating everyone about the information Hawke had brought, I returned to my quarters to gather more baskets full of goodies with Bull and his Chargers help. This was going to take me a better part of a day to disperse all of it, but it would be worth it.

I had them follow me through Skyhold depositing treats with the staff. The Orlesian chocolate was handed out to all of the housekeeping and serving staff along with a large basket full of thirty bottles of wine for them to share. Frederic, the man in charge of the staff, stared at the baskets in stunned surprise.

“Your Worship, this is…this is very kind of you,” he said looking at the mounds of goodies.

I shrugged off his compliment and smiled at him pleased that he liked the goodies.

“Without you guy’s and all your hard work, this place would resemble a barnyard,” I joked and saw his hesitant smile spread across his face before I turned and left.

The baskets of cheeses were brought to the kitchen and given to Francois, the Chef, to use as he wanted. His staff of helpers got a large basket full of goodies for them to share and he got his own private basket of wine, cheese, and chocolate for all his nummy food that he cooks with a handwritten note conveying my gratefulness for him. He too stared at the small token of appreciation with a shocked expression on his face.

“It is too much your Worship,” he started and stopped when he saw my hands held up.

“It is not Francois; it is a small thank you in comparison to what you do every day for everyone.”

He too smiled hesitantly at first and then brightened into a larger grin before I left. This little trend was starting to worry me. I noticed that the kitchen staff could use some new aprons and made a mental note to get them some as I left and walked across the Garden with Bull and his boys in tow.

We brought in some of the hardened candies and chocolates into the orphanage, and the Chantry Mothers were also surprised at the generosity. Although they were able to cover it up better with smiles, still it was bothering me. My thoughts were suddenly quieted as the children swarmed us for the treats and I felt fabulous just giving them something. Mental note – the children need toys and more clothing and bedding, gonna have to talk with Josephine.

The telling moment was when I handed the sisters a basket with a several of bottles of wine, cheese, and chocolate for all their generous work with the children, and the Chantry Mothers reaction was no different than the servants of Skyhold. Does no one show any gratitude for the people that actually make this place run like a well-oiled machine? Have I not done enough to let them know how much I appreciate them? I had to wonder with the many reactions of surprise I was receiving.

This was not the first time I had thanked people for their help, or gone out of my way to help someone even, but their reactions did shock me. I looked up at Bull with confusion as we left the orphanage and were headed back to my quarters for the other baskets of goodies.

“Do you think I don’t show my gratitude for them often enough, Bull?”

My question obviously startled him as his normally expressionless face, held astonishment.

“Boss, if you were any more ‘grateful’ with the people here, you would become the saint they call you,” he teased. Crossing my arms over my chest, I looked at him seriously and he let out a sigh.
“Listen, people are not used to anyone actually recognizing a job well done. You show a kind thoughtfulness with every interaction, with every person in Skyhold. So, to answer your question, I think you are showing them exactly how a leader should be. Now come on, let’s get that wine out of your room before people start thinking you are a closet alcoholic.”

I laugh and continue moving through the garden thinking about what he said. It was high praise for sure, but the one thing I could count on was that Bull would tell me straight even if it was hurtful. I let a small smile lift my lips with his words. The last thing I wanted to be was some dictating prick.

Even after all we had given away including what we had given to every one of the inner circle, I still had several crates of wine that the Chargers were kind enough to take down to the wine cellar of Skyhold. I am sure all those Orlesian’s thought I would hide their gifts like a dragon with its horde, but they were sure in for a surprise when they find out that I gave them away, because that is what I do.

*Thank God I wasn’t dropped in the middle of Orlais; I would have never made it.*

My last stop was Skyhold’s seamstress, and Bull helped me by carrying the large crate holding the multiple bolts of fine silks and satins. She about cried at the sight of them, almost knocking me off my feet. The force of her hug almost made me drop the basket of goodies I had brought with her energy. *Damn, the Elven woman is strong,* I realized as her arms gripped me tightly in her exuberance.

“Oh, thank you, your Holiness. Now I can keep Madam De Fer pleased, perhaps she will stop shrieking at me about my incompetency now that there are so many new silks for her to choose from.”

Bull was busy placing the crate down and I am sure he noticed the sudden tightening of my jaw as I hugged the woman back, and stepped away holding out her basket of goodies. I inhaled slowly to calm the sudden brewing of anger that knotted in my stomach. The fact that Vivienne and I did not see eye to eye was just a fact, and everyone knew it but I was really trying very hard to not hate the woman. Which Vivienne was making difficult for me to achieve when she acted like such an entitled, ego-driven bitch.

“Has she been cross with you Helene?”

Helene held her basket and realized what her suddenly loose tongue had said before she started to stammer nervously.

“Ah…what I meant to say was…her displeasure at the lack of materials…” her eyes darted around the room not looking at me as she searched for another way to explain herself.

I placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder and hopefully, my smile conveyed peace and not the churning anger I felt boiling through my stomach with the former circle mage.

“Helene, it is alright to speak your mind, you’re not in trouble. I would prefer that Vivienne treat you with the respect that you deserve, not like some stray Mabari hound.”

Helene suddenly looked at me, her large green eyes full of fear as she began to spill on Vivienne’s treatment of the servants around Skyhold, especially the elven ones. When she was done, I just rocked back on my heels, my face a mask of calmness I did not feel. It would appear that it wasn’t just me that she held in contempt. With everything Helene had just told her, Lady Vivienne did not
like any servants but particularly enjoyed expressing her displeasure on the elven ones.

“Thank you for telling me Helene,” I held one of her hands in mine. “Please inform any others that if they have *any* problems, with anyone here, that I am to be notified immediately. If you cannot find me, or I am not in Skyhold at the time then you will take your concerns to Lady Josephine, and she will make sure it halts, can you do that for me please?”

Helene bobbed her head in agreement and gave me a shy smile full of appreciation.

“Thank you, your Holiness. I will let the others know…and – thank you for not being angry with me.”

I gave her a genuine smile of appreciation and patted her shoulder.

“Helene, without you, my pants would split at the seams and leave me quite exposed,” I joked with her and was rewarded with her small giggle alleviating her sudden tension at exposing the mistreatment that many had experienced with Madam De Fer.

I turned and left the room with Bull following closely behind me watching me carefully.

“Boss?”

I stopped and glanced up at him and I was sure he could see my barely controlled anger though I spoke with a calm tone.

“Thank you for your help today Bull, I would not have gotten all that shit out of my room without you and your boys. I will swing by the tavern later and make sure to get a cask of Chasind Sack Mead for you guys; I believe Krem said something about really liking it.”

I turned to leave and felt his large hand on my shoulder stopping me.

“You going to be okay, is what I meant, Boss?”

I turn and glance at him with a cool stare.

“I am going to have a little chat with Madam De Fer, and then I will be okay, Bull.”

I shrugged his hand off and walked across the courtyard towards Vivienne’s room. My mind seethed with anger as I moved with angry purpose.

*THAT CUNT!*

No! That would require depth and warmth. That bitch has neither of those qualities. If I have to drag her by the ear, she will apologize to every servant in Skyhold she has mistreated or by God, I might just kill her.
The Blow UP!

Chapter Notes

As always, I am grateful to everyone who continues to follow my little story. Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The yelling could be heard in the main keep, stopping all people, servants and nobles alike, to cease talking or moving when the Inquisitor’s voice echoed loudly throughout the room threateningly.

Cullen led the charge through the nobles while Leliana, Josephine, and Cassandra wove around nobles and servants crowded around the main hall curiously listening. Not one of them flinching as the sound of Fenlin’s indignant voice echoed through the keep. Cullen groaned when he heard her tone having experienced it and moved quickly to get to the yelling coming from Madam De Fer’s apartment. He knew that tone, and Madam De Fer most likely didn’t realize the seriousness of the situation she was in or how close she was to full blown anger.

Bull had warned them Fenlin was angry, and by the sounds of it she was more than just angry, she was about to snap. Solas followed closely behind them with Bull and heard the loud crash of something or someone hitting something.

“Fen’edhis,” he muttered under his breath hastening his steps and heard Bull’s chuckle as they raced up the staircase.

I entered Vivienne’s quarters with the forethought that I would try and speak with her calmly and not let my anger get the best of me. I had vented silently on my walk, half angry stalked to her quarters. I was always an optimist, wanting to believe that someone could not be as inherently evil as this woman would like me to believe.

But as the conversation continued, and her flagrant disgust with me and the Elven people in Skyhold, my tenuous hold I had on my temper snapped. Her derisive arguments were only burying her further.

“You cannot pander to them, my dear, they are just servants. It is hardly my fault if your kind is more incompetent than others.”

“MY KIND?! YOU ARROGANT, SANCTIMONIOUS BITCH!” I yelled at her angrily clenching my fists.

“How dare you!” I growled angrily. "To think, even for one minute, you can treat anyone with such disrespect, Vivienne. What is wrong with you? They are not your personal kicking posts, they are fucking people,” I snarled at her.

Vivienne’s expression held cool contempt as she eyed me. She studied one of her fingernails indifferent to my impending explosion.
“My dear, they are servants…what else are they good for if not to – serve? It is not as if I have had anyone beaten for their negligence of duty, though some surely need such a reminder of their place.”

Her arrogant attitude and haughty tone of voice, grated on my last nerve. The more she spoke, the greater the ball of anger grew in my stomach. At this point, my anger was causing my aura to pulse dangerously around the room sending her loose papers flying.

“That is what you are here for as well Vivienne – to serve, shall I have you flogged for your obvious disrespect towards me? It is quite clear that you have forgotten your place.” I fiercely warned her and she gave me her most superior, dispassionate gaze.

“Ah, but I am not a servant, I am a member of the Inquisition’s inner circle, my dear. I am not here to please you; my importance to this cause is what separates me. Once, this little farce you have promoted about freedom for mages and equality with servants is over, the circles will return and servants will go back to not being seen or heard.”

My eyebrow rose and a rather menacing smile grew on my lips. The sudden narrowing of her eyes with the gesture only added to the great joy I took at watching her smile slip just slightly.

“I honestly deceived myself thinking that I could move past our personal differences. I mean how could anyone truly be as cruel as you portray, right? Maybe focus on the benefits that you offer the Inquisition,” I gestated with my hands to try and keep myself from punching the woman. Her eyes followed me as I slightly paced trying to bring myself under control, and then her eyebrow rose with a bored expression as if I was as inconsequential as a fly and I suddenly stopped pacing.

“The truth is you are that horrible of a person. You have made it painfully apparent that your sense of compassion and respect for anyone but yourself has the depth of a thimble as you cannot see past our FUCKING EARS,” I finished yelling at her. My voice was dripping with hatred as I stared at her coldly.

“As of this moment, your type of services,” I spat disgustedly, “Is no longer required. You are relieved of your duties for the Inquisition, Madam De Fer,” I said in my coldest tone that sent a chill through the room.

Her mocking laughter filled the room, setting my teeth on edge and my fist clenched tightly.

“My dear, I am too important for you to just dismiss in a snit. You are angry about servants, and your impulsive outburst is ridiculous. I have brought…” her prattling stopped as an unexpected Fade fist slammed into the glass armoire that stood next to her. Glass shattered into a million pieces, showering her along with the floor. I took an angry step towards her that assured her I would not miss a second time.

“GET OUT!” I shouted and saw her flinch as the words echoed around the room as everything in the room blew from the shelves or shattered.

The sound of boots crunching over shattered glass made me turn angrily towards whoever made the noise and I saw Cullen and the rest of my counsel all with different levels of surprise at the wreckage of the room. My eyes zeroed in on Cullen as I spoke.

“Find someone to help pack her things and pay her this month’s wages with a small severance. I want her out of Skyhold by morning Commander,” I barked ignoring the others as I walked passed them heading for my room.

“Inquisitor,” Josephine started with her hand held out to stop me and when I turned towards her she
dropped her hand and quickly ceased speaking with the hard look in my eyes.

“Bigotry and racist behavior will not be tolerated here, Josephine. I don’t care if she is fucking the entire Counsel of Heralds,” I snapped and stormed off ignoring the looks of shocked amazement at my fury. A heavy silence fell over the crowd of people who were standing close enough to hear while parting to make way for me to walk through. I caught Solas’ gaze as I passed and I could see his kindness reflecting on me and it only made me move quicker.

*No, I cannot deal with him too. I just…I just need to get to my room and decompress.*

Cullen held back a knowing grin as did Leliana while Josephine seemed to be floundering with the sudden change. He would need to settle up with Varric later after he was done here. He would never have imagined that Fenlin would get rid of the ‘Viper’, or at least that was the nickname Varric gave her anyway.

Cullen cleared his throat gathering the others attention just as Vivienne spoke angrily.

“She cannot possibly do this,” she spat at them looking from one to the next in complete shock.

“She can Madam De Fer, and quite clearly has,” Cullen spoke coolly and then looked at Leliana ignoring the First Enchanter. “I will get men to help move her things onto a wagon,” he started and Leliana followed his lead.

“I will have a couple of my agents help her pack while Josephine gets her wages prepared.”

“Lady Josephine, you must see the ridiculousness of this,” Vivienne said as she moved towards her. Josephine squared her shoulders and held the First Enchanter’s gaze. Everyone knew that Madam De Fer and the Herald did not get along, but she had seen how the Herald ignored her personal reasons and focused on the greater goal. She could respect that, the Herald was also probably one of the most generous and patient woman she had ever met. Whatever had happened between her and Madam De Fer was of great importance.

“Would you like a full retinue for your return to Val Royeaux, Madam De Fer?”

Vivienne stared at her for a quiet moment when she realized she did not have an ally in Josephine and then gave her a sharp nod.

“Lady Josephine, you must see the ridiculousness of this,” Vivienne said as she moved towards her.

Josephine squared her shoulders and held the First Enchanter’s gaze. Everyone knew that Madam De Fer and the Herald did not get along, but she had seen how the Herald ignored her personal reasons and focused on the greater goal. She could respect that, the Herald was also probably one of the most generous and patient woman she had ever met. Whatever had happened between her and Madam De Fer was of great importance.

“Would you like a full retinue for your return to Val Royeaux, Madam De Fer?”

Vivienne stared at her for a quiet moment when she realized she did not have an ally in Josephine and then gave her a sharp nod.

“Yes,” she said with a tone that could create ice.

Josephine gave her a polite nod and followed Cullen and Leliana out of the room in utter silence. Cassandra watched them move through the hall and then glanced over at Bull and Solas.

“So who else here owes Varric money?” She said quietly and saw both men raise their hand. She too would be paying Varric; she still couldn’t believe that Fenlin discharged Vivienne. Solas pulled his coin purse from his side and gave her the five sovereigns he owed as did Bull and watched her pocket them.

Solas glanced at them and gave them both a small bow. He had felt the turmoil of her aura as she had passed him and it concerned him.
“I should see if she needs anything,” he said calmly folding his arms behind his back before he left them.

Cassandra watched him leave and felt Bull’s elbow in her arm.

“I wondered how long those two were going to fight their attraction for each other,” he joked and heard her snort of an agreement.

“In all honesty, I don’t know if it was that or something else.” She said and Bull fell into step with her as they moved down the steps together.

“Fenlin does not trust easily if you hadn’t noticed. She is friendly, sure, but trust – no.”

Bull glanced down at her and was pleasantly surprised at how insightful the Seeker was.

“She is interesting,” he said simply. “That guy that came from her clan wouldn’t say anything about her when he was in the tavern, did he to you?”

Cassandra shook her head. “He would not with me either. She is unlike any Dalish, I have ever encountered before.”

She glanced up at Bull and shrugged suddenly unwilling to carry the conversation about Fenlin’s past any further. Everyone had a past, and that is where it should stay.

“However, I do not regret making her Inquisitor. She has proven to me and to the people that she is worthy of the title and the responsibility. Whatever her past history with her clan is…it is unimportant. She actually cares for the people, human and elven, servant, Templar or Mage alike. It is unusual to find such compassion in one person.”

Bull glanced down at her in agreement.

“Come on Seeker, I believe after that beautiful display of justified anger, we should get ourselves a celebratory drink and I’ll tell you about what Helene told her that set this whole thing off,” he said gesturing towards the tavern.

Cassandra laughed at him. “For you Bull, breathing is enough of a celebration,” she joked and saw his large smile.

“Then we have two things to celebrate,” he joked with her and they walked towards the tavern together.

Solas was not surprised to find Cole sitting with her when he entered her room, she was angry and he knew she did not like losing control of her emotions in such a public display. For what everyone saw of her, she was at the center a very private woman. She sat on the floor next to Cole with her head lying on the spirit’s shoulder.

“I am not going to apologize to that evil woman,” she said to him suddenly and he shook his head hiding his sudden urge to smile. He had no appreciation for Madam De Fer; she was like all Orlesian nobility who felt permitted to treat people as she saw fit.

“No one is suggesting you do so. Some of the servants I passed on my way to your quarters were
Their eyes held for a long while, and he wanted to wrap her in his arms and hold her.

"Tender, loving – I wish I could trust…” Cole started and she suddenly cut him off.

“Good night Cole,” she said quickly and Cole looked at her.

“But if you would…” he started again and she cut him off again.

“Good – night, Cole,” she said a little more forcefully and Solas now found himself in a place of utter confusion.

What did she not want him to know? He watched as Cole shook his head at her with an annoyed expression. A look on the face of the spirit he had never seen before. Raising a curious eyebrow at her, he saw she just gently shook her head as Cole disappeared.

He could not fault her for her own secrets; he had plenty of his own. It was uncomfortable to think, however, that she might not confide in him as much as he had thought tho. At times it frustrated him that there was so much he did not know about her and just as he thought he might have a piece of the puzzle figured out, it would disintegrate before his eyes.

“Would you try to explain to me what he meant?” He finally asked her after moments of awkward silence.

“No – I will not,” she finally answered him quietly before turning her somber, amber gaze to look at him.

Solas shook his head in confusion and his own emotions were now at an all-time high of turbulent churning and he didn’t know if he should move closer to her or stay where he was. He decided that staying where he was, was the better option if her aura of confusion and anger warned him of anything.

“You will trust me with your heart, but…”

Her gaze sharpened and he stopped suddenly unsure what he should do as her aura flashed with frustration.

“My heart is only yours, Solas. To do with as you will…” she said, and he heard the jagged intake of air before she continued. “You may take it, and accept what I offer, or you may not and discard it, the choice is yours.”

His own heart tightened uncomfortably at her unspoken expectancy that he too will hurt her as others have in her past. She had given it to him, but that did not say she trusted him with it. He wanted to say she could, but held his tongue knowing he loved her, but that did not mean he wouldn’t hurt her.

Her amber eyes held his captive and his heart caught at the sight of her knowing look. Her warm gaze held within their depths a wealth of knowledge he did not expect that she possessed and his breath caught in his chest at her unprotected expression. He suddenly felt stripped bare, and he did not like the sensation.

“You have secrets, I have secrets, and I am no young da’len, Solas. I know what is at stake, and we like to pretend that we don’t.”

He knew his face registered shock and then complete understanding of what she implied before she
continued. *She speaks of our time in the Fade, without actually making me admit the truth.* Even now she accepted him and he had wondered why she never pushed him for an answer, but quietly accepted that it was the way of things.

“I only hope…I am enough,” she whispered and his own ears that were sharp and could hear from long distances now strained to hear her small words and his body stood immobile. *How could she ever believe she was not enough?* He took a step towards her suddenly uncaring about what she knew or how she knew and stopped at her upheld hand.

“I have said enough…I think I would like to be alone, Solas.”

Her softly spoken words were laced with hurt, and the swift pain in his chest sent shockwaves of discomfort through him. He took another step forward unwilling to let this night end the way it was heading.

“Vhenan…” he began and she interrupted him quickly.

“Please, I just need to gather my thoughts,” she begged. Her voice broke suddenly with her plea as she stared at him. He saw the unshed tears she refused to show him and it stopped him dead in his tracks as formidable as mage ice. He had never seen this kind of torment in her expression when she looked upon him and it was wounding. *What else has she not allowed me to see?* He took a small shaky breath and finally bowed towards her.

“Ma nuvenin vhenan,” he finally articulated thickly and turned to leave the room.

He moved to the steps hastily and before he reached the door he heard Cole again in the room talking with her quietly.

“He should know you know,” Cole said quickly.

“No, not yet Cole,” he heard her defeated sounding voice and his mind went in a million different directions at her simple words.

*Know what?* Closing the door behind him, he leaned against it for a moment. *Had she found a way to his library? Is that what she knows?* Suddenly his heart began to race as he headed down the stairs. The idea that she would find his Eluvian before he could explain made his blood run cold. If she found the hidden chamber, she would know what he had planned.

He ran his hands over the door and found the ward still in place and let out a small sigh of relief. He knew he could not leave the door locked to her much longer, but now was not the time to even begin to try explaining his plans when he had no idea what he was going to do yet himself.

****

I watched Vivienne’s carriage and the full retinue of guards head out at dawn. I did not feel the satisfaction at watching her leave that I thought I would. I definitely did not regret her leaving, only how it was brought about. Rubbing my face as the last of the men crested the hill after the drawbridge; I felt his aura glide over mine with a hesitance.

I closed my eyes and prepared to face him, especially after last night. Poor Cole and his mounting frustration with my stubbornness it was almost comical. I took a deep breath as I turned and saw his careful approach. *I should never have said what I did to him.*

He had his arms folded loosely behind him as he walked and I knew I would by no means ever get tired of just watching him move. I swallowed the ball of anxiety that was lodged in my throat as he
came to stand next to me.

“I take it Madam De Fer has left, on time?”

His subtle stab at humor made me snort.

“Yes, punctuality was the only characteristic I could appreciate about the woman.”

He gave me a soft smile of understanding and gestured back inside.

“I will begin the next panel on the wall, perhaps you would care to join me? I believe I promised to show you how it is done.”

I see we are going to ignore the elephant in the room then…okay, back to pretending we go. I took a deep breath and smiled at him brightly while forcing the thoughts into the mental file labeled ‘not going to fucking think about it’.

“You did promise me, but I had thought you’d forgotten…age will do that I hear,” I teased and saw his raised eyebrow while his eyes held a gleam of retribution.

“Perhaps I will depict your likeness without clothing then. There were similar such drawings during ancient times.”

I laughed at him as I shook my head taking a small step closer enjoying the way his eyes dilated and his nostrils would subtly flare at my closeness.

“You are not the only one who knows how to draw and I have a very long stairwell leading to the dining hall with nothing but blank wall space to practice that technique on.”

His instant smile at my counter threat was adorable and his eyes gleamed with mischief.

“Perhaps we shall leave each other clothed then…for now,” he said with a seductive growl and my whole body shivered.

“For now,” I agreed and walked back inside smiling as he followed behind me. There was something about this man that just made all my common sense fly out the proverbial window. I glanced at him over my shoulder and felt my heart quicken at his soft smile. I am so fucking damned, I realized as I pulled open the door to the Rotunda.

Chapter End Notes

Fen’edhis - wolf dick (also used for a well-rounded curse word for just about anything...)
Ma nuvenin vhenan - as you wish my heart
Crestwood

Chapter Notes

*****NSFW*****

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I hope everyone has a safe, and wonderful holiday.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lace waited for me as we approached the Inquisition camp, and I gave her a bright smile through the dreary weather. It would appear that I don’t get to go to places that aren’t pissing rain.

A soldier ran forward to take Etta’s reins and I gave him a grateful smile.

“Thank you,” I told him patting her neck as he began to lead her away.

“I will take good care of her, your Worship,” he said quickly and took off towards a covered area for the horses. I really wished they would stop calling me your worship or your holiness, it was disturbing.

I walked to where Lace was waiting and she smiled at me chasing my thoughts away at the multiple titles I was called. Here is a woman I could enjoy the conversation with.

“Good to see you safe, Fenlin. We’ve got trouble ahead,” she said getting to the point.

“Of course we do, I never get to go anywhere nice and trouble free,” I joked with her and heard Dorian quip from behind me.

“It appears, neither do we,” he jested making Sera laugh.

I glance at him over my shoulder and saw his cheeky smile making me laugh before looking back at Lace and her serious expression sobered me instantly.

“That bad, eh?”

Lace gestured to follow her and we walked over to a tall rock wall where she and I stepped onto a large fallen rock on the ground to get a better view over the wall and I saw the green mist in the distance. Putting my hand up to shield my eyes from the falling rain I saw now what she meant.

“There is a rift, under water…how in the hell am I going to get to that,” I mutter as we both step back down.

“Crestwood was the site of a flood ten years ago during the Blight. It’s not the only rift in the area, but after it appeared, corpses started walking out of the lake. You’ll have to fight through them to get to the cave where Hawke’s, Grey Warden friend is hiding.”

“Of course, and undead – sure why not.” I rub my face in annoyance and sigh heavily. “Are you guy’s safe here?”
Lace gave me a smile as she chuckled.

“We’ve encountered a few shamblers, but nothing we can’t handle. Maybe someone in Crestwood can tell you how to get to the rift in the lake. Maker knows they’ll want help. Good luck, and please be safe.”

I nod before turning to look at everyone. *What a fucking mess…I really need a damn vacation.*

After encountering Grey Wardens on the road and finding that they would be utterly useless, we entered Crestwood and it was a frozen still frame in a nightmare out of a horror movie. Half of the townspeople looked tired and scared, the townsfolk had boarded up all the windows to keep out bandits and undead. Everything was soggy, grey, and dreary and overall just fucking miserable.

“Ferelden has failed the villagers of Crestwood. They deserve better,” Solas said from beside me and I glanced over at him silently agreeing with him.

“I thought that order was restored to Ferelden. To see such chaos, even here,” Cassandra muttered from beside Solas sounding slightly shocked.

“After we meet with the Mayor, I want to get us set up for the night and start off fresh in the morning.”

I look at Cassandra pointedly and gesture around us at the devastation.

“We need to send word to Cullen to get a crew out here to help. They need supplies with food and building materials. Take some people with you Cassandra, and see what the town has and what they need.”

“I will also see if they might have lodgings or if we will need to head back to camp. We can meet back here,” she offered before walking away with Varric, Sera, Hawke, and Dorian.

I watched her leave before looking at Solas.

“Well handsome man, let’s go speak with the Mayor and find out why he never sent word to anyone about the condition of his town.”

He softly chuckled and followed me with Bull and Cole.

The door I knocked on opened and the gentleman with the salt and pepper grey hair gazed at me in confusion for a moment and then his eyes rounded as recognition came and his gaze turned overly nervous.

“Inquisitor,” he said with a slight tremble in his voice and it was difficult to not raise my eyebrow at his odd behavior while he still stood in the doorway tensely.

“You must be Mayor Gregory Deidrick,” I say calmly. “May we have a moment of your time, Mayor?”

He suddenly opened the door further with embarrassment as he realized he was standing in the doorway frozen and staring.

“Of course, please come in…I…apologize for not doing so sooner.”

We walked through the door and I maintained my look of polite indifference.
“It’s quite alright; I am sure in such troubling times as these you really need to be careful who you open your door for.”

The Mayor shut the door appearing anxious and fidgety, and his eyes shifted from Bull to Solas and then to me. It was mind-boggling as to why he should be acting this way.

“Are you here to…stop the undead?”

I could feel Cole fidgeting just slightly behind me.

“We should,” he whispered and I gave him a gentle smile from over my shoulder before returning to focus on the nervous Mayor.

“That is the plan. They are rising because of the rift in the lake, how can I get to it?” I ask him as I fold my arms watching his expression of shock.

“The light in the lake? Then it is coming from the caves beneath old Crestwood. Darkspawn flooded it ten years ago during the Blight. It wiped out the village and killed all the refugees we took in.”

“What about the dam we saw on our way here? If we can use it to drain the lake, then I can get to the rift and seal it.”

The Mayor suddenly looked horrified at the idea.

“Drain the…you’d have to get through the bandits to get to the controls. I can’t ask you to risk yourself like that; there must be some other way.”

*Something is seriously wrong here…if I were in his position I would be all over any help I could get.*

“There isn’t…there really isn’t,” Bull told the Mayor in an annoyed yet bored tone and I noticed his subtle change in movement that he too was picking up on the same weird vibes radiating from the Mayor that I was.

“Listen to me Mayor,” I said with urgency and no small amount of annoyance in my tone. The Mayor flinched at the sound before his gaze focused on me. “The undead won’t stop until that rift is gone. If you want this town to recover in any form, then you need to take the help I am offering you.”

The Mayor glanced around at the others in the room and I heard his heavy sigh as he pulled out the key to the dam controls from his pocket.

“I must warn you, Inquisitor, the bandits are very aggressive.”

I took the key and smiled pleasantly at him.

“Don’t worry Mayor; we are skilled in aggressive negotiations.”

The door quietly closed behind us and I glanced between Solas and Bull. We walked towards the center of the town as I slipped the key into my pocket. *Something just doesn’t add up.*

“Something is definitely wrong here. Why wouldn’t he want our help in removing the bandits and sealing the one rift that is wreaking havoc on the town? It doesn’t make any sense,” I mumble and felt Solas’ aura slide along mine soothingly as he spoke.
“It appears the Mayor was very agitated with our presence, perhaps there is something he would prefer us not to find.”

“He worries you will find it…find them,” Cole said from behind me and I gave him a gentle smile.

“Hmm…well let’s catch up with the others and see what’s on our ‘honey-do’ list.”

Bull laughed and slightly shook his head as I went in search of Cassandra and the others.

The inn in Crestwood was as empty as most of the town. Thankfully they did have a room for bathing that boasted two tubs and a private room with a privy. We were going to be sharing rooms, which was fine by me as long as I didn’t have to sleep on the damp ground tonight or next to Varric, the man sounded like the Wild Kingdom when he snored.

Overall, the husband and wife that owned the small establishment were pleasant enough and tried to offer us what little food they had, but they were surprised when we just pulled out our own supplies and paid for our rooms. Over a shared meal with the couple, I learned about how the town had run before the bandits and then the Breach. They were very grateful that we had shown up when we did to help rid the town of undead and bandits.

“How shall we divvy up the rooms, Fenlin?” Cassandra asked me pulling my wayward thoughts away from lodgings, Varric’s snoring and not having to pee outdoors.

“However you like Cassandra, but I am bunking with Solas,” I said giving her a cheesy grin enjoying her sudden blush.

“I…I didn’t want to presume…” she stumbled along for a moment and my laughter drew her eyebrows together in agitation.

“Presume away my friend, the man is a heater and all this damn rain is making me cold.”

Her stunned expression was everything I could have hoped for and it only increased my laughter.

“Ugh, you are such an ass,” her disgusted signature groan only made me laugh harder as she turned away from me.

“Oh come on Cassandra…you know you love me,” I said between hiccups of gasping breath and saw her shaking her head and caught the little smile on her face as she continued walking away from me. God, I love teasing her.

After my hot bath and change of clothes, I began to resemble the living again and I moved up the stairs towards my room. Opening the door my eyes fell on the half-naked man in the middle of the bed reading. I am going to draw this one day…this memory is too stunning to ever forget.

His eyes glanced up and he gave me a soft smile as I shut the door behind me, warding it.

“I see you were able to finally have a private moment to bathe,” he said closing his book.

I placed my pack of cleaning supplies down and smiled at him mischievously.

“The damp hair gave it away didn’t it?”
I slipped my leggings off and laid them on the chair, leaving me in just an overly large tunic before heading towards the bed. Sliding under the covers, I watched him get up and remove his own leggings enjoying the view. The play of muscles in his arms and back as he removed the pants was enthralling. From my vantage, I could see the contraction of his stomach muscles as he bent and I bit my lip as I watched them move with his simple actions leaving him completely unclothed.

When he folded his pants and laid them on the chair he noticed my not so covert staring and started laughing.

My eyes wandered over his body silently memorizing it finally meeting his hungry gaze and I smiled at him.

“What can I say? I am appreciating the view that was so generously offered.”

He chuckled as he walked on silent steps towards me.

“Ah, I noticed,” he said as he slipped under the covers with me.

“Well, I suppose you would call it ogling?” I softly question as he glides his fingers over my hip. He hesitated for a small moment when he recognizes that I was not wearing any smalls. He emitted a soft groan and nibbled at my neck sending sparks flying through my system.

“Flattery, for an old man,” he teased and my giggles turned into moans as he nipped the lobe of my ear. Damn those things are highly sensitive.

“For an old man, you sure are lively then,” I groan as his lips trail down my throat and his deep, throaty chuckle makes my body burn even hotter with the sound.

When his lips captured mine, lightning flashed behind my closed eyes. The slow caress of his hand moving over my ribs to cup my breast made my heart race, and the soft tracing of his thumb over my nipple sent waves of excitement to my already wet sex.

“Isalan hima sa i’na,” he whispered against my lips and my sex clenched with the words as hot, rushing need rolled through my veins.

“Ver em ma nuvenin,” I whispered breathlessly and his pleased growl excited me.

He ran his fingers through my damp hair, and I could tell he loved the way it felt sliding through his fingers. I placed my hand on his cheek loving the feel of his skin beneath my fingertips while his lips seduced low moans from me. The silken glide of his tongue against mine was intoxicating. Sliding my shirt over my head, he pulled me onto his chest, and I breathed a low moan at the feeling of his skin against mine.

My hair lay to one side curtaining us into our own world, and it was a magical world for just the two of us. With each sensual touch of his lips, the slow glide down the side of my neck triggered small sounds of pleasure from me. This magical place we created pushed everything else away except for us. Here we could love, and be loved without reality crashing down on us.

His hands floated over the sides of my breasts and my back slightly arched inviting him to touch me. I was panting, and moaning as he lightly teases my sensitive nipples to tightness. His kiss excavated the depths of my soul, and became wild and lengthened to a perceptibly dangerous edge of passion that I rode willingly. I strained to get closer as his hands grasped my hips and settled me over him.

The connection stole my thought and I sighed with delight as my tight, wet warmth clenched and stretched around him – it was a moment of pure heaven. Rolling my hips forward bringing him
deeper into my wetness, I bit my lip trying to hold back my moan but the ragged sound escaped and something in him came apart. He moved beneath me with primal thrusts as he controlled my hips, and I felt the building ache within myself as he pushed me closer to diving into that gratifying abyss with each thrust.

His hand slid over my stomach and down to my wet center and I cried out as his fingers teased me. My head fell back at the dual stimulation attacking my senses and his low moan beneath me only excited me even more as my body clenched and quaked around him. My skin glowed with a fine sheen of sweat as the pleasure deepened, and my body clawed towards that cliff as it stretched and reached for it.

I felt everything, time, my mind, unraveling and I begged him unevenly, “Solas…” Rolling me beneath him, he looped my legs over his forearms and buried himself in me as far as he could go. The penetrating pleasure of the sudden move sent me over the edge and I shattered. The quick lightening of my release ran through my body as I hurtled over the edge pulling him with me.

When I woke, it was by the soft caress of his finger tracing the patterns on my arm and softly placed kisses on my shoulder. A small smile played over my lips as I leisurely stretched like a cat in a sunbeam. My body was pleasantly sore from his attention from the night before and I softly moaned as he bit my shoulder playfully.

“Are love slaves still a thing, because I will be the first one in line to be yours, although don’t ask me to share… I don’t share,” I teased and I felt his hand still on my arm.

“Is that so,” he whispered. The soft growl of his answer with my eyes closed sounded like Fen’Harel behind me and my whole body tingled with the vibration.

“Mmhmm,” I mumbled and rolled towards him kissing him dreamily never once opening my eyes. I felt the slight hesitation in his breath and my eyes slowly opened to find him watching me intensely, it was quite the turn on when I was the sole focus of his attention.

“I will bear that in mind,” he said and his tone was serious and my body stilled. What the fuck have I done now? I studied his face carefully for a moment and I couldn’t explain why I said it, but now I felt compelled to complete...whatever this was, knowing who he was.

“You do that, I won’t offer again,” I informed him, my own tone serious and his pupils dilated with understanding. God, I am pathetic...there isn’t anything I wouldn’t do for this man.

I kissed his nose and rolled away from him picking up my shirt from the floor and slipped it over my head.

“Though I would like to do nothing more than lie in bed with you and prove how good of a slave I could be, we have work to do and I don’t think the others will leave us alone.”

I turned and saw him watching me with a look I had never seen before. I chose to play it off and make it that it was my turn to catch him at his own game. I gave him a cheeky grin while resting my hands on my hips.

“I see I am not the only one who likes to check out the view.”

His eyes traveled up my body to meet mine and he smiled with just a roguish tinge to it that did nothing but make my body burn to crawl right back in the bed and lick him like an ice cream cone.
“I am always captivated by you and your beauty, vhenan.”

His words made me blush from my toes to the roots of my hair as I slipped a dark curly lock behind my ear.

“Smooth talker,” I mutter and ignored his laughter as I turned away and reached for my pack that held the rest of my clothes.

His steps were silent as he slipped up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist pulling me back against him. It startled me at first and then I melted back against him enjoying the heat of him surrounding me.

“Vhenan, it is a fact,” he whispered against the skin of my neck and my heart sped up.

I tilted my head so I could see him and pulled his lips to mine giving him a brief kiss.

“Get dressed before I forget that we have a job to do,” I growled at him and felt his lips smile on mine.

“Perhaps we may continue this later than,” he offered before biting my lip.

“Most definitely,” I said a little breathless and watched him cross the room to get dressed. It was always breathtaking watching him move, and I let a little sigh escape before tearing my gaze from his lithe form and pulling my own clothes on.

Chapter End Notes

Isalan hima sa i’na - I lust to be inside you
Ver em ma nuvenin - Take me as you wish
vhenan - my heart
I regarded the large wooden door while listening to Cassandra and Bull talk back and forth quietly.

“Four on the battlements,” Bull pointed out and I saw the archers as they made their rounds and I glanced at them with a smile before turning to look at Sera and Varric and felt Coles gentle tap on my shoulder.

“I won’t be seen,” is all he says to me and for a moment as I held his watery blue gaze, I had no idea what the hell he meant, and then it clicked, and I knew what he was saying. Smiling brightly at him, I turned back towards Cassandra and Bull.

“Cole can take out the archers on the battlements. Once he returns we will have a better head count of how many are within the walls.”

Bull considered the information and Cassandra’s face broke into an understanding smile before she turned towards Cole.

“Just be careful,” she told him and saw his quick nod before he disappeared.

A soft groan escaped Bull and I glance up at him with my eyebrow raised questioningly.

“I don’t know if I will ever get used to that, Boss.”

I patted his big arm and smiled at him realizing why he was groaning. Qunari didn’t do well with the whole spirit/demon thing.

“The fact that you are willing to try is enough, Bull.”

His one eye widened slightly before a large smile blossomed over his face. I turned towards Hawke and she gave me a small salute as I walked towards her.

“Don’t get hurt or I will never hear the end of it from Varric,” I joked with her and heard her soft snort.

“That Dwarf is more trouble than he is worth sometimes,” she muttered and slightly laughed. I knew we had time and I was curious about the others of their group and sat next to her.
“What happened to the other’s Hawke? Where is Fenris, or Isabella, Merrill even?”

Hawke glanced at me and shook her head.

“Isabella is on a ship, somewhere Maker only knows. I get letters every once in a while, but she is always on the move. Merrill is still in Kirkwall helping the elves of the alienage. She has made great progress in helping them get jobs and decent pay, and Fenris…” her voice trailed off and I saw the hurt expression cross her face and I interrupted her quickly.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to…” Hawke interrupted me then and smiled.

“It’s okay; I just miss him is all. He is off killing slavers somewhere and I…I am here. I don’t know where he is.”

Oh, well shit…

Before I could say anything else Cole appeared and I stood up.

“Thirteen in the upper area and only seven on the main floor,” he offered them quickly.

I gave him a grateful smile and looked at Bull and Cassandra.

“Well, let’s go take back a keep.”

Bull pulled his ax from the harness on his back while Cassandra casually grabbed her shield and pulled her sword, both warriors smiling at me. When Bull found out how much Cassandra really liked hitting things, they had become almost inseparable. Well, except when I saw her sneaking off with Varric when she thought no one noticed.

“Bull, would you do the honors,” Cassandra asked him and he chuckles as he bounces the overly large ax in his hand.

“Of course Lady Cassandra,” and he turned towards the large door while Solas places a barrier over him, and with his horns down and shoulder in the position, he ran straight for the door.

Dorian and I began placing barriers all around as we followed after him and Cassandra.

“And he says Tevinter mages are showy,” he scoffed as we heard Bull roaring his challenge and I chuckled.

Hawke came in behind us and started setting the scene as an experienced battle mage, and the lightning arched from one enemy to another stunning the bandit warriors. I am so going to love this woman, I realized as she Fade stepped and slammed the butt of her staff into a rogue moving in behind Solas.

I pulled the Fade tightly around me and throwing up my arms I called on large boulders to fall from the sky. They resembled meteors not unlike what fell from the Breach that flamed with fade fire. The move stunned and crushed the enemies lighting them on fire, and it also stunned Solas into a sudden halt. I had no idea what that look was about but I did not have time as I flashed him a smile and ran up the steps after Cassandra and Bull.

Solas watched the fade flamed rocks fall in sudden astonishment. It…can’t…how could…his mind
whirled in a jumble at what he was witnessing. His mind transported him to another time, another battlefield, another woman. Red hair whipped around her, black and gold armor glinting in the bright sunshine as she held her arms towards the sky calling on fade meteors to fall as Elgar’nan’s army rushed across a field. Her green eyes flashed open and glanced over at him. Her face was lit with a fierceness he had never seen before.

“Solas, come on they’re on the move,” Varric hollered back to him as he ran up the stairs.

Varric’s yelled words jolted him out of his memories and back to the present. His focus was now on watching Fenlin and how she was moving. Her fighting style had changed drastically and he had not noticed. His stomach clenched at the graceful sight of a now very skilled and trained warrior, and he had no idea how she had achieved this.

She moved in ways he knew he had not taught her, and it was beyond the ability of natural talent. He recognized the battle techniques she was implementing, they were Sentinel techniques as old as him. There was only one woman he knew that could move with such ferocious accuracy and could produce fade flamed boulders from the Fade and she was dead. How had she come to learn this technique? His tumultuous thoughts came to a grinding halt when Varric slapped him on the arm.

“You okay Chuckles, you seem out of it?”

Solas pushed his questions to the far reaches of his mind to review later and glanced at Varric.

“It is nothing but a small headache Master Tethras,” he easily lied and Varric motioned him to follow him.

“The place seems empty, let’s make sure.”

He nodded his agreement as his eyes glanced around.

“Of course Master Tethras,” and followed him through the large keep.

I watched him leave with Varric to check the rest of the keep and turned towards Cassandra as she spoke.

“We will need to wait for Leliana’s people to come and take over Caer Bronach.”

“Only until the town is situated and the King can get someone out here to take it over. If we can negotiate a possible liaison stationed here that is what we will do. I have a feeling that King Alistair will allow us to have at least one of Leliana’s agents here after all the hard work we have done for Ferelden.”

Cassandra looked at me in surprise and I shrugged.

“I thought the Inquisition was founded to help remove the chaos, not add to it. Am I wrong to think that if we take Caer Bronach, it will most definitely appear aggressive towards Ferelden? If I am not, I would prefer we didn’t do that,” I pointed out calmly and saw her immediate look of understanding.

I patted her arm before moving away.
“We are here to do damage control, not conquer. Let Josephine know what I intend please, I am going to start our dinner, I am starved.”

I could see that Cassandra was digesting my words and just nodded at me as I left to get some stew going.

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I was so tired of Crestwood I could scream. We were working our way towards the cave that the Warden was hiding in and it was slow going. I just wanted to drain the lake. When we had overlooked the large expansion of water from behind the keep, we found a dragon to Bull’s delight and of course, the creature was blocking our progress to close another rift.

“Is this our only option,” I question everyone as we sat around the fire.

“Come on Boss, she is probably causing chaos with just her eating habits alone.”

I look at him sharply and shake my head.

“I will not just run in willy-nilly and kill a majestic creature because it is proving inconvenient for me. There must be another way to reach that rift.”

His groan was enough to place a small smile on my face and I glance around at everyone before finally looking at Cassandra.

“Your family is famous for dragon hunting, Cassandra. What do you think?”

She chuckled and took a drink of her ale.

“The fights are never easy, but I agree. If we can close the rift without having to confront the dragon it would be best. I would suggest that we find out if she is a nuisance for the town before we do anything.”

I stare at Bull and he finally, begrudgingly agreed and I glanced at Solas who had been acting weird for over four days.

“Well, then let’s stay away from her for now and focus on draining the lake. Tomorrow I want to head down to the control’s housed behind the old bar. If we can get rid of that then the people of Crestwood can at least breathe easier knowing the undead will stop plaguing them. Hopefully, Cullen’s team will get here soon after, so the town can get some much-needed assistance.”

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement and I took a drink of my ale and stared into the fire. Sera sat down suddenly next to me and I looked at her with surprise.

“Will you…do my hair,” she said quietly and her face was blushing.

“You bet, Come on, I will comb it out and you tell me what you want.”

Sera’s face broke into a large smile and she grabbed my hand, dragging me towards her tent. I winked at Solas as I passed him and he just shook his head with a soft smile.

“Well, it is long enough for braids like yours innit?”

I look at her half-hazard ponytails and shake my head. Her hair had grown so rapidly in…sweet baby Jesus it had been almost six months. I’ve been here almost two years…how did I forget? Clearing my throat, I focus on the task at hand and smile at her.
“I think I got an idea you’re gonna like,” I said and followed her into her tent.

I pulled the leather ties from her hair and let it fall and stared in opened mouth awe at its length. It was well past her shoulder blades!

“Damn…no wonder you just hacked at it with a fucking knife Sera, this shit grows faster than a weed.”

She laughed as she handed me a large toothed comb from her bag.

“I know…I know you and Solas are a…thing, and I am not trying to make this weird or anythin,” she started as I ran the comb through her long blonde locks just listening to her knowing that she was going somewhere with this. “But…but I like when you play with my hair,” she finally said and I saw a soft blush of color over her ears.

Sera was not a frilly type of woman, she was a tomboy type of woman and for her to admit anything remotely girly was huge. I felt the overwhelming urge to hug her around her neck, so I did and felt Sera suddenly still and then grasp hold of my arm in a half-hug back.

“Sera, I love playing with your hair, it is relaxing to me. So if you ever just want me to play with it, you just have to ask, no weirdness attached.”

I split her hair into two parts and started a Fishtail French braid for each side and then gathered them together at the base of her skull and combined the two into one and finished it with a single Fishtail braid. I watched as Sera ran her hands over it and suddenly smiled up at me.

“You should ask Solas to braid your hair, the man is really good,” I told her and saw her face scrunch distastefully with the idea.

“How could baldy know ‘bout hair?”

I laughed and patted her shoulder.

“He wasn’t always bald Sera,” I informed her and saw her face register shock.

“No,” she said with a breathless enthusiasm laced with humor.

“Well, that is what he told me when he braided mine for Vivienne’s soiree,” I told her and saw her look of shock.

“I’m not gonna ask him to do nothin for me…probably set my hair on fire or something,” she quipped quickly before running her hands over her new braids again.

I shook my head and chuckled thinking of the time Solas found lizards in his bedroll that Sera had placed there.

“Not before adding a few lizards to it,” I reminded her and saw her face break into a large smile before chuckling.

“Oh yeah…that,” she said and suddenly stood and hugged me.

“You’re the best, even if you are all elfy,” she said before letting me go.

I entered my tent and found Solas lying beneath our furs, comfortably reading as I closed the flaps.
and warded them.

“Well I do not see any marks on your neck, and your clothing isn’t torn so Sera must have let you leave unmolested.”

I laughed as I removed my boots.

“I was braiding her hair and yes,” I gestured towards my body. “Unmarked, my love,” I said jokingly before peeling my socks off.

“Say that again,” he said suddenly with an intensity that surprised me and I turned towards him.

“What part?”

He stared at me intently, his book lay forgotten in his lap.

“The first part,” he said quietly.

“I was braiding her hair?” I watched him shake his head and gesture for me to move on to the next part.

“Unmarked, my love?” I asked and saw his face brighten with the words before I knew what he was about, he swooped in and kissed me passionately. He held my face as he demanded me to submit and damned if I didn’t even in my confused state. When he pulled back and gazed into my eyes questioningly, I felt utterly confused. *What the fuck is going on with him?*

“What the hell is going on, Solas?”

His blue eyes held mine and he gave me a lopsided smile.

“It is nothing whenan, just a moment of foolishness is all.”

I watched him finally lean back with a small smile on his face before he picked his book back up. I slightly shook my head still utterly confused and returned to preparing for bed.

*****

We entered the abandoned tavern and found a very young couple beneath a pile of furs on the floor.

“You have got to be fucking kidding me,” I muttered. Bull started laughing, while Cassandra let her signature disgusted ‘ugh’ escape as the couple scrambled to pull the furs over them.

“The Inquisitor,” the young man said to his partner and I just shook my head.

“How...” I began and turned hastily when the young man suddenly stood exposing himself. Clearing my throat I began again.

“How did you get in here?” I questioned him while staring at the wall and I heard the others laugh at my sudden blush of embarrassment. I felt Solas’ unexpected anger and I glanced at him and recognized that gorgeous jaw of his was tight as he scowled at the boy.

“We didn’t know you would be here, your Worship,” he stuttered quickly while pulling his pants up.

“I heard the kid clear his throat and I mentally slapped myself. Focus!
“You’re…you won’t tell anyone we were here right?” His impromptu question made me turn and look at him hard.

“Are you ashamed to be here with her?” I asked him suddenly and saw his blush of embarrassment rush over his cheeks.

“I…of course not,” he finally spat out while staring at the floor and I stepped towards him not missing Cassandra, Hawke, and Sera’s arms cross in that form of sister solidarity that said ‘all men are pigs’.

“Then grow some balls boy and own this moment. She is either someone you love or you are lying to her just to get into her pants,” I said angrily. I was unable to remove my own first time from my mind as I stared at a version of Tyler looking nervously around at anything but me.

The young man stepped back and looks at me with discomfort and I did not give a flying fuck for his discomfort as I moved towards the young woman still wrapped in furs on the floor of the tavern.

“Get dressed, you want a man,” I said coolly and looked at the boy over my shoulder briefly before turning my gaze back to hers. “Not a boy.”

I saw her nod and she slowly stood the furs wrapped tightly around her and the men of our group all turned quickly as she dressed. When she was finished I gave her a brief smile.

“Go home,” I said to her and saw her brief nod before she left the room and I looked back at the boy.

“Go…home,” I said to him harshly and saw his face pale before he scrambled for the door. The sound of it closing behind him was a relief and I closed my eyes shaking my head.

Girls are dumb in Thedas just as much as they were on Earth.

We moved through the tavern and found the room with the controls to the dam. Bull moved forward after I slid the key into the chain mechanism and he started moving a large wheel-like device almost like he was winding it and suddenly I felt a rumble beneath my feet. The gates to the dam were open and I looked around at everyone.

“I thought the Darkspawn broke them, I wonder who fixed them,” I muttered and saw Cole look at me suddenly.

“The Mayor, his shame has this shape.”

I gaze at him for a moment and then close my eyes, understanding rushing through my mind. He flooded old Crestwood. Taking a deep breath to calm my horror and anger, I ran my hand over my face and felt Solas’ hand on my back as I was currently bent over trying to gather my air.

“Vhenan?” he questioned softly and my own aura moved to curl into his with his soothing tone. Those poor people. I heard his soft inhale of breath as my aura rushed him and his aura reacted by curling around mine almost protectively. How could someone do such a thing?

After a few moments of gathering my breath, I finally stood and scanned around at everyone pushing the horror back. No…later…think about that later.

“Let’s get that rift closed so we can meet the Warden without undead attacking us,” I said my voice lacking the inner emotional turmoil I felt churning in my stomach as I left the control room.

Chapter End Notes
vhenan - my heart
Can you guys believe it...50 chapters!

Thank you, everyone, for your wonderfully kind words and encouragement. Without them, I do not believe I would have gotten this far.

“The smell just hits you, doesn’t it,” Varric announced coughing.

“So this is old Crestwood,” I mumbled aloud as I let my eyes travel over the waterlogged homes that were missing half their walls or roofs.

“I can feel the weakness in the Veil, even above ground. Spirits are being called here like moths to a flame,” Solas added as he looked at me.

They moved down the small hill and found a rift on the edge of the water. It did not take long to close the rift and my eyes scanned the choppy water and within a few steps, I felt one of Solas’ relics. I moved towards an old building that was closest to the water and found the relic lying inside. Once I righted it, I activated it so we could continue to move through the parts of the old town that followed the edge of the shore. He waited for me outside and I glanced at him exiting the broken building.

“You are quite adept at finding them,” he said calmly and for some reason, I could sense that there was more he wasn’t telling me and I held his curious blue gaze.

“The magic is rather…familiar,” I told him with a meaningful glance before tearing my gaze from his and moving away from the broken cabin.

I could feel his gaze on me as I met up with the others to walk through old Crestwood. This verbal dance they had going was getting more difficult as time moved on, and I didn’t know how much longer I would be able to keep it up.

“Move! I command you to move,” I heard from a broken down shack and walked towards it cautiously.

I entered hesitantly through a broken part of a wall and saw the large entity floating in the air. It was transparent in appearance, but you could distinctly make out the shape of a face and partial body.

“A lost spirit,” Solas stated and his words initiated the spirit to focus on us.

“Silence,” she commanded. Solas stiffened slightly with the demand and I watched as the spirit floated towards me.

“You! You there! I order you to tell me why nothing here heeds my commands!”

I tilted my head ever so slightly at the demanding tone. Maybe getting the information from a fellow
spirit would help, I surely had no idea how to really interact with one and I didn’t think Hope and Harmony counted.

“Maybe you could give it some guidance Cole.”

“Maybe, my name is…” and the spirit flared in frustration.

“Ugh, Compassion, did I ask for your name?”

Cole looked at me slightly embarrassed and I gave him a reassuring smile. Well, this spirit was going to be a pushy ass it appears.

“Sorry,” he offered and I patted his arm and looked at Solas.

“Spirits are your expertise, Solas.”

Before he could say anything the spirit flared again.

“Then tell me why nothing here changes!”

Solas moved closer to me and folded his arms behind his back addressing the lost spirit and I had to hide my knowing grin at his change in posture.

“This realm follows different rules from the Fades. Will alone cannot overcome what you see.”

“Then what’s the point of it?” the spirit questioned with a tone of frustration and I heard Solas patiently take a breath and covered my mouth.

“A solid form is both shackle and strength. It affects more than you imagine.”

Clearing my throat, I grasp the spirits attention.

“As a spirit, you must have a purpose, represent something. Compassion, Justice, Wisdom…” I inquire and hear the annoyed sigh from it.

“Soft virtues, all, I am more, I am Command.”

“Or Pomposity,” Solas muttered from my side and the corner of my mouth lifted at his obvious annoyance with the spirit.

“What of you,” she asked floating closer and I could actually smell the Fade from its translucent form. “I felt your coming. Is there something alike in us?”

My eyebrow rose in surprise and I turned her question around in my head carefully.

“Possibly, or you sense the anchor,” I told her holding up my marked hand. The spirit ran her hand over it, and it was the oddest feeling closely related to a feather’s touch.

“Perhaps it is both,” it said and I let my hand drop.

“How may I help you get back to the Fade, Command?”

“I cannot leave here until something obeys my orders,” it answered and I gave it a small smile.

“Then let me help you because you can’t stay here it’s not safe.”

I could feel the pleasure radiate from it at my offer.
“Excellent, I have only one command. A creature made of Rage had the gall to chase me across the lake destroy it in my name, and be rewarded.”

“Well, I have heard of worse requests,” I joked and noticed Solas watching me curiously before I looked back on Command. “Consider it done, I will return when it is destroyed.”

We left the spirit and moved through the soggy town up a small hill where we found the boards nailed to a door.

“Do you think this is the way that leads to the tunnels beneath old Crestwood?”

Bull moved forward and pulled his ax off his back.

“Well let’s find out,” he said before swinging the large weapon and breaking the boarded up entrance.

I watched Bull step in cautiously while Dorian threw a mage light in and then followed after him.

“Yes, let’s all climb into the unknown hole,” I grumble and felt Solas’ aura run over mine soothingly.

Sera stepped in front of me and gave me a cheeky grin.

“I’ll protect your front if ya like,” she teased and I slapped her arm ignoring the laughter from the others.

“Ass,” I retorted before following after the others inside.

Even with the mage lights, it was quite dark as we felt along the wall of the cave. Cassandra found an old torch on the wall and pulled it down.

“Do you think this will still work?” She ventured while holding it out. Dorian moved closer and doused the tip with mage fire. Miraculously, the waterlogged implement lit and held a flame.

“Well now that we have stronger light, you can lead the way Cassandra,” I teased and saw her annoyed look.

Bull chuckled and took the torch from her.

“I got it, let’s just hope my horns don’t get stuck,” he joked. I giggled at the sudden image of him with his horns lodged into a narrow corridor, feet just dangling and kicking as he cursed his position trying to extricate his horns from the rock. He turned and gazed at me with his one eye and shook his head.

“It wasn’t that funny, Boss.”

Still chuckling I shook my head. “Oh, I beg to differ with you. But by all means, please lead on so we can get this over with. I’m not a fan of deep holes in the ground.”

Varric chuckled from behind, “neither am I.”

We proceeded through the narrow path and Cole moved ahead of me.

“Let’s hope that rift is down here,” I whispered and Cole turned to glance at me.

“It’s humming below us. A window, wanting, wandering, looking back at what’s looking.”
“Cole believes we are heading in the right direction,” Solas’ dry sense of humor always made me laugh, and I chuckled as we marched through a narrow part of the path that opened into a much larger area.

There were wooden stairs that spiraled downward, and you could see water still draining from the rocks above over the wooden stairs.

“I wonder what this cave was used for,” I queried while my eyes scanned the area.

Glancing around I saw smaller caves dug into the walls and moved towards one to look inside. Sending my mage light into the small cave, it slowly illuminated the area and I gasped in horror.

Bodies, two adult sized and one child size were strewn along the cave floor and against the wall there stood a crib. A soft whimper escaped me at the idea that there would be a tiny body in it, and I clenched my eyes shut.

“People were living down here,” I choked out painfully.

“Don’t look, it hurts too much to look,” Cole whispered into my ear as he turned me from the room.

“Maker,” Cassandra said in a horrified whisper as she too looked inside the room and took in the bodies.

It was Sera who walked into the small area and peered inside the crib. Eyes blew wide in shocked horror, she covered her mouth and slightly shook her head.

“There were…he boarded the…he drown children,” I gasped. My stomach rolled, rebelling at the heinous scene and I suddenly lurched away from Cole as I emptied the contents of my stomach behind a rock formation.

His warm aura enveloped me as his hands rubbed my back while I continued to cry and heave until there was nothing left to give. When my stomach stopped its involuntary spasm, I rubbed my arm across my mouth and pulled my canteen from my side.

Rinsing my mouth out, I spat on the ground before drinking down half the container before capping it and slipping it back to its place on my side. Taking a calming breath his blue eyes examined mine with concern and again I wished I could crawl into that warmth and sleep away what was fast becoming a nightmare.

“I will be fine,” I finally whispered and he ran a finger over my cheek studying me carefully before giving me a slow nod. I turned towards the others and taking a deep breath, I squared my shoulders.

“We have a rift to seal folks; I am done sightseeing for one day.”

Silence followed me as I led the way down the wooden stairs. Cassandra walked closely behind me and I spoke quietly to her my tone laced with anger and disgust.

“I want the Mayor arrested for this.”

I glanced over my shoulder at her and saw her angry nod of agreement and returned my gaze forward. That man would not go unpunished for this; I would make sure of it.

With the Rage demon dead, and the rift closed, we moved through the Dwarven ruins and I felt
another of the artifacts and took a sharp left in the direction it came from.

“Boss, I believe the exit is back that way,” Bull uttered as I walked by him.

“Come on Bull, trust me. You’re not afraid of Dwarven ruins are ya?” I teased as I pushed against a stone door that would lead me where I wanted to go.

“No, more like I don’t want to get lost down here,” he replied seriously and I stopped trying to push against the door when it wouldn’t even budge for me.

“We won’t get lost and I promise you will see the sky again,” I told him reassuringly patting his arm. “Now please open this for me,” I said with a large grin, giving him my best puppy eyes as I thumbed at the door at my back.

Bull groaned at me and then shoved on the door. The loud scrape of rock against rock echoed as it opened reluctantly under his strength. Smiling brilliantly up at him, I patted his arm.

“You’re the best,” I tell him and slip through the opening.

“Does she always talk you into getting her way?” Bull questioned Solas before he could enter.

“Yes,” he replied and followed me into the large stone room.

“I’m not that bad,” I grumble as I follow the source of magic from the artifact my steps lightly echoing off the stone walls.

“Yes, you are,” Cassandra quipped and I started to chuckle.

“It’s because she’s too cute to disappoint. Her eyes just haunt you until you do what she wants,” Dorian added and I let out a groan. “Like now, why else would any of us be in some Maker forsaken hole in the ground, in Podunk Ferelden?”

I glance at him smiling and give him a wink before I turned to focus on the magical signature getting stronger.

“You guys are just too much,” I mumble and finally see the relic and move towards it. Once it was activated I turned back around and everyone but Solas was looking at me oddly.

“What?”

Bull pointed at it with his eyebrow raised at me questioningly.

“You just knew it would be down here?”

I glance around and the only one not concerned looking was Solas. In fact, he looked quite smug that I was able to find it. Ancient smug asshole!

“I can’t really explain it to you, Bull; I think I can sense them because of the anchor, but if they will strengthen the Veil then they are worth finding.”

Bull looked at me for a moment and everyone else seemed to buy it, so I just went with it.

“Well, let’s find our way out of here.”

“I’m all for that,” Varric said quickly while Sera griped about wanting a fire and a pint.
We found a rift outside of the cave’s exit and we made quick work of closing it. Glancing around the small field, I realized that for the first time since arriving, it had stopped raining and the sun was shining. Maybe the rift had something to do with the weather? Well, I don’t care what helped that change as long as I can catch some sun and not feel like a drowned cat.

“Cassandra, take Sera, Varric, and Hawke with you to detain the good Mayor. I am going to return to the spirit in old Crestwood so she can depart before she really gets stuck here.”

Cassandra nodded at me and took off for Crestwood, while we headed down the hill towards old Crestwood.

“Cassandra, the townspeople said he left the day after we did. We will send word to Leliana to have him found. He won’t have gotten far, I am sure.” I tried to reassure her rereading the confession letter the Mayor left behind. Son of a motherless fucking goat! I took a calming breath and folded the parchment before slipping it into my pocket.

“Let’s get a good night’s rest, and then head out early to find Hawke’s, Warden Stroud.”

“I’m all for beer and a bath,” Sera said quickly making me smile.

“Then let’s stop wasting time then,” I joked and left the Mayor’s empty home.

Laying in the bath drinking a beer I relaxed and let the hot water soothe my tired muscles, and my hurt soul. Sera was in the one beside me and was not as eager to just relax and soak in the silence. It was inevitable how the conversation with her revolved around my love life.
“What do you see in Droopy Ears anyhow?” Sera questioned between drinks and I glance at her for a moment with a smirk on my face.

“Besides that…that is just…eww, no, not gonna think about it,” she grumbled making gagging noises and I laughed. Staring up at the ceiling, I thought about it for a moment.

“He is very intelligent, a kind heart with strong arms that hold me when the day has been too much, and a good man unafraid to be who he is, and most of all my friend,” I answer her and then give her a shit-eating grin. “And the sex is out of this bleating world,” and almost choke on my beer as Sera’s face suddenly scrunched up in disgust at the idea.

“Ugh, yuck! I told you I don’t wanna know about his dangly bits,” she yelled and splashed water at me while I continued laughing.

“Well, what do you see in the barmaid besides large tits and a nice ass?” I question her splashing a handful of water back at her and she covers her face quickly.

She looked off for a moment thinking about it like I had. It was nice to see Sera’s face take on that little glow of happiness as she thought of her lover and then she smiled at me with that knowing smile.

“She is smart, and is really nice to me, like the cuddly soft kind of nice – and she is great in bed,” she joked and I laughed at her.

“People are people Sera, no matter if you love a man or a woman; we all want the same things and that is to just be loved for who we are.”

Sera held her mug out towards me and we toasted before taking a long drink. Setting my mug on the stool set between the bathtubs, I grab my bar of vanilla soap and start lathering it against the washcloth and then toss her the soap.

“I gotta get out of this water before I resemble a shrunken prune,” I joke as I started washing.

Sera giggled and lathered her own washcloth.

“No one likes a pruny…”

“SERA!”

I stop her quickly mortified at where she was going with that comment and she giggles, wiggling her eyebrows while I shake my head, blushing from embarrassment.
Dinner had been pretty simple with stew and hot bread. Everyone ate plenty, and I was pleased to see that Inquisition soldiers and materials had arrived while we were out that day. I took a bite of my stew and let my eyes wander around the room. There are some of the locals mingling with the Inquisition soldiers, and then my team of crazies sporadically sitting around the room.

Hawke sat with Varric and Cassandra chatting away while they played cards. Bull, Sera, and Dorian sat off to a different corner drinking and talking about Minrathous and Par Vollen. Cole was nowhere to be seen but I was sure he was helping someone, and then there was just myself and Solas. We sat eating quietly in a shadowed corner next to the fire, not saying much of anything.

It appeared that everyone had gotten a chance to bathe, and were in dry clothes. After all the rain, and the constant soak of our clothes, it was good to be dry and everyone looked to be in good spirits. I was, however, not feeling celebratory as my mind went over the roundabout word game Solas and I played. I let out a little sigh of frustration and took another bite of my stew. I had a feeling I knew what was wrong with me, and unless the stubborn man next to me went along with it, I was screwed.

“Will you share with me what troubles you, vhenan?”

His voice was gentle like a warm breeze rolling over my skin, sounding comforting, inviting me to share my troubles and I just shook my head ‘no’.

“It is just a feeling, that is all; it will pass,” I told him calmly and took another bite of my stew. I had to believe this frustration would pass.

“Vhenan,” he said quietly and held my gaze as if he knew it was more.

“Perhaps later?” I offer and see his eyebrow rise at me questioningly and then he finally concedes and goes back to eating.

*I know what is wrong…I just hope I can convince him it is worth the risk.*

The fade and my forest had become a comfort to me when I was troubled or stressed. Tonight I saw Hope wandering my forest smiling at me silently giving me courage and I smiled back.
Thedas I was not prepared for, nor could ever have been prepared for. It was a constant struggle and the horrible things people did thinking it was acceptable just astounded me. I glanced out over the water that reflected a silvery reflection of the moon and took a calming breath. Then there is Solas, and nothing could have prepared me for him either.

Snorting softly, I let the water slip through my fingers as I watch the droplets cause small little ripples on the surface. I had never loved someone as completely as I do him, and it was frightening and exhilarating all at once. I wanted the man and Evanuris, and I was tired of only getting half of him.

The Fade shifted around me, and I smiled as I stared up into the night’s sky listening for the soft steps of his paws.

*If anyone is listening, let me find the courage to do this,* I sent the silent prayer up quickly as I slowly stood.

“It is extraordinary that you do not tire of the night here,” I heard the deep timber of his voice echo around me vibrating over my skin seductively and I turned smiling brightly at the sight of him. His wolven form is immense, intimidating, but so beautiful.

“I love the night, the sounds of the owls in the branches talking to each other. The soft shimmery reflection of the moon, the way the earth smells at night is different than in the daytime where it is warmed by the sun.” I answered him and moved closer to run my fingers through his fur bringing a calming feeling to my jangled nerves.

I took a deep breath for courage and strength before I spoke.

“Will you always come to me in your wolf form, Fen’Harel?” I finally questioned and felt the slight stiffening of his muscles beneath my fingers.

The silence was deafening before I felt the vibration of his voice beneath my fingers surrounding me.

“Why?”

His tone was cautious and curious, *this is a good sign - I think.* I lightly smiled and leaned against his shoulder unwilling to play the word game any longer. I wanted the man beneath, the whole man; the man that I knew I loved and knew loved me in return.

“Stop hiding from me, my love…please, I…I need honesty between us,” I begged quietly and heard his deep inhale of breath.

He moved away from me and I watched him look out over the water, and drop his large wolven head. I was scared he would tell me no and leave, that I would never have the whole man but destined to only half.

His change was swift, and I felt the cool breeze of his magic ruffle across my face. The sudden man that stood in front of me was not the Solas, I had come to know. This man had long chestnut brown hair in thick, cording braids gathered at the nape of his neck by a leather band. The armor was black like the wolf’s fur draped over his shoulder to his waist. The suit including a chest plate, full leg plates, gauntlets, and high boots; I had never seen him in so much metal before. The mask was what startled me more than anything else. He wore a half face mask that resembled half a wolf’s skull, complete with teeth and it was held on by a thick metal band that sat around his head like a crown. It accentuated his angular jaw and full lips covering half of his face the way it did, but the top held the red eyes of his counterpart and a set of those red eyes hid his blue ones.

Here was my wolf, the other half of the man I loved. With showing me this side of him, I knew
without a doubt he loved me.

I stared in awe and surprise at the sudden differences and I noticed that the half of his face I could see held the same expression of indifference that I normally saw. No, I want the man…not the Elven God. I stepped forward surprising him as I placed my hand on the muzzle of the face shield preparing to push it up, and his hand suddenly grasped my wrist stopping me.

“Don’t hide from me, Solas, you have no need to. I’ve known…I’ve always known who you are and I still fell in love with you,” I whispered in elven.

The hand around my wrist slackened ever so slightly and I pushed the muzzle upward only helped by his head dropping. When the headpiece was removed, his eyes were closed but it was still the man I loved and let the facepiece slide from my grasp and fall to the ground. Reaching up and caressing his jaw, I ran my fingers over the small scar on his forehead studying his face all over again and his eyes slowly opened to meet mine. I saw his fear, his love for me, and his uncertainty at what I thought of him staring back at me.

“There you are my handsome man,” I said softly and ran my thumb over his lower lip as it slowly slid up into a small form of a nervous smile. His lips pressed a gentle kiss on the pad of my thumb and shivers ran down my spine. I didn’t know if my heart had room to love him any more than I did already.

“Vhenan,” he uttered. His deeply rich baritone echoed around me making my pulse race and the butterflies to buzz in my stomach.

“I need to know that my love for you has worth, that all this secrecy isn’t ruining what could be. I don’t have the energy to pretend anymore, I want all of you or none of you.” I tell him quietly and saw that his eyes slightly widened with my honesty and then his whole face softened making my entire body melt.

His hand slid over my jaw tenderly cupping my chin and held my gaze.

“You’re the other half of my soul; your love has always had worth for me.”

His thickened voice soothed the questions that ran through my mind and his lips pressed against mine tying my heart completely to him.

This is a good first step...now to convince him that he doesn’t have to burn the world.

*****

The small hill leading up to the hideout of Warden Stroud was short. At the mouth of it, I glanced at Hawke.

“I hope he is still here and hasn’t gotten caught by the other Wardens we ran into on the way here.”

Hawke nodded her head in agreement and glanced around the area.

“Well there’s no time like the present to find out, shall we?” She gestured for me to lead the way and lighting a mage light I entered the cave.

“He better have some answer Hawke, or I might just let Sera prank you like she has been dying to do,” I joked hearing her soft laughter behind me.

“I might just let her,” she joked back and I snorted.
At the far back of the cave, we found a door with a large skull painted next to it that warned trespassers. I had seen a couple of these types of paintings in most of the caves in Crestwood. Smuggler’s hideouts and stash places. Opening the door I found a lit room and extinguished my mage light while glanced around. I turned towards another area that had a bedroll and a small table when I heard the sound of a sword being drawn.

Wrapping the fade around me rapidly, I turned on my heel towards the sound prepared to freeze whoever was behind me. A large man with brown hair peppered with a little grey, wearing full Warden armor, and piercing blue eyes stared at me unpleasantly at my unexpected intrusion. This must be Warden Stroud.

Hawke entered the room holding up her hands while Bull and Solas followed closely behind pulling their own weapons. I could feel the angry swirl of Solas’ aura and I sent mine back to him with a teasing jab. His eyes darted to mine, annoyance shining brightly and I gave him a lopsided smile.

“It’s just us, I brought the Inquisitor,” she informed him hurriedly.

The Warden glanced from Hawke back to me and slowly sheathed his sword. I let out a soft breath of relief when Bull and Solas put their weapons away as well. Jesus, that almost got ugly real fast.

“My name is Stroud, and I am at your service, Inquisitor.”

“I can always use more allies, Warden Stroud. Perhaps you could explain something to me. Most of the Wardens disappear, and then a darkspawn Magister named Corypheus destroys Haven. Do you think that one might have something to do with the other?”

I watched for his reaction and saw that he looked thoughtful but also saddened before answering.

“I fear it is so. When my friend Hawke slew Corypheus, Weisshaupt was happy to put the matter to rest. But an Archdemon can survive wounds that seem fatal, and I feared that Corypheus might possess the same power.”

Stroud turned away from me and walked towards a wooden table full of maps and candles and gestured me to come closer and take a look.

“My investigation uncovered clues but no proof. Then, not long after, every Warden in Orlais began to hear the calling.”

Hawke let out a small gasp of shock and stared at Stroud worriedly while I watched wondering what the hell he meant.

“Maker, why didn’t you tell me?”

Stroud held her gaze and gave her a gentle smile. “It was a Grey Warden matter, and I was bound by an oath of secrecy.”

“Is the calling some kind of Warden ritual?”

Stroud shook his head as he held my gaze.

“The calling tells a Grey Warden that the Blight will soon claim them. It starts with dreams, and then come whispers in their head. The Warden says his farewells and goes to the Deep Roads to meet his death in combat.”

I rub my face trying to process the information and let out a sigh of annoyance.
“So you're telling me that every Warden in Orlais is hearing this *calling*, they think they’re dying?”

“Yes,” he answered with a heavy furrow lining his brow. “Likely because of this Corypheus, and his connection to the Blight. If the Wardens fall, who will stand against the next Blight? It is our greatest fear.”

My gaze held his for a moment and then I looked at Hawke as she spoke.

“So Corypheus isn’t controlling them, he’s bluffing them with this *calling*, and they’re falling for it.”

“Well, this isn’t going to end well,” I mutter and see her slow nod of agreement.

“We are the only ones who can slay Archdemons. Without us, the next Blight will consume the world. Warden-Commander Clarel spoke of a blood magic ritual to prevent future before we all perish. When I protested the plan as madness, my own comrades turned on me.”

Stroud held out a map towards me and pointed to a specific area.

“Grey Wardens are gathering here, in the Western Approach. It is an ancient Tevinter ritual tower. Meet me there, and we will find answers,” he offered and I held my hand out to him.

“Of course, thank you for this information, Warden Stroud.”

“Will you come with me Hawke or will you continue to travel with the Inquisitor?”

Hawke looked at me and I knew she would be leaving with Stroud and patted her arm.

“Go, Hawke, we will meet you there.”

She gave me a grateful smile and patted my arm. “Take care,” she said quietly before following Stroud out of the cave. I watched them leave and felt a horrible ball of anxiety in my stomach building. I vaguely remembered this part of the game and rubbed my eyes. *What a fucking mess.*

“Come, you can talk with everyone about it back at the keep,” Solas advised from beside me. His voice was a soothing balm to my anxiety-ridden system. I let my aura mingle with his and it helped to even further calm me and I gave him a grateful smile.

“Have I told you lately how wonderful you are?”

He chuckled and took my hand giving my knuckles the barest of kisses before squeezing my hand.

“Not lately,” he teased.

“Hmm…I will try to remember to remind you at least daily if not weekly,” I joke and let him lead me from the room.

“And I will endeavor to give you a reason to remind me,” he replied with a mischievous glint in his eye.

“Oh, I think I might like where your thoughts are taking you there handsome,” I teased enjoying the slight pink that dashed across his cheeks.

“I thought perhaps you might,” he said softly his tone full of promise and I felt my own face heat up.

“Wicked man,” I mutter and hear his soft husky laughter as I followed him out of the cave.
Solas lay watching her sleep and slipped a curly dark lock behind her delicate ear. He had never felt freer knowing he did not need to pretend with her and the feeling was one he was not accustomed to. She knew who he was, accepted and loved him and yet, he still had no knowledge about her.

A small frown furrowed over his brow as he studied her sleeping form curled warmly against him. When they had awoken that morning, she had kissed him tenderly, and he could feel the change in her towards him. She was not as guarded or reserved, but much more relaxed. Now he found himself questioning why she would not tell him about herself. Did she still not trust him?

He had searched the Fade for answers, finding small fragments of her dreams that would dissolve at his magical pull. He knew she was conversing with spirits, gaining knowledge at a rapid pace if her newly acquired Sentinel abilities were to be explained.

To think otherwise would be foolish. No matter how much one wished it, the dead could not return. He gazed back down at her soft, sleeping features and let out a little sigh of frustration.

Who was this woman that had become so important to him that he was willing to question everything? Do anything for? How much was he willing to change just to be with her?

All these questions were beginning to give him a headache, and he closed his eyes pulling her closer. Even in her sleep, she let out a soft little sigh of pleasure with the action, and it made him smile. Known by her people as the greatest adversary of their mythology, and yet when she looked at him she held a bottomless well of love, not fear. Compassion and respect, not shame and disgust, it was all very humbling to have someone look at him in this way when none other had in many a millennium.

He still did not believe that he deserved such devotion from her, and feared that he would again do something that would tear her from him. He let out a heavy sigh and felt her arm tighten slightly around him. He would think about this later, for now, he would endeavor to deserve her love and show her how much she meant to him.

He would not answer his questions all in one evening, and only some she could answer for him if she is willing. Pushing all thought from his mind, he focused on entering the Fade. Perhaps he would find a few answers tonight.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Off To The Western Approach

Chapter Notes

Italic sentences in quotations are for elven conversation.

Thank you, everyone, who is following this little story I hope you continue to enjoy it.

For those of you just starting, I hope you enjoy it.

I was so glad that we are heading back to Skyhold for supplies on our way to the Western Approach. I was looking forward to being back if even it was for a couple of days to catch up with paperwork and sleep in that humungous bed of mine. I glanced over at Solas and hoped that I wouldn’t be occupying that bed all by myself.

I hoped I could convince him to just move into my room. I had adjusted to sleeping next to him, and I did not like the idea of going back to sleeping alone. Although, he has been curiously quiet since leaving Crestwood four days ago. I had yet to draw him out, but with luck, he wouldn’t brood long.

Bull interrupted my wayward thoughts by pointing out an area to make camp and I nodded at him and directed Etta in that direction. The view through the canopy of tree limbs above me was beautiful and I smiled at the oncoming of twilight. Taking a deep breath, I overhear Cassandra talk about a small lake with falls behind the campsite and I started thinking that doesn’t sound like a bad idea.

Sliding from Etta’s back, I released the cinch and pulled her tack off preparing her for the night while others gathered wood, some began pitching tents. The sound of the nightly routine was soothing as I ran a brush over Etta’s shiny roan coat.

Almost two years…so much has changed…I have changed. Glancing to where Solas was busy erecting their tent and my heart double beat in my chest. Letting a small sigh escape as I watched him. It has all been worth it. That realization alone brings a smile to my face and return my focus back to brushing Etta.

My eyes strayed to where Solas sat across from me at the fire for the millionth time with a building sense of frustration. He was definitely distancing himself and I didn’t understand why. I tried asking him, and he just gave me a pacifying smile and told me it was nothing. Such bullshit!

I went back to drawing in my sketchbook and tried to block out his sudden cold shoulder. This is ridiculous, how am I supposed to understand if he won’t tell me?

“He worries he doesn’t know your secret but you know his.”

My head snapped to my right where Cole sat looking at my drawing, acting as if what he had said was closer to a comment on the weather than profound insight into my stubborn man.

“Well, then he should stop being a broody butt, and just ask me what he wants to know.” My tone is frustrated and I return to my drawing. Jesus, for a man who is really good with words his
communication skills, is sucking big time.

“He wants you to trust him and want to tell him. Not asking but telling…trust is important. He knows you don’t do it easily.”

_Oh, for the love of the fucking Gods, this is ridiculous!_

“Alright then, if that is how it needs to be…so be it.” I stood and dropped my sketchbook into my pack and ignored Cole’s smile as I walked to where Solas sat. His eyes glanced up at me in surprise at my obviously irritated expression.

“We need to go for a walk, come on,” I tell him and saw his raised eyebrow with my tone and I held my hand out to him and took a breath to try and calm my annoyance with him. “Please,” I asked, satisfied that I sounded slightly less frustrated.

Solas took my hand as he stood and I led him from the camp towards the waterfalls. My stomach was churning with what I was about to do and I could only hope he didn’t either think I was crazy or push me away. _Hey, what do I got to lose? He’s the Dread Wolf, and I am a crazy chick from Earth…worse pairings could be made, right?_ We reached the water and I turned towards him, and then nervously started pacing.

“Cole told me that you have been distant because you were lacking a certain amount of information about me especially since I know specific information about you and that it was worrying you that I didn’t trust you.”

I threw up that whole word salad like a blathering boob and took a deep breath trying to calm my nerves. He was watching me carefully, his expression absolutely confused and I took another deep breath trying to calm my nerves and speak in real sentences instead of long rambles of just words.

“You always questioned why I wasn’t like other Dalish.”

I noticed him nod slowly and that I had his complete attention without the confused look.

“It’s because I’m not Dalish or at least I wasn’t before or…it’s…well you see…shit. I’m confusing and…I am not doing this right.”

I plopped down on a large rock in frustration and threw my hands over my face, on the edge of hyperventilating. _I am not doing any of this right…I sound like some manic schizoid off her meds._

He sat down next to me and took hold of my wrists, pulling my hands away from my face. Holding my gaze calmly, he leaned in and kissed me gently.

“Perhaps you could begin again…slower this time, vhenan,” he requested gently and I knew he could see the fear in my eyes as I took a slow, shaky breath.

“I’m not from Thedas; I’m from another planet called Earth. I was human, that is the only race on that planet. When I got here, I woke up in the Chantry’s dungeon an elf. That is why I never acted like the normal Dalish, Solas; it was because I was never a Dalish, to begin with.”

I could see he was digesting what I said and worried my lower lip as I waited.

“Do you remember how you got here?”

His question gave me pause because I didn’t know if it was a good idea to tell him about Mythal and I am a shit liar so why even try. _She never said I couldn’t, but then…ugh._
“You appear to not want to tell me that part yet,” he spoke calmly watching me carefully.

“Not really, I’m good at hiding stuff but I am a lousy liar and you know it.”

He smiled gently at me and slipped a lock of my hair behind my ear and my stomach calmed slightly with the soothing action.

“Yes you are vhenan, it is a quality I find most endearing. Then we will leave the how you got here for another time. But if what you say is correct…”

I looked at him now with annoyance because how could he not think I am bonkers.

“Solas have you ever really studied my forest?” I question him, cutting him off and saw his head tilt slightly to the side as he thought about it.

“I have seen it; it is a forest like any other.”

I shook my head and gave him a lopsided, anxious smile.

“Yes, it has trees, water, animals all the accouterments of a forest, but next time, look up and you will know I’m not cracked.”

He looked stupefied with my answer. “Look up?”

“Yes, if you don’t get it, then I will point it out. But I don’t think you’re going to need my help figuring it out.”

"Then let us return to our tent, vhenan, I am most curious about what you are sharing with me."

He led us back towards the camp and my stomach cramped with nervousness. This is where the rubber meets the road they say.

The moon was full and the reflection rippled over the surface of the water. I sat on a fallen log with Hope and she patted my hand comfortingly.

“It is time,” is all she would say.

“It is a time, but is it the right time?” I question her and see her gentle smile.

“He is ready; he is full of hopefulness for his future. Not something he has had before, so it is the right time.”

I stared at her for a long moment and with the shift of the Fade around me, Hope stood and left the forest while I watched her leave. I hear the shift of branches behind me and I turn as Solas walks through the break in the tree line towards me. My stomach buzzed nervously at the sight of him.

He had forgone his wolven form, and even his armor and I smiled softly as the man came to me as he was, both Elven legend and Apostate mage. He sat next to me and took my hand before placing a soft kiss on my lips in greeting.

“You believed I should look up,” he reminded me with a gentle smile on his lips and I nodded unable to make my voice work.
His eyes left mine and he tilted his head back to gaze up at the night sky, and the large moon. I watched nervously as his smile slowly slipped from his face and his eyes began to scan the sky for the other moon I already knew he would not find.

For long moments he scanned the sky until he sighed and closed his eyes, dropping his head back down.

“There is only one moon in your night sky, vhenan.”

His voice held uneasiness and I waited for him to continue when every part of me screamed to prepare for his anger or worse his rejection as he realizes that what I told him was true.

“This is perhaps why I could not find your memories or your dreams in the Fade. You were never from here, so they would not echo here.”

His eyes slowly opened and he looked at me, and I wanted to squirm under his concentrating gaze.

“If this is your home, where are your people, vhenan?”

My eyes glanced at the water and I smiled bitterly as memories of my arguments with my parents came to mind. There were so many it was hard to keep track of them all. The straw that broke the camel’s proverbial back was the moment my father demanded I finish law school or I would cease to exist for him. I had just been commissioned to paint for the Prime Minister of England, and he hadn’t thought it even worthy of their so-called great name.

“They lived across the country from me, we…we did not get along well. I chose to leave them and move so I would not have to tolerate them or them me.”

His expression was one of slight confusion at the idea but then his face changed from mild confusion to one of concern.

“Fenlin is not your true name then?”

I stare at him for a long moment and swallow nervously shaking my head slowly, ‘no’.

“It was Breeyanna Grant, but I like the name Fenlin,” I admitted. My voice uneven, I watched him take this new information in and then stare steadily at the ground. I could see him piecing everything together and I knew it would not be long before he got to the meat of his questions.

“If you were not from here, then how did you know so much about Thedas?”

Ah, quicker than I had hoped. The one question I dreaded the most. How did you explain that his life, his struggles are entertainment where I’m from? Clearing my throat, aware he could see my sudden grimace as I held his gaze.

“There are many wonders in my world that are difficult for me to explain in terms that you would understand because there are few comparisons to use. The only way for me to explain it would be that this world, Thedas, was considered a fantasy world where I’m from. It was a compilation of well-written works of someone’s imagination that people could read.”

It was a half-truth; I couldn’t tell him that he could be romanced in a fucking game by only a Dalish female. That everything I had learned in a game is what jaded me towards him in the beginning. But the more I thought about it, I was starting to wonder if it was someone’s imagination or someone who knew it existed.
“We were not real to you?”

His sound of complete bewilderment was expected and I sat quietly watching him.

“You knew who I was from the beginning because of these stories,” he murmured quietly and his hand let go of mine.

“Yes,” I spoke softly and saw his face turn from me and my stomach dropped.

“Then you already know about the anchor and what it will eventually do to you.”

I saw the raw pain in his profile and with trembling fingers, I reached for his chin to turn him towards me.

“I know that eventually, it will kill me if it isn’t removed.”

His eyes closed and he dropped his head, and my heart ached at the hurt I could feel radiating from him in waves.

“How could you possibly still love me, knowing what you know?” He whispered raggedly.

Here I thought he would be angry with me or possibly disgusted, and in fact, he was angry with himself and what his fumbling’s had caused and I couldn’t have that.

“It’s easy; you are more than just your mistakes.”

He opened his eyes and they searched mine with longing and pain. His arms were suddenly around me, crushing me to him and I let out the first breath of relief since this whole thing started.

“Ar lath ma,” I whispered into his neck and felt a soft shudder run through him.

He grasped my face, kissing me gently and pulled away staring at me.

“I want to make love to you vhenan, wake up.”

The quick cool breeze of his magic slid over me and slowly opening my eyes his lips were crashing into mine. It was passionate, needy and I wrapped my arms around him tightly and held on. His hands outlined my sides and pulled me closer to him and I let out a breathy moan.

“Ar julath ma bellanaris,” he whispered against my lips and every nerve in my body went up in flame at the seductive slide of his tongue up my throat to place a biting kiss to my chin before claiming my lips.

If I suddenly burst into flame…I will go happy.

*****

The loud horn blared sounding our arrival and I glanced over at Solas and smiled. The way his eyes traced my face sent the flutters flying crazily in my stomach. It should be illegal to have that kind of effect on a person.

Showing him a piece of me, my truth gave him what he needed to know and that was I was in this for the long haul. I couldn’t share everything with him, and he understood it, for now at least but I was certain he would want to know more soon.

Seeing Skyhold, my concerns over what to tell or not to tell Solas fell from my mind. My eyes took
in the large castle embedded into the side of a mountain with a rushing waterfall beneath it and it felt like I was living in a fairytale book. Glancing back towards Solas I let out a small sigh. Perhaps I do.

Crossing the bridge I saw Josephine standing with an Orlesian and I paid him no mind still focused on my own thoughts until I got closer and recognized the golden mask and the cone-shaped nose.

Gaspard

As I got closer I observed Leliana and Cullen walking together down the stairs out of the keep and Master Dennett was waiting for me next to Josephine with a handful of stable hands to take our horses. What the hell is going on, and why is he up here and not in his barn? The man never leaves his barn.

My head turned towards the sound of Bull’s chuckle beside me and he must have seen my expression of confusion.

“It looks like someone doesn’t want to take ‘no’ for an answer, Boss.”

I glanced nervously to where Solas rode quietly beside me and recognized the tightened jaw and narrowed gaze as the one that I experienced in my room when he found Gaspard’s gift. Glancing around me quickly looking for Cole, I found him riding next to Varric wearing Gaspard’s gift and hid my smile.

This is going to turn into a shit storm.

I sent my aura to touch Solas’ and found he was busily churning and angry with the Orlesian’s presence. Prodding his aura hesitantly, he glanced at me and I recognized the angry look, it was the same one I had seen that day in my room. I am so fucked, and I didn’t even do anything.

Stopping where Master Dennett stood, I slid off of Etta and gave the older man a happy smile.

“Master Dennett, you didn’t have to meet me up here,” I told him with a cheerful tone.

Master Dennett glanced at Josephine from over his shoulder with annoyance and then looks at me with a soft smile.

“It wasn’t my doing Fenlin; I know how you like setting up Etta here yourself.”

He took the reins and I patted his arm and shook my head slightly at Josephine’s diplomatic backbending.

“I will be down in a bit to give Etta her treats for the night. Thank you for indulging Lady Josephine.”

He gave me an ear-splitting smile and patted my shoulder in a fatherly fashion.

“Don’t you worry about a thing girl; I’ll take good care of her. You just keep that lot out of my barn,” he said gesturing with his thumb towards Josephine and Gaspard over his shoulder.

I laughed and nodded my agreement as he walked with Etta towards the barn, and I turned towards Josephine with a look of annoyance.

“Grand Duke De Chalons, Josephine, what do I owe the pleasure of both of you out here to greet us?”

Gaspard stepped forward and took my hand, bending quickly and placing a brief kiss on my
knuckles before taking in the staff on my back and my lack of his gift around my waist.

“I thought perhaps we could speak over dinner my lady,” he replied smoothly and I suppressed the groan of disgust with his actions. It did not help that Solas’ aura was flaring dangerously behind me as he pulled his own pack from his mount with aggravated movements.

I turned and looked at Solas noticing he was avoiding my gaze and it bothered me. Flaring my own aura at him, surprising him enough to make him look at me with my raised eyebrow.

“Perhaps you will park that jealousy out here in the yard and meet me in my room for a bath?”

My speaking in elven threw everyone, and Gaspard looked from me to Solas in confusion. Solas held my gaze for a moment and gave me a short-tempered nod still obviously unwilling to let his anger go.

“Bring clothes my love; I don’t plan on letting you leave anytime soon.”

He had taken only two steps and he turned towards me and there was a small lift at the corner of his mouth as he nodded towards me again and left the courtyard for the keep. I turned toward the others and gave them a happy smile. Not wanting Gaspard to single out Solas for anything, I spoke with the others as well.

“Don’t get too comfortable guys, we leave in three days for the Western Approach,” I reminded them and heard the mumbles and groans as they walked away.

I turn my focus back to Gaspard who looked absolutely confused and saw Josephine rubbing her mouth to keep her knowing smile from showing.

“As I have just returned from Crestwood, I am sure you can understand my reluctance to have dinner with you this evening Grand Duke. As tired as I am, I would be horrible company and would hate to be rude and fall asleep on you. Perhaps tomorrow night would be best when I am more refreshed?”

I could see his annoyance but bowed towards me relenting, if reluctantly.

“Of course my lady, I completely understand. Tomorrow then,” he offered as he bowed regally.

“Thank you for your indulgence Grand Duke,” I said politely and turned towards Josephine. “If we could have a quick meeting before I retire for the evening that would be perfect.”

Josephine nodded quickly and turned towards Cullen and Leliana standing behind them and gestured for them to follow.

“The Inquisitor would prefer a quick meeting before she retires for the evening.”

Cullen and Leliana both give a quick nod and fell into step with us as I walked towards them leaving Gaspard in the Courtyard. Leliana glanced down at me and gave me a knowing smile.

“Perhaps you will give me lessons in elven,” she teased.

“Not a snowball’s chance in the desert, Leliana.”

Her soft laughter and my cheeky smile up at her made Cullen chuckle and Josephine fret.

“Inquisitor…did you just send Solas to your…” she looked absolutely beside herself.

I glanced at her as we took the steps with my eyebrow raised.
“If you don’t know Josephine, you are not culpable for my actions. So do you really want to know?”

Cullen laughed a little louder making Josephine blush and finally shake her head ‘no’.

“Smart move lady Josephine, now let’s settle my judging schedule for tomorrow and figure out how the hell I can get rid of Gaspard before Solas encases him in ice and shoves him over the falls.”

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma - I love you
Ar julath ma bellanaris - I will love you forever
Chapter Notes

What a wonderful Friday!

Thank you, for your continued reading and giving this fanfic a go. All of the feedback that I get is really wonderful, and it continuously pushes me forward to write more.

You guys are the best!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I dropped my pack at the top of my stairs and moved through my room slipping the tray of a light dinner on the desk before moving towards the bathroom. I already knew that is where he would be and stopped in the doorway suddenly feeling a little breathless. Leaning against the door frame, I bit my lip as I took in his wet form. He was laid back, hands on the sides of the tub, eyes closed and… Damn that man is hot.

My eyes followed the length of his body obviously enjoying the benefits of my ginormous tub. My eyes slowly trailed back up his body and noticed that he no longer had his eyes closed, but now held my gaze with a raised eyebrow and a hungry look and I swallowed at my suddenly dry mouth.

“I will not apologize for voyeurism…if you are going to present it to me, I am going to take it all in and appreciate,” I joke with him and see his lopsided grin.

“I believe you said something about bathing,” he reminded me and I smiled as I moved to unbuckle my chest piece.

“Yes I did, and I am really looking forward to it now,” his soft laughter echoing gently in the room.

Dropping my armor outside the door unceremoniously, I yanked my boots off one at a time. Hopping around a bit on my right foot when the left one got stuck, I heard his laughter at my obvious struggle. I grabbed for the hem of my padded overshirt made for beneath my chest piece and pulled. This stupid thing was made to be very fitting so it was like trying to work myself out of a fucking wetsuit. The saving grace is it pulled my undershirt up with it when it finally came off, and I let out a breath that blew my hair out of my face.

His eyes followed my movements as I slipped gear and clothing off and I finally reached the laces of my leather breaches and looked at him through my fallen hair with a raised eyebrow.

“Enjoying yourself?” I tease and a deep chuckle from him is his reply as I continued to unlace the leathers.

“Immensely,” he said with a teasing tone and I groaned making him chuckle again.

Pulling the leathers down my legs, I kicked them off to the side and followed my lacy smalls after them, kicking those towards my leathers. I came to my final piece of clothing and worked the Thedas’ version of a bra off. It was more than frustrating, and I wanted to growl at how many layers I had been wearing but grunted instead.
I started feeling like the little kid in the Christmas story who got all bundled up just to go outside in the snow as I finally got the breast band to release. With a triumphant sound, I threw it over my head and stepped into the tub with him. I groaned pleased that after all that, the water was still hot and I sank in and lay back at the opposite end.

“Is it always such a struggle?” He inquired humorously and I stare at him.

“Only when I’m in a hurry,” I joke and we share a moment of laughter.

The whole scene was domestic as he washed my feet and I washed his. He had very pretty feet I thought, and I was not a foot person. I moved up and started washing his legs, massaging the muscles of his calves and thighs enjoying the soft, appreciative groans that came from him at the manipulations of my fingers.

“You are very adept at that,” he murmured as I ran my fingers in steady movements up the back of his leg working the thick muscle and all its knots from riding all day.

“I do believe I was applying for a ‘love slave’ position. What good love slave wouldn’t know how to please her lover with something as simple as a body massage?” I tease him and his head that had been laid back with eyes closed lifted slowly and gazed at me with a hooded expression.

“Is that what you are doing,” he said evenly watching me his expression unreadable.

I really hate when his face goes all expressionless like that…ugh!

“Well…and I really do enjoy touching you, that can’t be a bad side benefit to being a love slave, right?” I kept my teasing tone as I worked at a knot just behind his thigh.

His hand shot out and grabbed my wrist stopping my movements as he held my gaze steadily with my hand hovering over his thigh. The sudden move made me jolt in surprise and my hand started lightly trembling at the way his blue eyes held mine intensely. They were dark, powerful and telling me absolutely nothing of what was going on behind the blue gaze.

“Perhaps I have no need for a love slave.” His voice was thick, deep, and vibrated around me like it would in the Fade and my whole body tensed at the sudden combination of having the Evanuris and the man in my bathtub. Swallowing nervously, I square my shoulders and decided that I didn’t know what game he was playing but I wasn’t playing it.

“Then don’t give me the damn job, I’m sure I’ll survive,” I answer yanking my wrist from him annoyed with how fucking cryptic he was right now.

His eyebrow rose watching me curiously and I splashed water at him in irritation hitting him in the face. I enjoyed his sudden sputtering of water, dashing away my earlier annoyance with him and giggled, covering my mouth quickly at his returned wicked gaze.

“Why must you always be so difficult,” he sighed sounding exasperated and shook his head wiping the water from his face.

“Why must you always be so ambiguous and vague,” I came back at him.

I grabbed the bar of soap to lather the washcloth and began washing my arms ignoring his steady stare. When I was done, I laid the cloth on the edge of the tub and reached over to grab the pitcher of water for my hair and poured it over my head quickly so I could begin washing that too. His eyes followed all of my movements and I continued to ignore him.
After another pitcher of water, I was finished and I realized he had been watching me the entire time. I didn’t know what he was thinking because his face wasn’t giving anything away, but I was finished bathing and I was tired of guessing. Moving to get out, I felt his hand on my wrist again and I stared at him with a raised eyebrow.

“I have not finished bathing,” his tone was commanding and it sent sexy shivers up my spine that totally made me want to slide back in the water. I resisted the urge and gave him a sweet smile instead. Something was going on here and I had no fucking idea what.

“Then you should hurry before I fall asleep,” I point out to him and step from the tub as he releases my wrist and lays back watching me. Picking up a bath towel, I slowly dry myself off not willing to give into his unspoken demand. I could see that my action had surprised him and knotting the towel around my chest, I left the bathroom without a backward glance.

I went for the cold dinner that I had brought up earlier and picked up a piece of cheese. That man was as confusing as Mythal at times. Nibbling on the cheese, I smirked at the sounds of splashing from the bathroom. Popping a piece of fruit into my mouth, I thought about the differences with Solas that came about when I told him I knew who he really was.

Only around me were these changes apparent, for obvious reasons, but he had changed. I couldn’t get upset over any of them really, he was always this way, I was just learning about the many different angles that make up the man. I took another piece of cheese and the feel of his arms snaking around my waist jolted me and I glanced up at him in surprise.

“That was quick,” I tease and see his calm gaze and swallow slightly nervous now wondering if he was angry with me for leaving him to bathe alone.

What have I gotten myself into now? I can never stop overloading my alligator mouth with my hummingbird ass it seems.

“So far vhenan, you have proven to be a terrible slave. Perhaps you would be better off mated.”

My eyes grew wide with his words and I found I was unable to do anything but just stare at him.

“M...mated?” I finally stammer out pathetically.

Solas gazed at me with one of his unreadable expressions and I felt my heart race and my stomach plummet. What the fuck is he talking about?!

“Yes, mated, as opposed to being a slave. You have already proven that the later would not please you. Talented you are vhenan, but you do not take commands very well, thus showing that you do not have the qualities required of a good slave.”

His face gave nothing away and I held up the piece of cheese in my hand to him for something to fill the silence as my stomach knotted and my heart raced. His lips softly grazed the tips of my fingers as he took it and my blood bubbled at the small contact.

“That would require a partner,” I slightly squeaked out watching him chew.

“Yes, mated, as opposed to being a slave. You have already proven that the later would not please you. Talented you are vhenan, but you do not take commands very well, thus showing that you do not have the qualities required of a good slave.”

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“That would require a partner,” I slightly squeaked out watching him chew.

“It would indeed,” he replied before kissing my forehead and picking up another piece of cheese and popping it into his mouth.

I watched him for a long moment silently while he ate. Rubbing my face in confusion, I watched him chew. What the hell is this game? Slipping from his loose hold around my waist, I went to my wardrobe and grabbed a nightshirt. His soft chuckle from behind me had me turning back towards
him questioningly.

“I will only remove it from you, vhenan,” he said with a humorous tone, eyes sparkling with mischief.

Realizing he was definitely right, I threw the shirt back inside. Closing the armoire, I dropped my towel and slipped under the covers. This feels very nice, I thought stretching like a contented cat. Pushing away thoughts of the weird conversation with Solas, I closed my eyes and as quickly as I closed them they popped right back open when he slipped under the covers with me and pulled me to him as he let out a contented sigh of his own, rubbing his hand over my hip.

“What are you up to wolf,” I finally ask him softly and saw his eyes widen at the name and gave me a roguish smile before claiming my lips and rendering me stupid. Breaking apart, we were lightly panting and he nipped at my lower lip making me moan softly with the gesture.

“It is called courting, vhenan.”

I stare at him in shock. Courting? What the hell, I thought that was what he had been doing. Well, this definitely goes to show the vast differences between modern woman and ancient Elvhen.

“C…courting?” The uncommon word stumbles over my tongue and out of my mouth, the sound of my nervousness self-evident with its slight wobble.

“It is common that when you find one that you wish to mate with, that you proclaim your intentions in action and deed. If the other find your intentions acceptable, then you would mate for life with them.”

His matter of fact words sent my world into a spin. Was he trying to tell me he was…is that…does that mean…Oh, my God!

“Th…that is what all this is about?” I stammer afraid to believe what I am hearing.

“I believe that is what I was attempting to…”

With a rush of sudden understanding, I grasp his face and stare into his beautiful blue eyes.

“Your intentions are acceptable,” I whisper with a small tremor in my voice and his eyes widen.

“But I have not…” he began and I stopped him.

Pressing my lips against his silencing him. Wrapping my arms around him, I pulled him closer to me.

“You have,” I whisper against his lips. His soft smile only made me melt as he proceeded to thoroughly kissed me silly.

*****

I stood in Cullen’s office going over the maps for the Western Approach when we heard the first loud meaty sound hit the outside wall. We both looked at each other for a moment in silence and I turned as we heard it again. Moving towards the door that led out towards the Rotunda I opened it to see what the noise was about. Ducking quickly as a large brown blob flew towards me.

“What the fuck…” I hollered as I hit the floor.

“Bloody hell,” Cullen yelled diving for the floor behind his desk.
I look at the goat slowly getting up in the middle of Cullen’s office with supreme confusion. The animal wobbled about understandably since the poor thing just flew through the air and unceremoniously landed here. My head turned towards the sound when I heard another goat screaming as it flew through the air.

“BAAAAAAA”

“I’ve heard of when pigs fly, but this is ridiculous,” I muttered scrambling off the floor and glancing at Cullen.

“Commander, I believe we are under attack…by goats,” I joked and see him grabbing the door that led to the other side of the ramparts shaking his head.

Running from his office down the rampart to the Rotunda, I dropped to the stone path when I heard another goat screaming and another loud thump hit the walkway behind me. Scrambling back up, I reached the door and yanked it open running by Solas.

“Careful, we are under attack by goats,” I warned him before dashing through the other door to head into the main hall. Reaching the outer door you could hear Cullen barking out orders to his men from the battlements.

“You there – get down there, and remove that man from that catapult before he launches another bloody goat!”

Solas came to stand beside me and we watched as another goat flew through the air towards the castle with confused expressions.

“I did not realize you could attack a building with goats,” I murmur watching the poor creature fly.

“I was unaware of the strategic possibility, but it has made everyone stop to observe.”

I glance up at Solas with a small grin and see he too is smiling somewhat, finding the humor in the crazy part of this whole sudden goat attack.

“It is never a dull day in Skyhold,” Varric quipped from next to Solas and I giggle as another goat flew into the courtyard.

“My dear, will this be how we import all our meat from now on? If so, could you let me know when you will have cows delivered? I have no desire to see cows flying,” Dorian jested and I just groaned while another goat flew towards the castle.

It was sometime later and about five more goats thrown before we watched the soldiers lead an Avvar man towards the keep. Cullen was jogging towards me with a harried expression.

“We are taking him to the dungeons to await you, Inquisitor.”

I smile up at him and shake my head. Who the hell throws goats with a catapult?

“Has he said anything as to why he was chucking goats at the castle, Commander?”

Cullen shook his head looking as confused as I felt.

“No Inquisitor, he has said he will only speak with you.”
“Well, I guess I better get Josephine so we can get this show on the road.”

I turned to head back inside with Solas, Varric, and Dorian when my eyes landed on Gaspard who waited for me just inside with a large smile displayed beneath that hideous golden mask. Suppressing an annoyed expression, I pasted a smile on my face. *Like my day wasn’t already full of fun with flying goats.*

“Good morning Grand Duke, I trust you slept well?”

Solas’ aura swirled against mine angrily as the Duke took my hand to kiss it. I ignored the jealousy I felt rolling off of him in waves, though it did give me some perverse pleasure that he thought I would even look at another the way I did him. *Focus idiot!* Returning my focus back to the Duke.

“I did very well my lady, thank you for inquiring. I had not expected the accommodations in Skyhold to be so lavish with it being so far removed from civilization.”

“I am sure you were prepared for camping type of accommodations, but Josephine has made sure that we are considerably cozy way up here in the Frostbacks.”

I could already sense that he would like to keep talking and I gave him a polite smile having accomplished my pleasantries with the man and wanting nothing more to do with him.

“If you will excuse me, Grand Duke, I still need to speak with my Arcane Advisor before I meet with my Ambassador this morning.”

He nodded his head towards me as I walked away with Solas and Dorian towards the Rotunda. We walked through the Rotunda’s door and Dorian started laughing as soon as the door closed.

“Persistent, I will give the man that. You did send him a return letter telling him no, that is what you told me, yes?”

I rubbed my face and peeked at him through my fingers, shaking my head ‘yes’. Dorian quirked his eyebrow at me and rubbed his mustache as he looked to be contemplating something and then snapped his fingers like he just had an epiphany.

“Perhaps what would finally convince the Duke is…” Dorian began and I snorted.

“A swift kick in the nuts?” I interject with a grumble and Dorian looked at me startled while Solas softly chuckled beside me. His aura had calmed considerably since entering the Rotunda and I gave him a cheeky smile.

“No my dear, that will only give the man swollen nuts. What I was thinking, is showing your obvious interest in another if he will not accept your refusal of his betrothal.”

“You don’t think that won’t anger him? The last thing I want is any man thinking he needs to fight over me, that is just laughable.”

Solas’ look that I caught from the corner of my eye spoke volumes to how he must have thought differently. *Men…Neanderthal’s the whole lot of them.*

“No, you have turned down his betrothal already. You were not expecting him to come to Skyhold, so play it off as you thought he came for business, not that he is still trying to pursue you after your refusal.”
“How am I going to do that when Josephine has me eating dinner with the jackass tonight?”

Dorian glanced at me mischievously before tapping his finger against my forehead.

“Ah, but was the dinner designated to be done alone? No, I believe not. Josephine would never allow it. You will be dining with other nobles here in the Castle, and I am sure that I could gather a few others to have dinner at the same time so that you could innocently ask us to dine with you.”

I rubbed my face again as anxious balls of nervousness bounced around in my belly. I hated the Game; it was such a waste of time and energy.

“Dorian…I am no good at all that scheming. Can’t I just tell the fool that I am already promised to another and just leave it at that?”

Dorian laughed and glanced at Solas for a moment then back to me.

“He is of Orlesian nobility, my dear. He will not listen to you, he has proven that already. I am most curious about why he would continue to do so unless he feels the partnership would strengthen his hold over Celine.”

“Ugh,” I groan and move to flop myself into Solas’ chair for a moment of self-pity before rising and taking a calming breath.

“Fine, dinner is at seven and don’t be late,” I said stopping next to Solas and glance up at him for a moment.

“Ar lath ma,” I whisper to him before leaving through the door leading to the main hall. Now to find Josephine and get the circus started.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma - I love you
Josephine stood with her clipboard gesturing towards the overly large throne.

“You will sit up there Inquisitor, and we will bring them out one at a time.”

I looked at her and then to the large chair and my stomach knotted. I didn’t feel like the person who should be doing this, most definitely didn’t feel qualified to pass judgment on anyone. I walked hesitantly up the small steps of the dais and studied the chair, it at least looked comfortable.

I slid into it and realized that I would have to sit at the edge of the chair or otherwise my feet wouldn’t touch the floor, and I let out a sigh of annoyance at my height deficiency. Josephine was quick to see the problem and left the room only to return quickly with a large pillow to prop behind me.

Smiling up at her, she slightly blushed.

“Perhaps, I did not take into account how large the chair was in comparison to your stature. I shall have that rectified before you must do this again Inquisitor.”

“Don’t worry about it Josephine, I will be fine, I needed to work on my posture anyway. Besides, maybe we just need to add a footstool,” I joke with her. “Let’s just get this over with.”

I see a crowd was gathering in the main hall and the nervous ball I felt in my stomach tightened as Josephine moved to the bottom step. Nodding towards a couple of guards at the door leading to the dungeon, the door opened and a guard led Gereon Alexius out and I felt a spike of anger at the sight of him.

I wanted to suddenly be like the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland and yell, off with his head! Taking a calming breath, my eyes found Solas’ and I could see the understanding in his gaze. The soothing feeling of his aura gliding over mine helped as I listened to Josephine address the crowd.

“You recall Gereon Alexius of Tevinter. Ferelden has given him to us in acknowledgment of your aid in his capture. The formal charges are apostasy, attempted enslavement, and attempted assassination – on your own life, no less. Tevinter has disowned and stripped him of his rank. You may judge the formal magister as you see fit.”

I stared at the former Magister who held his head down and folded my hands in my lap.

“Remind me, what is the precedent for nearly ripping time apart at the seams?”
Alexius lifted his head and I could see his look of anguish, and it startled me.

“I couldn’t save my own son. Do you think my fate matters to me?” His broken heart over his son was obvious, and I pitied him for thinking that was his only way to save Felix.

“Will you offer nothing more in your defense?” Josephine asked of him.

“You’ve won nothing. The people you saved, the acclaim you’ve gathered – you’ll lose it all in the storm to come. Render your judgment, Inquisitor.”

I nodded my head slowly and held his gaze steadily.

“The magic you used was theoretically impossible, Alexius. I sentence you to research – under guard. You also swore to the mages you’d help them. I will have you uphold that promise as well. Fiona will take charge of you. Any knowledge, favor, or coin you own will go towards the mages’ future.”

He looked at me with clear hostility reflecting in his gaze.

“A headsman would have been kinder.”

I raised my eyebrow at him and smiled slightly menacingly.

“You do not deserve kindness Alexius, you lost that the moment you tried to destroy my world.”

There was a soft wave of murmurs through the crowd as the guards took Alexius by the arms and led him from the room. I returned my gaze back to Josephine, motioning for the next one and she turned towards the guards at the door and they brought in the next prisoner.

I almost laughed as I saw Duchess Florianne being led to stand in front of the dais. The sudden rise in conversation among the crowd was noticeable.

“Oh this is rich,” I mutter as Josephine commences in retelling the Duchess' crimes.

“I do not believe a reminder is necessary for the accused. Her capture and disgrace could not have been more public. Grand Duchess Florianne De Chalons, although her titles are among the dignities already at risk of forfeiture, you spared her life, despite her treachery. What becomes of it now falls to you.”

I saw that Florianne was smirking at me and I just smiled.

“Feel a little out of your element, Florianne? Welcome to the Inquisition – my party.”

Florianne snorted while Josephine continued calmly.

“Despite her posture, Lady Florianne has acknowledged your authority.”

“Should I curse you on behalf of the Elder One? I realize he had no intention of honoring the concordats I manipulated. Do as you must, I respect your mastery of the Game, even as I despise your victory. Celine does not know her fortune.”

I noticed Gaspard leaned casually against a wall, watching from the side of the hall. I’m sure curious to how I would deal with his sister. *Probably a lot nicer than you or Celine, that is for sure.*

“Like most nobility, you have never walked in the shoes of those you endanger. Lady Florianne, I give you one chance. You will do common work, farm work and do some good. Try to run or shirk
your duties, and I will send you back to your Cousin for her judgment.”

She smirked at me and shook her head.

“Sentenced to walk with animals, how droll,” she quipped and I gave her a wicked smile.

“Be thankful you are keeping your head Florianne, you were very willing to try and take mine.”

Her eyes slightly widened and she nodded her acknowledgment before the guards led her away.

I heard some of the surprised sounds that came from the crowd and started to wonder if I was being too lenient with people who had tried to kill me. Josephine’s voice brought me back into focus as the guards brought out the next prisoner.

“This was a surprise. This morning as you witnessed, they discovered this man, Chief Movran The Under, attacking the building, with goats. He feels slighted by the killing of his Avvar tribesmen, who repeatedly attacked you first. What should we do with him, where should he go?”

I couldn’t suppress the giggle that escaped and I swallowed back the urge to continue laughing as I thought about watching the goats fly. Clearing my throat, I sat forward and held his dark brown gaze.

“You answered the death of your clan – with goats?”

He held my gaze and shrugged, looking almost bored as he laughed.

“A courtroom? Unnecessary, you killed my idiot son, and I answered, as is my custom, by smacking your holdings with goat’s blood.”

I shook my head slightly and glanced at Josephine and she raised one of her perfectly arched brows at me.

“Don’t look at me.”

“No foul, he meant to murder Tevinter’s but got feisty with your Inquisition. A redhead mother guarantees a brat. Do as you’ve earned, Inquisitor. My clan yields, my remaining boys have brains still left in their heads.”

Those in the crowd did not realize how true his statement actually was, considering I literally shattered his son into a bunch of frozen pieces. Movran laughed at the situation and I join him. This is absolutely hilarious when you really thought about it. Clearing my throat and trying to stop laughing and be serious, his half smile recognized the absurdity of the whole proceedings.

“Well, Chief Movran it would seem that our conflict was accidental, although I would rather not repeat it, especially the goat part. I banish you and your clan, with as many weapons as you can carry – to Tevinter.”

He started laughing even more and smiled at me.

“My idiot boy got us something after all!”

I saw that the guards removed his restraints and I stood walking down the dais towards him and held my hand out. He grasped it strongly and gave me a pleased smile.

“Travel safe Chief Movran,” I tell him before he turned to leave.
“Aye, and you as well Inquisitor,” he replied with a large smile as he left the keep.

I glance to where Josephine stood and walked towards her feeling somewhat nervous to what she thought of my judgments.

“Well, did I do okay?”

She looked surprised with my question and then nodded her head at me.

“I believe you were more than fare Inquisitor.”

*Well, that is something then.* I left for the library to sit with Dorian for a bit before I would have to get ready for dinner. Thinking about it, I was starting to regret coming back for a few days.

I pulled the long sleeved, dark brown and gold colored gown over my head with a grunt and heard Solas’ soft chuckle from the couch.

“Don’t just lay about laughing at me and my struggles, come help me lace this up, then you can laugh.”

I give him my best puppy eyes over my shoulder and his laughter grew deeper as he moved from the couch. I grab my hair and pull it over my shoulder out of his way, and his lips graze my neck while he runs a finger over the skin of my shoulder.

“Mmm…that feels very nice,” I tell him a little breathless sounding.

“I find it difficult to ignore,” he said gently and nipped at my ear making me moan and instantly setting me on fire. *Damn this man for never playing fair!*

His hands skimmed down the skin of my back before he started lacing the dress. When he was done, he pressed a warm kiss to between my shoulder blades and I turned around smiling up at him.

“Thank you,” I whisper.

He bent and took my lips with tender purpose and it was breathtaking. Lightning chased over my skin and heat pooled low in my stomach with the slow ministrations of lips and light caress of his tongue dancing along mine.

“You will be dining with me won’t you?” I asked him my voice husky when we broke apart and I laid my head against his chest.

“Is not the plan to show the Duke that your interest lies elsewhere?”

I nod against his chest listening to the sound of his heart beating strongly.

“Then I will be at your side, vhenan.”

I smile softly up at him and reach up to caress his face.

“Get dressed then handsome while I finish getting ready. If I know Dorian he has some grand entrance planned.”

Solas laughed and turned to gather his things and prepare for whatever Dorian had planned.
“Lady Montilyet, you are aware that my intentions are to change Lady Lavellan’s mind in this matter. I cannot do that if we are to be surrounded by others. This is why I have requested that we dine in the garden.”

Josephine held the Duke’s gaze steadily, with a polite smile affixed to her face.

“I understand Grand Duke, and as I have already told you that is not possible. To place you both in the garden, alone, would be improper. The Inquisitor answered all of her letters, including yours, all will similar replies. She has accepted only one that she is actively pursuing. It is my understanding, she believes, you are here for business and nothing more.”

Josephine knew how to play the game, well in fact, and made sure to drop the information casually. By the look on the Duke's face, he was not expecting the Inquisitor to have found someone to her own liking.

“Perhaps you will divulge who this…other is? Is he a noble from Orlais or Ferelden?”

Josephine kept her polite smile in place and bowed her head at him.

“My apologies Grand Duke, the Inquisitor has requested that all information about her private life, be kept private.”

Gaspard nodded his head sharply and left her office with clipped steps. Josephine watched him leave and covered her mouth to keep the smile from showing. Dorian’s plan was perfect; everyone knew where the Inquisitor’s heart lies and it was definitely with her Arcane Advisor. The poor Duke didn’t realize he had never had an opportunity.

The table was lined with nobles all drinking and chatting away without a care in the world. Until I arrived, Gaspard had been one of them. Entering the Great Hall, he stood quickly and pulled out my chair sitting to my left.

“I appreciate your leniency with my sister, although I do not know if I would have been so kind in your position.”

I blinked a few times at him feeling like nothing could surprise me anymore when it came to Orlesian’s and took a sip of my wine.

“Yes, well, we are all a product of our upbringing,” I reply trying to keep the disdain out of my tone, sadly, I was unsuccessful noting his raised eyebrow at me.

That’s right asshat; you’re as much of a backstabbing, conniving little twatt as your sister. Gaspard cleared his throat, and I took another drink of wine.

“It is my understanding that you will be leaving again in the morning?” Gaspard’s question sounding slightly put out only made me want to leave all that quicker.

“Yes, there is a lot that needs my attention. While Corypheus runs free, I do not have time to sit at
home and relax,” I point out and take a drink of my wine.

“I had hoped that you would stay here in Skyhold for a bit longer,” Gaspard hedged.

I cleared my throat preparing to reply when Dorian came into the dining hall with Solas and Bull. Oh, this is going to be fabulous. Dorian walked towards my table and calmly bows with a smile towards the Duke and then looks at me.

“We were hoping to find you here, my dear. There are some details we would like to get settled before we leave in the morning.”

I smile at him and gesture towards the seat next to Gaspard, noting that the noble sitting next to Bull looked petrified. Suppressing a small giggle at the man’s response, Solas sat to my right and I give him an adoring smile.

“Good evening my love,” I say in elven ignoring, Gaspard.

“My heart,” he says tenderly kissing my hand before taking my glass and taking a small sip while holding my gaze lovingly. Damn that man makes me want him by just looking at him. I turn at the sound of a clearing throat and it is Gaspard who is preoccupied with glaring at Solas as he takes another sip of wine from my glass while holding his gaze challengingly. Even his aura reflected his inner thoughts of ‘back off Jack, this is mine’. Ugh! Men are ridiculous...I'm not a tree you can just mark, wolf.

“As I was saying, I had hoped you would be in Skyhold for longer than just a few days. You took no time for yourself,” he pointed out shrewdly tearing his gaze from Solas back to me.

I give him a pleasant smile and took my glass from Solas, taking a drink, I handed it back to him. Gaspard’s eyes narrowed perceptively on the action. I held his gaze for a long moment and thankfully the women from the kitchen chose that moment to deliver our dinners. I turn towards them smiling and thanking them as they brought everyone a plate to the table. Normally, I preferred taking my meals either in my room or down in the dining hall with the others. At least in those two places, I could be myself and not someone I wasn’t.

“And as I explained earlier, Grand Duke, I don’t have that luxury. What kind of Inquisitor, would I be, if I stayed in the castle and ignored what was going on around me. If you hadn’t noticed there are Fade rifts in the sky with demons pouring out of them, Red Templars running around burning, and murdering whole towns, and a crazy ancient Tevinter Magister who wants to be a God. So where in all that do you see the time for a mini-vacation?”

“Precisely the reason I am here,” Dorian interrupted smoothly. “My dear, we were inquiring as to whether it would just be the four of us going or will the others be joining us and which route are we taking to the Approach. I’m hoping for a moment to possibly get a little shopping done in Val Royeaux.”

I mentally giggled watching Bull take the goblet next to him that belonged to the noble seated beside him. Cutting a piece of pheasant, I take a bite appearing to be thinking about his question. I know already Dorian knows who is going and the route; we just went over it that morning.

“We are taking a boat across the Waking Sea into Val Royeaux. I don’t think we will have time for any shopping on the way there as we are kind of in a rush, but on the way back we could take a couple of days. I need to get more sketchbooks and pencils anyway. But we are taking the Imperial Highway all the way to Val Foret and then we are trekking into the Approach by trails and such. As to who is going, that will be everyone. The Approach is a large area, and I want to have two teams to
take care of the chaos.”

I cut another piece of pheasant and held my fork out towards Solas for him to take the offered food. His blue eyes watching me were full of mischief with the intimate gesture. I gave him a warm smile as he leaned forward and opened his mouth and I placed the food on his tongue. *Watching this man eat is quickly becoming a fetish I think.* His hand took mine on top of the table and a sizzle of heat and awareness rushed over my hand and up my arm. Winking at him and hoping my eyes convey how much he means to me, my eyes stray back to Dorian.

His wicked grin told me that I had conveyed successfully what I wanted the Duke to get, without having to kick him in the nuts. Although, I still think that a good kick there would have been faster.

“So what business has brought you to Skyhold, Grand Duke?”

He looked at me for a long moment and then took a drink of his wine.

“Well, actually, it was to perhaps discuss our last correspondence.”

I cut into a carrot and took a bite, glancing covertly around the table and trying to calm my suddenly nervous belly. It did not help that Solas’ aura was pulsing against mine with annoyance over Gaspard’s statement. I let out a small sigh of annoyance and chance a look at Dorian who looked flabbergasted that his idea hadn’t worked. Squaring my shoulders just slightly, I cut myself another piece of pheasant.

“Perhaps I miss heard you, Grand Duke, I thought you were here on business?”

Gaspard gave me a pacifying smile and patted my hand that held the anchor as if I were a child. His action set my teeth on edge and I unconsciously gripped my fork tighter as I bit the pheasant from the tines.

“My lady, as we discussed when we danced at the Winter Palace, your naíve standards on such arrangements are best kept to the lesser population of people than you and I. These kinds of arrangements should be unions of power not romantic ideals for people such as ourselves.”

I caught the narrowing of Solas’ eyes, his aura flaring and I let out a sigh of frustration, and his eyes glanced at mine. I sent out a soft shove of my aura at him and I felt him begin to calm his own. I shook my head slightly and finally looked at Gaspard.

“I believe I gave you my answer Grand Duke. I will not be another man’s stepping stone because he thinks I can elevate his status.”

Gaspard leaned closer towards me, taking my left hand in his and I internally cringed, especially when I could feel Solas’ aura flare at the unwelcome touch and closeness of the Duke. I knew my aura was feeding him at this point because I couldn’t hide my disgust or anger with Gaspard’s unwanted attention either.

“Perhaps we could discuss this in private my lady, I believe that once I explain the many benefits of such an arrangement, you will rethink your refusal. It is hardly your fault that you would not understand such things.”

My temper soared with his condescending words and without thinking, I stabbed my fork into his hand drawing the attention of everyone at the table.

“Bloody hell,” he yelped in pain yanking his hand back while I ripped my hand from his grasp. He held the bleeding appendage as I leaned towards him and spoke angrily almost hissing like a wet cat.
Perhaps this will get it through his Neanderthal sized brain.

“First of all, don’t ever touch me again, unless I fucking ask you too. Secondly, I do not appreciate you speaking to me as if I were a damn child. I know what I want and it isn’t you, so what language would it take for you to hear ‘no’?”

Gaspard’s eyes widened as he cradled his hand against his chest. It was almost comical as my fork was still embedded in it. I pulled my napkin from my lap and threw it on my plate with disgust and stood glaring at him. I caught out of the corner of my eye Dorian’s mouth actually falling open, and if I wasn’t so angry with Gaspard, I might have laughed before leaving the table.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Chapter Notes

***NSFW***
Sentences in italics with quotations are meant for the reader to know it is elven.

Thank you, everyone, for your comments and continued reading. For those of you just finding my story, I hope you enjoy it! Also, thank you MorgueKD for the lovely art, you are fabulous!
See the end of the chapter for more notes.
Josephine fretted around me as I strapped my pack to the saddle.

“You cannot just stab a Grand Duke with a fork, Inquisitor,” she chastised me with obvious frustration.

“Well she already did Josephine,” Leliana pointed out with a hint of a smile at the corners of her mouth.

“Perhaps I should have given you that penknife back,” Cullen teased.

I chuckled at them and finished tying the pack on. I don’t think I have ever seen Josephine so worked up, and I turned towards her with a gentle smile.

“Josephine, I do not appreciate nobles pawing at me as if they were entitled to do so. He’s lucky I used the fork and not the knife,” I pointed out to her and saw her face grimace. It did not help that those around us listening were laughing. I let out a sigh and placed my hand on Josephine’s arm.

“Listen, I am sorry that this upsets you and that I have now in some way made your job more difficult than it already is. If I must,” I sighed again, “I will be the adult and apologize to the Duke for my behavior.”

My offer brought a swift smile to Josephine’s face that was quickly dashed as my offer also earned me a loud groan from Dorian and Bull, and a sudden growling voice next to my ear from Solas who was suddenly looming over me closely.

“You will not apologize to that man, ever!” His rapid elven was commanding and very angry. My eyes darted up at him and almost crossed at how close he is to my face. I could tell that apologizing would definitely be a very bad idea as his eyes held mine intently. Okay, Roger, no apologies to the Duke.

Josephine didn’t need to understand elven with the obvious tension and anger rolling off of Solas in waves and quickly interceded.

“No, that won’t be necessary, Inquisitor. Perhaps for future dinners, you could refrain from assaulting the guests with kitchenware?”

I pulled my eyes from Solas’ and focused on Josephine and chuckle.

“I will if you inform them I don’t like being touched.”

Josephine nodded her head quickly and gave me a pleasant smile.

“Agreed.”

Grabbing the saddle horn, I pulled myself up onto Etta’s back, and glance around at everyone gesturing with my arm to head out.

“Let’s get a move on guys; the Approach won’t come to us.”

“Safe journey Inquisitor,” Josephine called out as we rode towards the bridge and I waved back at her.

God, my life is one freakin hectic moment after another.

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It had taken us six days to reach Val Royeaux because the weather was not cooperative. First, the Frostbacks had proven that the term ‘Frost’ in a name is for a reason. Our trek through the mountain pass had everyone bunking together to keep warm. Magical heating runes could really do only so much. Needless to say, my tent had Solas, Sera, and Cole. What a wonderful four nights that was listening to Sera bitch about Cole - alcohol would probably have made that situation tolerable, but Varric forgot his flask which left me questioning his right to call himself a Dwarf.

By the time we actually reached Jader, our original boat had sailed. Leaving the only obvious option – take the next boat. Well, if that wasn’t a bowl full of fucking cherries. The four days I spent freezing my ass off was tame in comparison to this new level of hell. The boat was cramped – so cramped could literally not take a piss in private.

Four days on horseback freezing my ass off then two days on a boat out of Jader listening to every bowel movement and complaint within spitting distance. I wanted to slice my own damn throat by the time we reached Val Royeaux. What was even more irritating, was my wonderful man seemed to just block it all out and was calm as a fucking cucumber. I need to learn his ‘Yoda’ ways of the force, so I too can ignore this crap.

By the time we were able to disembark I was thoroughly tired of the cramped quarters in the boat and all but sprang from the ship with excitement. I stood under the sun with my arms out, face turned up, taking a deep breath of fresh air…well sea air, but it smelt quite a bit better than the bottom of that damn ship. I watched as they began disembarking our horses and as soon as I saw my beautiful Etta, I took her reins from the young boy leading her down the plank and pulled out an apple from my pack.

“I know girl, now we can stretch those beautiful legs of yours and get you some fresh air like the rest of us sheep,” I croon to her softly feeding her the bright red treat.

“Hey Fenni, are we stayin in Val Royeaux tonight?” Sera called back to me leading her dark brown mare down the docks ahead of me.

“For the night anyway, I want a bath, and a bed that isn’t rocking,” I kid and hear plenty of agreements with my joke.

“At least not from water, anyhow,” Sera joked and my face blossomed red.

“You are so bad Sera,” I grumbled and heard her answering laugh.

The good thing about my part in the Grande Masquerade and my new connections to the Empress was that we could now stay anywhere in Val Royeaux we wanted, elf or not. But I had an idea and I was going to make it work, it had been a long six days and I needed some alone time with my sexy man. I moved to walk next to Solas and glanced up at him pushing my aura out to poke him to get his attention. His curious look made me smile before I divulged my plan to him.

“I thought maybe we could stay in the inn we stayed in the last time we were here.” It was the only inn that wouldn’t make a big deal about the Inquisitor staying there; they would also be discreet about who stayed in the Inquisitor’s chambers. Rumors were circulating already, which in reality I could give two nugs asses about what people said. I was proud of whom I loved, but some of those rumors were not so nice and it made Josephine fret something awful as she tried to do damage control. Sometimes being adult enough to take other people’s feelings into account – sucked. Somedays, I just wanted to be a selfish bitch.

His eyebrows furrowed slightly as he recalled the small inn.
“The one in the Alienage?” He questioned his voice sounding slightly surprised.

I nod my head and wiggle my eyebrows at him earning a small chuckle from him as he caught onto my meaning for wanting to stay there.

“Ma nuvenin ma vhenan,” he responds his voice a little deeper and I felt myself blush.

“Hey you two, stop with the elfy shite and let’s get a bath and dinner,” Sera hollered back at them and I flipped her off making her laugh.

“Get over it Sera, I’m an elf…elfy shit is what I’m good at.”

Bathing had been everything I had hoped it would be, especially after not having one in six days. I knew I did not smell like a daisy that was for damn sure, and I poured vanilla oil into the water with a generous hand. Thankful that our room had a bath in it, Solas and I took our turns bathing. It would have been comical for anyone listening to our moaning sounds of pleasure just from fresh, hot water. I washed his back thoroughly, as he did mine. He helped me wash my hair as well and the feeling of his fingers massaging my scalp was out of this world, fantastic. It was frustrating to have to leave the privacy of our room, but we both knew if we didn’t somehow, they would find where we were.

After our yummy dinner in the cafe with everyone, we all parted ways to our respective lodgings with the understanding that we would meet up in the livery at dawn. Solas had entwined our fingers on the walk back to the Alienage, and when we entered the inn, it was relatively quiet save for a few people drinking by the fire. Our night had been building up to our alone time since we had not had any ever since leaving Skyhold, and my body silently hummed in anticipation. Soft, meaningful touches during dinner beneath the table only built the need we both felt. Opening the door to our room I walked in and he shut the door behind us gently. Turning towards him, I recognize the desire in his eyes even while his aura pushed against me with his need, making me hot and achy for him.

“I am so glad…” his lips silenced me. His hands held my face and a soft sigh escaped me as I melted against him while all coherent thought fled and lightning flashed behind my eyes. Damn, I had missed this. His kiss turned demanding and I started unlacing his leathers feeding off his sudden urge to be closer as he backed me towards the door.

Breaking apart breathless, his eyes held my gaze with a dark intensity that set my blood roaring in my ears and I bit my lower lip in expectation. His lips slammed back into mine as his hands ripped my tunic and the buttons flew to be vaguely heard skittering across the rough-hewn floor while he began working the straps of my breast band hurriedly. I moaned as he trailed hot kisses over my jaw and down my throat, pulling the band from my chest and dropping it on the floor. He sucked and kissed at the skin just beneath my collarbone while his nimble fingers worked the lacings of my leggings impatiently.

He growled, and I groaned as we panted in frustration at our clothing. Breaking apart long enough for me to yank my ruined tunic from my shoulders and peel my leggings off roughly kicking them away; Solas slid his breeches down his legs kicking them away while yanking his own shirt roughly over his head. Grabbing my hips he picking me up as if I weighed nothing, stealing the breath from my lungs, and I wrapped my arms and legs around him as we slammed back against the door with our urgency.

I could not get enough of him and moaned heavily as he slid possessively into my wetness with a single deep thrust. His need was wild, unrestrained, and I was in no mood for him to be gentle. Digging my nails into his shoulders, I chanted his name with breathlessness. Sometimes moaning his
name, sometimes on a mid-level scream of pleasure, I said it almost religiously while he continued to
plow me into the door at a punishing pace. The sound of our lovemaking was echoing through the
small room and for sure down the hallway of the small inn since we had forgotten to put wards on
the door for privacy.

I did not care about any of that, I only cared about him, and the way his hands gripped me tightly
around my waist. The feel of his mouth burning kisses down my throat, biting at my collarbone
marking me. My own hands ran over his head holding him to me as the sensations swept through
me. I was completely caught up in an under-toe current of sensation he created, and it felt amazing.

I could feel his need building as he thrust into me and I whimpered at the intensity of his aura filling
me as thoroughly as he was with each thrust. Our bodies were slick from the heat we were causing.
Biting my shoulder roughly, I knew it would leave a mark, moaning my pleasure I ran my nails over
his shoulders enthralled with this untamed passion he revealed. The action extracting a low growl
from him before he dragged his tongue over my nipple making me cry out with the intensity of the
feeling that made me spasm and clamp down on him. It was erotic; this feeling of dangling on the
edge of desperation was exhilarating.

I had never experienced this type of unrestrained passion with him before and it was intoxicating.
Our combined impatience to be closer to each other was overwhelming. He was devouring me; my
mouth, my body as I screamed my release that crashed over me without warning. He thrust hard and
followed me into the depths with his own release on a loud moan against my neck. Leaning his head
against mine as we both were trying to catch our breath, our racing hearts slowing as the echoing of
our breaths filled the silent room.

Oh, I would definitely have bruises later, but this was so worth it just knowing that I drove him as
crazy as he did me. Kissing his jaw his, eyes fell on the bruising that was forming on my shoulder
and his aura flashed instantly with anger. He gazed at the marks and then he leaned slightly back, still
holding me against the door and glanced down the rest of my body seeing a plethora of more slowly
forming bruising. His eyes finally met mine horrified with how he had acted and turned suddenly
carrying me towards the bed.

His silence was brutal, especially after sharing something as incredible as that, and I closed my eyes
in frustration. Laying me down gently, he pulled the covers over me and sat on the edge of the bed
unwilling to look at me.

“Ir abelas vhenan,” he said his voice laced with self-loathing.

I slowly opened my eyes to look at him; my body felt like a happy limp noodle and I laid my hand
on his back, enjoying the feel of his soft skin against my palm willing him to look at me. I pushed my
aura into his to mingle and convey my emotion so he knew I was not lying to him to make him feel
better.

“Tel’abelas, ma lath,” I tell him gently.

He snorted, “I was no better than an animal, you deserve better than that, vhenan.”

He was finally looking at me over his shoulder and I smiled impishly, tilting my face down so I could
look at him through my eyelashes teasingly.

“Don’t be that way Solas…it was perfect and I will expect you to definitely do that again…many
times.”

He groaned as he brought his lips to mine kissing me passionately and my body flared ready to go
again. I slid my hands over his sides teasingly enjoying the tightening of muscle beneath my fingertips.

“You are incorrigible,” he whispered against my lips.

“I try wolf,” smiling against his lips he groaned and roll me over with a throaty chuckle.

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We crossed Orlais with very little problems save a couple of groups of bandits and a few rifts. This part of our trip was definitely going a lot smoother than our first half. My eyes scanned the horizon and I found it was the vast difference in foliage that surprised me as we entered the Western Approach. It was unlike anything I had really ever seen before, and the sudden change was startling. We went from grassy type of scenery very much like the Dales to absolutely nothing – for as far as one could see.

*Nothing but dead, long forgotten trees, and bloody sand out here, this place was going to suck – awesome.*

The wildlife was aggressive and nasty except for the Fennecs that would dodge between the horse’s legs or into our camp at night. We were a half days ride from the Inquisition camp and I glanced over at Dorian when he pulled out a small square cloth from his pocket and dabbed at the sweat on his forehead.

“Well, at least this exotic venue isn’t raining or full of undead,” I point out teasingly.

Dorian held my gaze for a moment giving me his snarky, debonair smile.

“No dear you are correct, it does not have any of those things. It does, however, have heat. A heat that is making parts of me perspire that have no right to be perspiring in such a manner. I am sure as soon as I dismount from this beast of burden, all the sand in the Approach will quickly find its way into these new sweltering areas and begin all kinds of unpleasantness. But I digress…you are right, on the bright side, it is not a swamp.”

I am laughing – hard. Tears are rolling down my cheeks and I am holding my sides against the pain of laughing uncontrollably while my imagination gets away from me.

“You are such a fucking drama queen. Is there anything you won’t bitch about?” I finally said in between bouts of laughter. He actually for a second looked to contemplate the question and then shrugged.

“No, there isn’t,” he said with a cocky smile sending me into another fit of giggles.

“Oh…oh, my God, just stop,” I beg of him holding my hands up. “I am envisioning that you are complaining about swamp ass and the picture is very disturbing…” I said laughing even harder.

Dorian looked at me curiously.

“Swamp…” and then you could see that he suddenly understood what I meant and started laughing himself.

“Oh, that is just shameful of you, my dear, if not terribly accurate,” he grumbled between his own bouts of laughter.

Our laughter suddenly stopped when we came across a destroyed caravan with bodies strewn about
the desert floor. The corpses were covered in ravens and my eyes widened at the horrible carnage.

“What are the odds that all these people just happened to die here?” Dorian muttered as he slipped from his horse.

“What…happened here?” I question softly as I slipped off of Etta’s back dropping the reins.

“A long road, stumbling through the rocks, struck from behind.” Cole said softly from beside me and I grasped his hand needing that feeling of existence as the scene was beyond just gruesome but incomprehensible.

“None of these poor sods had knives or shite. Who’d do this?” Sera questioned angrily.

“Whoever did this has a lot to answer for,” I rumbled walking back towards Etta. “Come on everyone, we are close to the campsite.”

Reaching the Inquisition camp, I slid off Etta and walked towards Lace who greeted me with a welcoming smile.

“Fenlin, welcome to the Western Approach. The land of nothing but sand and mean wildlife.”

I start laughing as we walk together towards the cloth-made shelter to get out of the glaring sun.

“We’ve sighted Warden activity but no one has been close enough to figure out what they are doing. Between the sandstorms and the vicious wildlife, we haven’t made it far. One of my men got to close to a poisoned hot spring and gave a slightly delirious report of a high dragon flying overhead. In short, this might be the worst place in the entire world. Be careful out there.”

I grin at her and bat my lashes teasingly.

“Why Lace…are you worried about me?”

Her loud laughter was a welcome sound after the dreadful site we had passed on the way here.

“Someone has to be…just try not to die. I don’t want to deliver that report to Skyhold.”

I chuckle and slap her shoulder preparing to turn away when she spoke suddenly.

“Oh, before I forget. We intercepted a Venatori messenger and…uh…persuaded him to give up the orders he was carrying. We have them here,” she pointed towards the makeshift table and then glanced around the sandy area her green eyes surveying the land. “This entire place just feels…wrong, please be careful.”

I smile at her grateful for all that she did for me and hugged her. Her strong arms hugged me back and I gave her a mock salute before heading out from beneath the cloth cover taking the orders from the table.

“I will, I promise.”

Chapter End Notes
vhenan - my heart
Ma nuvenin ma vhenan - As you wish my heart
Ir abelas vhenan - I am sorry my heart
Tel'abelas ma lath - I'm not sorry my love
Meeting Up With Hawke

Chapter Notes

***NSFW***

As always, thank you for being wonderful readers! I hope everyone has a great Monday!

We were working our way across the Approach towards Hawke and her friend, Warden Stroud. There were only a few rifts that we had come across so far, but I was sure that the area was going to be littered with them after Solas informed me the Veil was thin here even before the Breach because of the Blight. *The Veil thins were great battles are fought*, he had said. Pulling my cloak up to cover my face as a gust of wind threw sand at me, I tucked my head until it passed.

It had been a few days since we split into two groups, and I hoped that Cassandra and her group were okay with the area they had taken off for. She promised she would mark on a map where the rifts were for us to double back and take care of later. I looked forward to seeing them again in a few days when we would meet up outside of Griffon Wing Keep. I smiled when I thought about taking the stronghold of the Venatori away from them.

“This is when I appreciate learning the magic to prevent sunburn on a bald head,” Solas joked as we climbed over the next sand dune. I shook my head at him and his dry sense of humor.

Laughing, I glance around at the others seeing they were indeed as miserable as I felt. I could now relate to Dorian’s bitching about sweating. I had no breasts to speak of, and yet, they were swimming in water. My breast band was soaked completely all the way through and dripping down my sides and stomach. The light leather gear was definitely not helping me any. I was beginning to feel like a turkey being slowly cooked by the heat waves radiating from the sand. The one thing I could be glad about was that I didn’t have to worry about the horses out here, it was enough just worrying about ourselves.

Finally cresting the top of the sand dune, I pulled my canteen from my side and took a drink of the warm water. Swishing it around my mouth first before swallowing to make sure I stayed hydrated, I raised my hand over my eyes to knock out the glare of the sun as I scanned the horizon for the rift. *What I wouldn’t give to have a cheap pair of sunglasses right now.* Thankful it wasn’t too much further; I dropped my hand and slipped my canteen back on my side.

“Come on guys, let’s close this one and find a place to camp for the night.”

The oasis we found before twilight was a beautiful sight until I thought about what Lace had told me. *Poisoned springs, shit please don’t let the water be poisoned.* I look towards Solas and Dorian to find out if it was good or bad.

“Is the water safe?” I asked them. Both of them moved towards the water’s edge to check it and saw
their instant smiles of relief.

“It is,” Solas replied turning to smile at me.

“Thank whatever God is listening, let’s check out the cave and make sure we aren’t the only ones staying before we go about making camp, and getting ourselves cleaned up a bit.”

Bull pulled his large ax from his back and began walking towards the mouth of the cave.

“On it Boss,” he offered and Cole silently went with him.

After a few moments, they came back out and Bull gave me a large smile.

“It’s clear and much fucking cooler in there than out here.”

“Well, it’s about to get a lot fucking cooler when we get done setting the cold runes on the walls,” I retorted moving towards the cave with Solas.

We worked in companionable silence moving through the cave, setting cold runes on the rock walls until we reached the end. You could already feel the temperature difference in the air and I let out a sigh of pleasure.

“That feels much better.”

Solas wrapped his hands around my waist and pulled me towards him, kissing me quickly.

“Now it does,” he replied and I chuckled.

“Smooth, very smooth handsome,” I tell him touching his face gently. His face was tanning and he had more freckles dusting across his nose from all the sun I noticed.

His fingers ran over my cheek as he smiled. “You are so beautiful,” he breathed before kissing me again.

Oh, what I wouldn’t give to be alone with him right now, but I could already hear the others moving into the cave. Their movements echoing through the small cavern and I let a small sigh of annoyance escape.

“What I wouldn’t give for just an hour alone,” I told him softly and saw his answering smile.

Grabbing the front of his armor, I pulled him towards me kissing him again quickly, enjoying the teasing smile on his lips. I bit his plump bottom lip before I let him go with a hungry look. His returned look of desire was thrilling and unfortunately would have to wait. Moving around him back towards the mouth of the cave, I called out to Dorian.

“Dorian, will you get us a fire going, I’m going to grab the stew pot,” and moved towards the pack.

Glancing over my shoulder I saw that Solas was still watching me, and my stomach fluttered appreciatively. I will never get enough of that man; I realized and with a small sigh, I turned my focus back to preparing dinner.

******

We crossed the small bridge towards the ritual tower when I saw the large smile on Hawke’s face and moved to greet her and Stroud.
“Hawke, Warden Stroud,” I offer my hand out to each of them in greeting.

“I am glad you could make it Inquisitor,” Stroud said as he took the offered hand in greeting. His eyes darted around the others and nodded his head in greeting at them before turning towards the stairs.

“I’m afraid they have already begun,” he told me as we took the steps.

“You, take point and I will guard your backs,” Hawke offered as she moved to walk with Bull at the back.

I crested the top of the steps with Stroud and I gasped in revulsion instantly covering my mouth and nose as the stench of blood permeated the air. My eyes survey the carnage of piled up dead Wardens, and my stomach rolled warningly at the sight. Oh my God, my mind cried holding my staff tightly while my eyes scanned the area…there are so many piles. Solas’ aura ran over mine soothingly and I closed my eyes to gather myself back together.

Bull moved to stand next to me and scowled at the site.

My eyes found the man standing on the small dais watching us. His smirk told me he was pleased with my reaction to the piles of dead Wardens before he bowed with a flourish towards us.

“Inquisitor, what an unexpected pleasure; Lord Livius Erimond of Virantium, at your service, my lady.”

Stroud cut his hand through the air angrily. “You are no Warden,” he spat.

“But you are,” he said sighing with annoyance. “The one that Clarel let slip. I see you ran to the Inquisitor, so I can only assume you are here to stop me. Shall we see how that goes?”

“It would seem you have already run out of bodies for any further ritual so that just leaves them,” I said turning towards them. “Warden’s you are being used.”

The men vacantly stared at us as Erimond laughed.

“Oh were you hoping to garner sympathy? Maybe make the Warden’s feel some remorse?” He said sarcastically.

“Warden’s hands up,” he said and I watched in horror as I saw the mages raise their arms in unison at the command and then lower them when Erimond told them to lower them. Warden Stroud’s face saddened at the sight then hardened while glaring at Erimond.

“Corypheus has taken their minds,” he said to me as an explanation.

“They did this to themselves,” Erimond said with a large smile. “You see, the calling had the Warden’s terrified. They looked everywhere for help,” he said pleased with himself.

“Not everywhere,” I muttered disgustedly as Stroud narrowed his gaze on Erimond.

“Even Tevinter;” his tone laced with disgust.

“Yes, and since it was my Master who put the calling into their little heads, we, the Venatori were prepared.”

Erimond paced a little as he explained, pleased with himself and what he had accomplished. He was like a strutting peacock with an avid audience to show his plumage, what a douche-canoe.
“I went to Clarel full of sympathy, and together, we came up with a plan. Raise a demon army, march into the Deep Roads, and kill the old Gods before they could awake.”

I turned at the sudden flare of Solas’ aura against mine to see his eyebrows up in disbelief. He stared at the Magister clenching his fists in frustration, and I wanted to soothe his temper because I knew it was directed at him, not the Magister. I wanted to assure him that he couldn’t have known what would happen, but now was definitely not the time and I pushed my aura towards him hoping it would soothe his anger if even a little bit. Turning my complete focus back to Erimond, I crossed my arms disgustedly.

“So you manipulated the Warden’s to build an army of demons for Corypheus,” I said sickened.

Erimond narrowed his gaze at me and nodded his head.

“Just so – sadly the Warden’s did not realize that the binding ritual has its costs. They are now slaves to my Master.” He smiled at them evilly as he waved his hand around at the bodies. “This was just a test. Once the other Warden’s complete the ritual, we will have our army to conquer Thedas.”

_Just a test! Is this man a fucking psycho?_ I shook my head and stared at the Magister. “Do you really want to see the world fall to the Blight? What do you get out of this?”

Erimond laughed, “The Elder One commands the Blight, and he is not commanded by it like the mindless Darkspawn. The Blight is not unstoppable or uncontrollable. It is simply a tool,” he said folding his arms.

Sera snorted, “He’s a tool.”

Dorian glanced at her quickly with a cheeky smile. “Agreed, my dear,” he said with a soft chuckle.

“As for me,” Erimond continued ignoring their little side banter at his expense. “While the Elder One rules from the Golden City, we, the Venatori, will be his God-Kings here in the world.”

_God-Kings, seriously…what a moron._

“Why would the Warden’s want to kill the Old Gods?” I questioned.

“A Blight happens when Darkspawn finds an old God and corrupts it into an Archdemon. If someone were to fight through the Deep Roads, and kill the remaining old Gods before they became corrupted – then no more blights.”

“That’s madness – for all we know, killing the old Gods could make things even worse,” Solas said loudly as he threw his hand in the air with disgust at the idea.

“Well then it is a good thing we will be taking that army off of their hands now isn’t it?” Erimond replied with a saccharine smile.

“Why demons,” I ask him not understanding why they would risk possession for this crazy idea.

His eyes narrowed as he smirked at me thinking me obviously ignorant, which I guess at this moment I am because I just couldn’t fathom this whole thing actually working. Dying or no dying, this Warden-Commander Clarel was an absolute jackass for believing this bullshit.

“Well, you see demons do not need food, water, healing or sleep. Once bound, they will never question orders or retreat. They are the perfect army to fight through the Deep Roads or across Orlais now that they serve my master.”

“You must be kidding,” he said laughing at me. “My Master showed me what to do with you if you were caught meddling in our affairs again.”

I watched as he raised his hand and suddenly the anchor flared with magic. The onset of pain slid me to my knees as the mark flared angrily at the sudden lack of control over it.

“That mark you bear, the anchor that lets you pass safely through the veil? You stole that from my Master. He has had to seek other, means to enter the fade.”

What other means? I felt Solas’ aura swirl menacingly around us and I slowly rose from my knees finally having control over the anchor and it quieted.

“That trick will only work once Livius. Will somebody please kill this asshole already before he starts showing us his tool,” I said sarcastically.

Sera nocked an arrow as she laughed, “really don’t wanna see any of that mess.”

Erimond gazed at me with hatred as he lowered his hand quickly and looked at the bound mages.

“Kill them”

At his sudden command, the mages with their demons sprang into action. “Shite,” Sera muttered as she let loose her arrow into the first demon that came at them. Solas threw up a barrier as a barrage of arcane fire came at them from the mages.

“Take out the mages,” Stroud yelled as he dashed forward to engage a demon with Bull.

When the mages and their demons were killed, I turned towards Solas and reached up with the anchored hand touching a scratch on his neck. He smiled at me tenderly and held my hand as he sent healing magic into the spot using the power of the anchor and leaned into my hand once he was done. It had felt odd, but not uncomfortable his channeling of magic through it. Probably because it was his, to begin with, I reminded myself.

Turning at the sound of Stroud speaking with Hawke I couldn’t help but hear the anger and disgust in his tone.

“You were right Hawke, through their ritual they are now slaves to Corypheus.”

Hawke stared at him in anger and frustration.

“And the Warden warriors?” she asked before closing her eyes in frustration as she answered her own question. “Of course – sacrificed in the ritual, it wouldn’t be a ritual sacrifice without the actual sacrifice – what a bloody waste.”

I looked at Stroud furiously. “Human sacrifice, demon summoning…who looks at this and thinks hey, I think I’ll have a go?”

“The fearful and the foolish,” Hawke answered ironically. Stroud suddenly stiffened at the comment and glared at both of us.

“The Wardens were wrong, but they had their reasons.”

“Had their reasons? That’s the fucking understatement of the century,” I mutter sarcastically. Hawke snorted and Stroud gave us a hardened stare.
“All blood mages do,” Hawke said crossing her arms in disgust. “Everyone has a story to justify bad decisions, and it never matters. In the end, you are always alone with your actions,” she replied heatedly.

Stroud shook his head and rubbed his face in defeat.

“I believe I know where the Wardens have gone; Erimond fled in that direction.” He said pointing north. “There is an abandoned Warden fortress that way, Adamant.”

*Why does that sound familiar…damn it, I wished I could fucking remember the important shit – that might have helped.*

“Well, they can’t just do this kind of thing in public,” I commented absently gazing over the sandy landscape that surrounded the tower.

“The Warden and I will scout out Adamant and meet you back at Skyhold,” Hawke said turning towards me holding out her hand in farewell.

“Stay safe Hawke, Varric will never forgive me if you get hurt.”

Her answering smile bolstered my spirits slightly as I watched her walk away with Warden Stroud. *Well if this day didn’t turn into a complete cluster fuck.*

*****

When I awoke there was a hand under my shirt laying on my stomach and soft breath on my neck telling me he was still asleep. Softly smiling, I snuggled even closer back to him and felt the reflexive tightening of his arm. I relished that he loved me, I could feel it with every gesture, every action. My spirit or soul or whatever anyone wanted to call it was finally happy.

All my adult years of dating thinking there was something wrong with me; the broken engagement, and the handful of men I tried dating seriously. Failures all of them, but I had never loved anyone the way I did him and it was exhilarating and frightening, and I wouldn’t trade it for anything.

I still didn’t know if I could convince him to stay once Corypheus was dead, but for some reason, it was not as frightening of a thought as it once was. Even if he did leave, not my ideal choice, but if he did, I knew that if it took me a lifetime, I would convince him. I sighed heavily at the idea of actually having to do that and felt his fingers softly move over my stomach and the butterflies buzzed at the small movement.

“You are awake early,” he whispered next to my ear sending small little shivers down my spine.

“It is not fair that your voice makes my panties want to melt off, you know that right?”

He chuckled, his voice deep with sleep and pulled me tighter against him. I could hear the soft snores of the others echoing in the cave ahead of us and his hand lightly played over the skin of my stomach. Everyone would be rising soon since today they would assault Griffon Wing Keep.

“I will bear that in mind,” he growled softly against my neck and I was instantly on fire and already slightly breathless.

“That is taking unfair advantage,” I warn him huskily.

“Mnmmmm,” he agreed. Taking my earlobe between his lips, I bit my lip to keep from moaning as lightning danced along my nerve endings.
“Turnabout is fair game Solas,” I warn him again and he ignored my warning by running his tongue over the shell of my ear while his fingers slip beneath my leggings with an obvious intent as his other hand slowly teased my already hardened nipple.

I steal my hand behind me where I can feel his ridged hardness pressed against my backside and slip my hand beneath his leggings. His panting breath and soft moan against my neck as his hips arched into the touch were all I needed to know that he was just as needy as I was and damned if this wasn’t our own doing.

I bit my lip and let out a shuddering breath as his fingers slid teasingly over my hooded pearl to the core of my desire, his lips nibbled down the column of my neck and my core tightened and clenched with a desperate need for him. I grabbed the edges of his leggings, pulling and the action surprised him, but it did not take him long to understand what I wanted and he slid my own leggings swiftly over my hips and out of the way. Grabbing my hips, he positioned himself at my entrance and slid into me slowly. His hand grasped my chin and turned my face toward him, capturing my lips, his tongue mimicking his slow, well-regulated movements that constantly teased that hidden spot of nerves.

We both were ready – beyond ready and his hand that was teasing my nipple slid down to between my thighs to tease the hidden gem. My whole body shook and then stiffened as I came apart shuddering around him. His soft groan into my mouth was a welcome sound as I swallowed it hungrily.

And you said I was incorrigible,” I whisper breathlessly.

“You are,” He said sounding just as breathless and I chuckled softly pulling my leggings back up and try straightening out my clothing with little success.

“Yes, well I wonder where I acquired it from,” I tease him before placing a quick kiss on his smiling lips. “Get up old man, there is work to be done today.” I giggled as his hand shot out and tugged me back down when I tried to get up. His eyes held a devilish glint as his arms wrap around me when I fell onto his chest.

Kissing my nose, I giggled again, Sera grumbled at us from the front of the cave.

“Do you two ever take a break? Ugh,” she griped.

Solas gave me a wicked smile that instantly told me he was up to no good and I was about to pay for the ‘old man’ comment, and I started shaking my head.

“Don’t…” I began trying to scramble off of him and his arms only tightened around me before his fingers started tickling my sides mercilessly. My peals of laughter echoed through the cave waking everyone who wasn’t already awake while I squirmed to get away.

“I don’t know Sera, I rather like waking to the sounds of laughter,” Bull joked as he rolled out of bed.

“It is a sight better than screams, I'll give you that,” Dorian quipped rubbing his face.

“She is too bright. Like counting birds against the sun, the mark makes her more and not,” Cole said staring at the opposite wall absently while he sat against the opposite wall.

Solas stopped tickling me, and everyone quieted to listen as Cole continued.

"But past it...she reaches across, mindful, meaning, pulling it through to this side, making it real here.
And past all that, the weight of all on her, all the hopes she carries for them, fears she fights. She is theirs,” Cole said quietly from his spot against the wall. “It must be very hard, but he helps,” he ended looking at me and Solas.

“Well that is something,” Dorian joked as he rolled from his bed on the cave floor.

“It is indeed,” Solas murmured against my ear before kissing my cheek and letting me go.
Our sweep through Griffon Wing Keep should be fast, definitely not like it had been with Caer Bronach now that we had more people this time. Cole had gone ahead and removed the lookouts before we got close to the main door making everything so much easier. Glancing around and keeping the barriers up as we approached, I gave Bull a large smile which he returned. The Venatori had not been as diligent as the bandits it would seem. By the time we reached the main doors, they still didn’t know we were about to kick it in and introduce ourselves.

Reaching the main door and glancing around at everyone, I gave them a mischievous smile gesturing towards the Venatori stronghold.

“Well, should we knock?”

“It would be rude not to,” Cassandra replied drolly pulling her shield from her back.

“I think so,” I add and look at Bull as Cassandra slaps his arm with a wicked smile.

“Bull – would you do the honors please.”

Bull pulled his ax from his back and smiled cheekily.

“I would love to Seeker,” he said excitedly as he charged towards the door. I placed a barrier around him as he took off, and everyone moved to follow. From the moment we entered, the Venatori resistance was in part futile as they tried bombarding us with magic and arrows and when that didn’t work they threw their warriors at us. We ran up the steps leading to the main keep cutting through their resistance like butter when a Venatori yelled out to whoever was still alive.

“The Inquisition is here – kill them quickly you fools.” My eyes flew to the walkway above us.

*It’s a mage, damn it!*

“Don’t move Fenni,” Sera whispered calmly and I froze in place.

Balancing her bow on my shoulder, she buried an arrow into the mage's forehead, shutting him up. Giving me a cheeky grin, she cartwheeled away from me towards another Venatori stabbing him in the throat as she went by. *Jesus, that woman sometimes reminded me of a Thedas' version of Harley Quinn,* especially with the pigtails she was wearing today.
Clearing out the Venatori on this level we reached the next set of steps, and the spellbinder they called Macrinus was standing at the top flanked by warriors and staring down at us with his arms folded.

“Inquisitor – how wonderful of you to join us,” he said loudly.

Glancing around, I slowly led everyone up the steps towards him, and felt Solas’ cool barrier soon envelope me.

“How could we ignore such an invitation Macrinus,” I said with a smug smile.

“Servis will be pleased when I inform him you are dead,” he said dryly.

Bull chuckled as we stopped on the fourth step from the landing.

“Yes, I am looking forward to meeting this Servis; perhaps you will tell me where the little worm is hiding?”

Macrinus frowned at me and my saccharine tone and shook his head, his body language conveying his disgust.

“He has no need to hide from some lowly knife-ear, you are nothing but slave fodder to him,” he replied snidely.

With a quick flip of my wrist, Macrinus flew backward from a Fade fist in the chest.

“You really should be careful about what you say to me Macrinus. You’re not some all-powerful God-King yet,” I spat at him angrily.

From that moment everything went sideways. His look of shock was everything I’d hoped it would be. Pulling my staff from the harness on my back I gave him a sarcastic smile as he held his stomach trying to catch his breath.

“KILL THEM,” he finally croaked out at his men while scrambling to his feet. Clutching his chest, he retreated behind his warriors that charged them from the platform at the top of the steps.

Barriers cast quickly, Solas froze the first warrior and Bull shattered him with a heavy downward swing of his ax. Dorian laid down fire runes around them when he caught sight of a rogue fade out.

“I got him,” Cole said softly from beside me before wrapping the fade around him. I was so focused on the others that my attention was suddenly brought back when an arrow flew by my head to bounce off the stairwell wall next to me.

Focus, you daffy bitch, before you get your head split like a canoe.

A quick frost spell froze the archer, and I pulled Fade fire meteors to drop on him and the others running towards them.

Overall, I was very happy that the fighting hadn’t taken very long. Turning around to make sure everyone was okay, an arm came out of nowhere to suddenly wrap around my neck. The move painfully restricting my throat and air while the assailant pressed a dagger hard into my side, piercing through my light armor. Everyone froze instantly with the rogue’s actions, and I dropped my staff to have my hands free.

“MOVE or I gut this knife-eared bitch,” the man growled from behind his face mask at everyone.
“Kill him,” I said with a raspy voice looking at Sera.

Sera’s movements caught the rogue’s attention and he dug the blade in a little deeper. She moved slowly around Varric, her bow drawn tightly and her arrow trained on the rogue holding me, all the while smirking at him. Her eyes glittered with almost a sense of anticipation. Varric kept his eyes on the rogue, his crossbow loaded and aimed; it was almost comical how bored he looked as he followed our movements.

Cassandra sheathed her sword and slid her shield over her back watching the Venatori rogue with a very angry look. Dorian and Bull showed no expression just followed the Venatori as he tried dragging me towards the stairs.

*Jesus, my people had some serious fucking poker faces.*

It would appear this guy was the last one and he knew it thinking he was going to use me to get out. *Ha! Not fucking likely.* My eyes fell on Cole holding his daggers totally still and I stared at him for a moment. *Cole, I got this,* I told him pushing my aura and thoughts at him.

Cole watched us carefully, hearing my thoughts he gave me a small nod of understanding before sheathing his blades. It was Solas’ eyes that never left me. His aura reached out to mine and he could feel that I was as angry as a wet cat that this Venatori got the drop on me. His eyes conveyed strength, love and I could feel his fear and anger through his aura. Pushing a soothing energy into my aura at him, I saw the tenderness in his eyes before they fell flat with the Venatori’s words.

“I SAID MOVE,” the rogue yelled squeezing tighter around my throat and pushing the dagger a little deeper.

“Not bloody likely you fuck’en wanker,” Sera snarled at him following his slow movements towards the stairs waiting for her opening.

I had learned how to deal with attackers in this exact situation at a YMCA, and as scared and angry as I was, I believed I could handle this idiot.

“Will no one kill him,” I croak out just loud enough for everyone to hear. Sera still following him with her arrow trained, her blue eyes hard as diamonds smiled. That smile sent a silent shiver up my spine of warning, *serious Sera is not fucking around.*

Pushing the dagger in a bit deeper, I winced. My anger grew at the feeling of my blood flowing down my side.

“I will fucking kill you, you knife-eared cunt. Tell them to move,” he hissed near my ear menacingly.

I gathered my anger around me like a blanket and took a small breath to calm my anger, as I subtly gripped my wrist preparing to elbow him hard.

“Ah, therein lies the problem isn’t it. Kill me, and you die before you can stealth. If my archer doesn’t kill you, the mage will, how much of a gambler are you?” I rasped out.

“Shut up! We’re leaving, NOW,” he yelled into my ear. His face so close to mine, I could smell onions on his breath and the dagger in my side dug in deeper making me bite the inside of my cheek to keep from crying out at the pain.

“Oh fuck this…should have killed me,” I muttered before I rammed my elbow into his stomach while slamming the heel of my boot into his foot and popping my hips back in a butt-bump into his groin. All of this was done in one fluid motion that caused him to let me go and stumble back in
surprise, but not before jabbing his dagger in deeper. The moment I was barely clear, there was a loud thundering crack of ice forming behind me and a high pitched whistle of Sera’s arrow soaring past my ear to bury itself into the rogue’s eye, shattering his head from his shoulders.

Falling to my hands and knees onto the stone floor, I press one hand to the bleeding wound at my side. Glancing over my shoulder at the dead, now frozen headless rogue in disgust, I turned as Solas was immediately kneeling next to me. His eyes searched my face before pushing my hand out of his way to look at the wound on my side. Shaking his head, his hands moved over the spot and I felt the cool, tingling of his magic as he healed it.

Another scar what a lovely day today has turned out to be.

“You will be the death of me,” Solas growled as he healed my side and I gave him a small smile.

“I’m sorry…” I started and his eyes suddenly found mine, flaring angrily at me.

“You have nothing to be sorry about,” he growled before focusing back on my side.

Confused by his angry tone, I rub my hands over my sore neck.

“Will you tell me why you are angry at me then?”

His eyes came back to mine and his brow furrowed with my words.

“I am not angry at you, vhenan… I am angry… that I cannot protect you the way I should,” he finally admitted.

I smiled at him and ran my hand over his cheek making him look at me.

“I’m not angry with you, so stop being angry with yourself. You can’t see everything that is going to happen, Solas.”

He was finished healing me and gave me a tender smile. Looking down at the new scar with disgust, I sighed and pulled my shirt down.

Nothing can be done about it so stop being so vain, appearances aren’t everything.

Glancing around at the others as they had waited for Solas to heal me, I smiled at Sera as I finally stood a bit unsteady and Solas’ arm went around my waist steadying me.

“Remind me to take lessons from you woman, you are crazy,” I tease her and see her smirk and got a sudden slap on my arm as she leaned towards me.

“You are the crazy one,” she grumbled and I laughed.

“Well, it looks like we got ourselves a new base of operations,” Bull joked as he clapped his hand on my shoulder.

“Good, let’s take out the trash before it gets dark.”

*****

We were going to have to wait for Cullen’s man, Captain Rylen to arrive at the newly owned keep. He should be here within a few days since we had informed Cullen of our plans over a week ago, I could only hope he would arrive sooner. My eyes scanned the Abyssal Edge thinking how similar it was to the Grand Canyon. The sky though…it was like the skies in Alaska without the freezing cold.
The auroras with their pinks and greens swirling through the starry sky were beautiful and so very peaceful.

According to Cassandra, this place was the stage for the second Blight and that it was once a lush green country before the Blight corrupted the ground turning it to a desert. Letting out a small sigh, I wondered what it would have looked like before the Blight.

Rubbing my face, I thought about Mythal. She alluded to memories that were mine, but I didn’t remember them.

_Brought me back to save the people, and him…whatever that meant. What people? I got the 'him' part, but does she mean elves or just people in general?_

Massaging my temples, my mind was bouncing in a hundred different directions tonight so it was no surprise when I heard Cole’s soft voice beside me.

“All people…it is time…you need to know…he needs to know,” he said simply looking out into the blackness of the Approach.

“Do you know what she is talking about?” I ask him curiously.

“Yes,” he replied and I turn my gaze from the desert to him.

“Why haven’t you told me, then?”

“Because, I am not the one to tell it,” he said simply.

I groan at his idea of being a good spirit and rub my face.

“Not because I want to be good, it is she that must tell you. Give you the memories she took so that you remember you, I can’t do that.”

I mulled over his words and realized that it wouldn’t be right for him to tell me what he knew. Only Mythal could answer my questions, and that bitch better have a suitcase full of patience because I had a fuck-ton of questions.

“Cole?”

“Yes?”

I bit my lip nervously and glanced at him out of the corner of my eye.

“Have I always loved him?”

I knew I didn’t need to say his name for him to understand who I meant. For some reason, and I couldn’t explain it…but he felt like home as if my soul recognized him.

“Yes,” he answered looking at me with his head cocked to the side. “He has only loved you too.”

_Yeah, well that should make things really interesting once he realizes what that ancient has done. I hated the thought he might feel betrayed, that I had somehow failed him._

“Not betrayal, not by you…it will mean more,” he said quietly and I looked at him curiously.

“More?”
“If you are her and she is you then it won’t feel wrong for him to love you now.”

He feels it’s wrong? Well, that hurt more than I thought it could, and my eyes teared up at the realization.

“Not wrong,” he said with a sigh and turned towards me. “Forever wasn’t forever then, but it was or is, now. He can keep his promise.”

I stare at him for a moment and then return to look out at the night.

“Well, that is sort of comforting I guess,” I murmur and feel Cole’s hand on my shoulder before he is gone.

*Fucking spirits, Evanuris...why did they all have to be so damn mysterious?*

*****

Knight-Captain Rylen strode towards me with his hand out and a large smile on his tan tattooed face.

“Inquisitor,” he said dwarfing my hand.

“You made good time getting here; we weren’t expecting you for another week.”

He chuckled and followed me to a covered area so we could get out of the sweltering sun’s rays.

“Yes, well, Scout Harding’s message came a week before yours with explicit instructions on bringing a building crew.”

I gave him a brilliant smile and clapped his arm.

“I love that woman,” I joke with him leaning against the table and gesturing for him to sit.

“I must inform you that we spotted Darkspawn on our way here Inquisitor, and I advise caution.”

I repressed the sudden need to rub my hands over my arms as my skin crawled with the knowledge, *eww...worse than undead.*

“I also grabbed the reports from Scout Harding on my way by one of her camps. She says that bandits have taken up squatting in the Fortress the Wardens abandoned. Give me forty-eight hours Inquisitor and I will have more to tell you.”

Chuckling, I shook my head and held my hand out towards him glad that Cullen had sent this no-nonsense man to take charge of the keep.

“Deal, but only if you call me Fenlin, and drop the: *Your Worship, Your Holiness, Herald or Inquisitor,* crap.”

“Deal Fenlin and you should call me Rylen; Knight-Captain makes the mages twitchy.”

Laughing at how true the statement was, I showed him to his sleeping chambers. We had gone through all the quarters and gathering areas that were usable and placed frost runes on all the walls to keep the areas comfortable and left him to get settled.

*Darkspawn...I will see my first unanimated Darkspawn...not gross, not gross at all.*

“Yuck,” I mutter walking towards the makeshift kitchen area.
“We have built a bridge over the poison springs for you and your men to cross just outside of the keep. I believe the Darkspawn are coming from an old abandoned Tevinter prison, here,” he said pointing at a place on the map.

I stare at the map and nod my head in understanding before glancing at Cassandra who had become something of my Second in Command.

“What do you think,” I ask her.

Cassandra’s face was a mask of nothing as she studied the map.

“I think we have no option but to find where they are coming from and close the hole.”

“Okay then, let everyone know to gear up and prepare to leave. We are burning daylight sister,” she chuckled at my lame joke and I turned back to Rylen and held my hand out towards him.

“Keep the home fires burning Rylen, we will return when we are done.”

“At your order,” he nodded smiling and dwarfed my hand. “Be careful Fenlin.”

Cassandra and I walked down the steps together and she glanced at me curiously.

“Have you ever encountered Darkspawn before Fenlin?”

Shaking my head ‘no’, I glance up at her.

“Any advice you could give me would be greatly appreciated.”

Cassandra stopped and held my gaze, and I recognized that it was the hardened warrior that was looking back at me.

“Aim for the head, don’t let one get close enough to bite you and don’t swallow their blood.”

“Good to know got it.”

We continued down the steps and I went to my small room to gather my things while she went to inform everyone we were leaving.

Early afternoon we finally reached the entrance to the prison and noticed that the entrance had recently been renovated.

“I wonder who did this,” I mumble to myself. Taking a deep breath to calm my nerves we stepped onto the platform that resembled an elevator. My trembling was noticeable and Solas took my hand gently.

“Focus on me,” he said gently. My eyes held his as Bull lowered us down into the prison using the crank on the side.

My hand gripped his tightly as the lift swayed with the movement and I let out a small whimper and scrunched my eyes closed while my whole body tightened. The gentle hand lifting my chin was somewhat comforting, the soft growl of words in elven next to my ear made my pulse race.
“I have not forgotten our night in Val Royeaux.”

I snorted at his diversionary tactic, and it was working in more ways than one and smiled.

“Good, I am looking forward to a repeat performance,” I tell him my voice uneven and trembling with fear.

He ran his finger down my throat and heat pooled low while a dampness grew between my thighs.

*It is not fair that he can do this to me so easily.*

Jolting as the lift reached the ground; I open my eyes and see his smug smile.

“Ass,” I mumble quietly and his throaty chuckle sent my stomach fluttering like crazy. Shaking my head I got off the lift and looked around at the hallway we were now standing in.

“Stay alert,” I warn them and no sooner do the words leave my mouth we hear shrieking before three Darkspawn charge us from around a blind corner.

“Shit,” I yell pulling the fade closely around me and throwing a barrier over the group.

*Armored skeletons are what they were, armor, sword-wielding…and ducking suddenly at an arrow flying at my head, and arrow shooting skeletons – fucking great.*

With the Darkspawn finally killed, I stare at their corpses and give in to the urge to rub my arms.

“Damn they are unpleasant,” I mutter making Bull laugh.

“I'm guessing there's more?” Bull said aloud while scanning the hallway they had come from.

“The darkspawn will probably have the run of this place,” I answer him absently still staring at their corpses in disgust.

Sera looked at me with a snarky grin. “Never easy with you, is it?”

I chuckle and shake my head. “Who else would lead you on such exciting, and exotic adventures Sera?”

“We really must sit you down and explain what an ‘exotic vacation’ really is my dear. Your education on the matter is immensely lacking,” Dorian teased and I just smiled at him impishly.

We followed the long hallway and saw another group of Darkspawn around a tunnel entrance guarding it.

“There,” I tell them pointing at the hole. “That has to be the source of our Darkspawn’s entrance. We have to get that sealed.”

The fight was quickly over and Solas moved towards the mouth of the hole to collapse it in on itself.

“That should keep the Darkspawn at bay,” he said dusting his hands as if he had actually touched something.

“Those anyway, curious though, did you notice that the tunnel was opened from the outside? Someone was digging here.”

We continued further into the prison finding notes about old prisoners, vague Venatori activity.
“Of course, Venatori – they’ve been excavating. I bet breaking into Darkspawn tunnels wasn’t part of their plan,” I joke with them pocketing the notes.

“They’ll be holed up somewhere — if the darkspawn didn't get them,” Bull offered with a large smile. The ground suddenly shook and a loud roar could be heard echoing down the halls.

“What the hell was that?” My eyes darted around the chamber nervously.

_Could it be one of those Hurlock’s…the really big mofo's?_

We moved down another long hallway and heard the loud roar again. Bull reached to open a thick, heavy metal door and we found the source of the noise.

“A fucking giant?” I squeaked. Staring at the enormous creature with wide eyes, as it paced around looking for a way out of his confinement.

“Nothing is ever simple is it?” Cassandra said with disgust.

“Vints, darkspawn, and a giant? This is turning into a pretty good day!” Bull said excitedly.

Groaning, I rub my face and swallow the sudden fear lodged in my throat.

“Well, let’s get to work,” I tell them throwing a barrier over us and I watch as Cassandra and Bull take off to occupy the giant.

_I think I would like a day of normal…just once, please._

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Echo Back Canyon

Chapter Notes

- conversations in quotations and italics are meant to be understood as spoken in elven.

As always, you readers are wonderful!
This chapter is a bit longer than my usual but there is a lot going on and I don't feel so guilty for getting sick and not updating on my regular schedule.
Thanks for patience and understanding and happy reading.

Our camp was set up outside of the prison’s large entrance way surrounded by strong stone walls that led out into the canyon. Cassandra pulled a map from her pack and sat next to me pointing to where she thought we were.

“I believe this is Echo Back Canyon. While we were exploring the region, we found great huge doors with markings similar to those on the doors leading into the prison but those doors we found could not be opened from that side.”

I handed her a bowl of stew as she set the map down and we ate in silence for a moment.

“Do you think we might find this, Servis, that the Venatori talked about?”

Cassandra nodded her head and put her spoon back in her bowl and wiped at her mouth with the back of her hand.

“If he is here in the Approach, then this is the only place left for him to hide.”

“Oh, I really do hope so Cassandra, I have a lot of aggressive questions to ask him,” I replied with a cheeky grin. Cassandra gave me a knowing smile and Bull, who had been listening to us from across the fire laughed.

Tonight I brought the memory of the camping area I went to as a child with my parents into my mind again. I focused on everything, the vivid colors of the flowers, the smell of the warm earth, and the feeling of heat as the sun graced my face. Creating my forest was simple for me and now it was a permanent place that spirits kept alive, not unlike Wisdom’s garden. Opening my eyes slowly, the sun-drenched the field of wildflowers and the warmth of it on my face made me smile.

Taking a deep, calming breath of the earthy scents on the air, I hoped that Mythal would visit me as she did before. With a heavy sigh, I created a bench and plucked a flower before sitting down to twirled it between my fingers while I waited. It was not long before I felt the shift in the Fade and my head snapped up to glance around. It was not Solas, that much I knew and my eyes scanned the area until I saw her.

Standing at her approach, she gave me a pleasant smile that I returned nervously.
“Aneth era,” I offer in greeting.

“Aneth era lethal’lan, you have questions,” she offered with a calm appearance and I gestured for her to sit with me.

“I do if you are willing to answer some of them now.”

She smiled at me, folding her hands in her lap and nodded her head waiting for me to continue.

“Can you tell me who I was…before? How did I get to where I was only to be brought back here? What happened?”

My questions came out in a rush and I clasped my hands nervously together. Her soft, husky laughter surprised me. Mythal took a deep breath and then took my hands like a mother soothing a nervous child.

“You were my friend. My confidant and it was what you had to be that brought respect and jealousy from the other Evanuris.”

I gazed at her for a moment still feeling confused with her words and she ran her fingers over my vallis’lin lightly before she continued.

“Ma banal’ras,” she said softly holding my gaze. “Everyone knew I went nowhere without you. To see you, usually meant their death, and that fear is what brought many intrigues into the court. When you came to me at Abelas’ urgings, I was unsure if it was wise to single out a Sentinel for such a task, but he proved wise to bring you forward out of his ranks. He believed I needed protection, and I thought it foolish…at the time.”

She smiled at her memories and letting go of my hands, she looked out over the field.

“You were so young then, but so vibrant, full of life and confidence. You were bold, beyond your years. Bolder than a Sentinel had a right to be and this was what made me like you all the more. Your intelligence and quick eye caught much, and angered many with your abilities.”

Patting my hand, she held my gaze for a moment searching my face for only she knew what, and it made my stomach knot.

“That same night you told me, I sent for him to teach you,” she chuckled and gave me a playful smile. “You were quite unhappy with my decision as I recall. You told me he was conceited and full of himself, and I could not disagree with you. My brother was and still is,” she said simply and we shared a moment of laughter.

“In the end, you listened to reason and agreed to allow him to teach you. For many years thereafter he trained you secretly. It was my daughter, Andruil, that finally saw you two together. She…” she sighed heavily and her lips turned down forming a small frown. “She wanted Fen’Harel for herself,
and did not like the closeness you two shared.”

She shook her head slightly angry and gazed out over the sun-filled field of flowers again.

“I should have foreseen what she would do in her jealousy, but I was blind to my daughter’s machinations. No mother wants to believe their child could be so cruel or vicious, and in that, I failed you and fated you to what happened. Andruil found a way to remove you from his attention, and please the other Evanuris who wanted you gone from my side. They all thought you too dangerous to remove themselves, and Andruil’s jealous plan gave them the means to be rid of you.”

Mythal sighed heavily and shook her head at her memories.

“On the day that he came to me to request that you be elevated to an Evanuris was the day Andruil chose to strike in her anger. His reasons for your elevation were sound and I was in agreement. He then informed me that he wanted you as his bond mate and that you were agreeable. I had known you two had become very close over the years and I thought it time for my brother to finally shed his Sentinel Wolf duties. When Andruil overheard him tell me he wanted to take you as his mate, she became enraged.”

Shaking her head, her eyes closed, and then slowly opened to look at me and the hurt I saw lurking in the yellow depths was heartbreaking.

“I could not calm her, and she would not listen to reason. She challenged Fen’Harel angrily, and before he could accept, you stepped forward out of the shadows and accepted her challenge on his behalf,” sighing heavily she took my hands again. “I knew why you accepted her challenge in his place, and I did nothing.” She ran her fingers over my vallis’lin with a soft smile.

“In the end, your death only prolonged the inevitable. My brother grew angry and despondent with his loss of you, making it unsafe for anyone. He became the Dread Wolf, focussing on freeing the people that the other Evanuris gathered as worshipers. Without a word and using only his actions, he challenged all of them.”

Sighing she folded her hands in her lap and gazed at me.

“My daughter continued her pursuit of him thinking that with you out of the way, he would be eager to take her. She did not see that he grieved for the loss of you, and one night in my parlor she pushed him too far and he lost his temper. He took her ability to wield magic and pulled her own dagger that she used to kill you and stabbed her in the shoulder. It was not long after that night, that we devised a plan to free the people with his ability to manipulate the Fade and the veil was created, locking my children and my mate behind a Fade mirror so they couldn’t harm one of the people again. Afterwards, he went into uthenera not expecting to wake again and I wandered in my own grief with the heavy loss. He did not know what I had done with your spirit, nor did he know that our plan would be the end of our empire. This is why I brought you back lethal’lan, to keep him from rebuilding it and freeing the others it will only end in war and ruin. Now you know. I wanted to tell you before giving your memories back; I owed you that and so much more.”

Surprised with her confession having thought all this time that it was only Solas that had devised the plan to create the veil, she laid her hand on my forehead and every memory that was taken was returned. I was prepared for pain and felt none, it was like she unlocked a place they were hidden and my mind startlingly flooded with memories.

A heat blossomed in my chest that restored the spirit of my former self to me and it was scary and odd to feel this immense power running through my veins. I had never realized the difference not having that small piece of myself was until it was returned. My eyes grew wide with understanding
and reaching out, I hugged her knowing she had not only restored me to my former self but released me from my duty to her and ascending me. Lithe arms wrapped around me as silent tears ran down my face.

“Ar lasa mala revas ha falon,” she whispered next to my ear.

“Ma serannas lethal’lan,” I replied my voice thick with emotion.

My head quickly came up with the unexpected, menacing shudder of the Fade around us and my eyes darted around my small field until I found him standing in the treeline.

*Solas*

“What have you done?”

The deep, ominous timber of his voice echoed around us sending shivers of apprehension running down my spine. Mythal patted my shoulder before letting me go to stand and face her brother. His body was rigid with anger, and his aura pushed and stretched the Fade around him. It was astonishing to feel the intense power radiate from him and it was scary as fucking hell.

“Only returned what was rightfully her's lethal'lin,” Mythal answered him calmly.

His eyes glared at her menacingly and I moved to stand in front of her bringing his attention to me.

“What's done is done, please just listen.”

“What have you done?” His eyes held accusation and I shook my head quickly.

“Nothing, I have done nothing,” my voice pleaded.

My gaze held his steadily while he appeared to digest my words and looked back to Mythal.

“Again, I ask you lethal'lan, what have you done?” His tone held a wealth of threat.

“Only returned what my daughter took from me and from you.”

He looked at me and then her angrily.

“This joke is a cruel one, even for you,” he spat.

Mythal crossed her arms and gazed at him patiently.

“Were you so changed with your sorrow that you did not take note of Falon’din’s anger when he could not find her spirit to lead to the beyond? You yourself could not find it either.”

His eyes suddenly dashed to mine and held them captive. I could see he didn’t believe her and a small part of my heart cracked at the cold look now focused on me.

“If it is true then perhaps you will indulge me with something that only Assan would know.”

I cleared my throat and squared my shoulders under his angry, heavy stare. I prepared to be tested, though I had hoped he wouldn’t look at me like I was the one who betrayed him.

“The scar you have on your forehead,” I started cautiously and cleared my throat again. “You told me the story of how you got it by the river outside your home one night after we had drunk a bottle of Alendrian wine. You told me that you got it when you removed your own vallis’lin before your
I observed the harsh expression slowly soften and the coldness in his eyes fade. I knew he realized then that I was telling him the truth because only I knew how he had gotten it.

“This can’t be possible…how?” His voice full of disbelief and then he looked at Mythal and his gaze narrowed.

“You brought her back from wherever you sent her…why? For what purpose?”

His tone was cold, clipped and I could feel the Fade changing around us with his anger. My sunny sky was turning ominous and grey with streaks of lightning. The flowers in the field were wilted, his power over the Fade was frightening.

“Are you not even going to take a moment to be pleased she has returned us, Fen’Harel?” Mythal chastised him her tone now sounding slightly angry as well.

His body rigid with anger, his aura pulsing with betrayal and hurt, and I could do nothing to console him. I stood watching him for a moment longer and gently shook my head reminded of Cole’s words even as my heart hurt that he wouldn’t or couldn’t look at me. *It will take time for him, and that is if he can reconcile what was done.* I gazed at him and felt Mythal’s hand on my shoulder trying to bring me comfort.

“It doesn’t matter; I will leave you two to talk alone. I am sure he has questions and mine have been answered.”

My thoughts were different now, there was a part of me that was angry and hurt at his reaction, and then there was the other part that accepted it and it did not hurt as much. This whole part of having two different sets of memories was going to be a bitch to put together. I walked away without a backward glance and took the path towards Wisdom’s garden leaving the two alone.

*****

When I awoke it was early and I left him and our tent to start some breakfast. Even as he slept I could feel his anger pulsing at me through his aura. I stoked the fire before preparing a pot of oatmeal and stared at the flames absently. It was difficult to combine the memories of who I was before and who I am now. Some of it was just really confusing.

I poured the oats in and stirred it for a moment before placing the cover on it. I dropped my face into my hands and breathed. My thoughts flashed to his sudden understanding, yet he hadn’t even smiled or shown any emotion except anger.

“He is not angry at you; he hurts by what happened.”

I lifted my head and gazed at Cole for a moment and then shook my head.

“Of course, because how he feels and what happened to him is what is important?”

I couldn’t keep the anger out of my voice and I shook my head apologetically.

“I’m sorry Cole, I’m afraid I am not good company this morning.”

Cole’s unexpected hug was exactly what I needed and I wrapped my arms around him.

“It is good you are you now,” he said quietly and I snorted a small laugh. Moving away from his
shoulder rubbing the tears from my face and went back to stirring the breakfast.

“Thank you, Cole.”

By mid-afternoon, we found Servis’ hideout in an abandoned fort. I don’t think you could have swung a dead rat without hitting a Venatori – they were everywhere. Glancing at Cole, he briefly nodded and went to find out exactly how much resistance there was. Solas was standing next to me, his aura hesitantly touching mine and I was annoyed. He had been doing that since waking up and I began to walk away from him only to be stopped by his grip on my hand.

“Will you be angry with me now?” His question surprised me and I finally just shook my head.

“For now I am irritated and exasperated, but I will get over that. You never promised me that loving you would be easy, I guess I just didn’t count on how hard it would actually be,” I told him and pulled my hand from his grip. Ignoring his surprised look, I turned towards Cole as he came towards us. I was grateful for the interruption because I didn’t want to get into it with him now.

“Twelve on the walkways, eight in a tunnel and ten more counting Servis up there,” he said pointing to a narrow platform.

Thirty of them… I looked at Cassandra.

“Well, more than what we would like but still doable.”

My matter of fact tone slightly surprised Cassandra and I glanced at everyone.

“Sera, Cole, Varric, Dorian – focus on the ones on the walkways above us. Bull, you and I will take care of the small group in the tunnel. I want to get them in the middle and then I will collapse it on them,” his smile was pleased with the idea and I turned towards Cassandra.

“You and Solas will head for Servis and his minions. Once we have the tunnel collapsed, we will meet up with you. With luck, Servis will be too scared he won’t have a chance to get away.”

Cassandra nodded her head and Solas glanced at me for a moment before following after her. Ignoring the sudden plummet in my stomach at his questioning look, I pushed it away for now and focused on Bull.

“Bull, will you trust me?”

He looked at me surprised and then quickly answered.

“Sure, why do you ask?”

“Because we are going to be invisible to them for a moment; take my hand, when I let it go they will see us,” I told him. Bull slightly hesitated before placing his hand on mine. Smiling at him, I pulled my staff from my back and wrapped the fade tightly around us as I spoke softly the ancient spell that won me the name banal’ras and led him towards the mouth of the cave.

Everything went as planned and everyone found themselves on the small platform fighting Servis’ guards. Bull grabbed a Venatori warrior and threw him over the wall of the old fort, his scream sounded like one of those canned screams you would hear in the action movies. When all of his
guards had fallen, Servis dropped to his knees pleading for mercy.

“Please, I will tell you what you want…anything, just don’t kill me.”

“Can I kill him,” Sera asked me quickly with her bow pulled tightly and I shook my head placing my hand on hers lowering her bow.

“No”

“Please? Just a little bit?”

I snorted and gave her a half smile still shaking my head.

“No Sera, I want to know everything he knows,” I told her my tone cold as I stared at the begging Magister who flinched.

Bull and Cassandra chuckled as they hefted the mage to his feet.

“Give him a little Magebane; I don’t want him getting away anytime soon.”

Dorian flinched out of the corner of my eye and I gazed at him.

“Is there a problem, Dorian?”

“No, but it is a very painful method of control when we have other means. Rendering a mage from his magic is…”

“Good then,” I said coolly interrupting Dorian. “He can begin atoning for all the slaves that died working for him while he ran away to hide.”

Ignoring his raised eyebrow at me with my words, not to mention the surprised looks on the other’s faces at my cold statement, I rubbed my face. My attitude was not completely my own and it was weird to suddenly feel this way.

“I will meet you guys back at camp,” I tell them needing some time to think.

Turning on my heel I walked away from them to gather my wits about me and got just outside the fort when his aura slid over mine questioningly. Letting out a sigh knowing I couldn’t shut him out, nor did I want to, I answered his unspoken request and waited for him to fall into step with me.

“It will take time for you to reconcile who you are now and who you were,” he advised.

“I know there will be more moments like this one where everyone will look at me odd.” I let out a sigh and glance up at him. “How long will it take for you to reconcile the changes in me and not look at me as they do? Do you still see me or someone else now?” Shrugging my shoulders I began walking again and he fell into step next to me.

“Don’t be inane, Fenlin. I see the woman I fell in love with two years ago, who unexpectedly happens to be of the same spirit of the woman I fell in love with in Arlathan. I loved her and then she was taken from me. When I met you, I reconciled my confused feelings of suddenly finding myself whole again when I did not think it possible. The fact that you are one and the same, only confirms what we knew then and that was our love truly was for forever.”

I glance at him with a small smile, feeling relieved.

“Now will you tell me why? Why you did it? Andruil was of no concern to me.”
I snorted and gave him a lopsided smile.

“I know she was of no concern and that is why I did it. She was Mythal’s daughter and you are my heart. If you would have struck her down, Mythal would have never forgiven you and the other Evanuris would have gotten what they wanted. Andruil knew exactly what she was doing, either way, she would have won and I couldn’t abide that, not at the expense of you and the people. They needed you,” I said simply and he stopped walking. I gazed up at him and his face is a sea of astonishment that swiftly changed to furious rage. This I knew was coming when he understood what had made me step forward that day and I only hoped I was ready for it.

“I needed you,” he growled at me angrily.

“I needed you too, but the end is never truly an end, but a beginning.”

He threw his hands up at me and his frustration rolled off of him in waves.

“That beginning caused the complete downfall of our empire, our people,” he replied angrily.

“Our empire was already falling, what you and Mythal accomplished only brought a swift death to an already decaying empire. The people, albeit changed, are still the people they can be taught it only takes patience and time. I did what I had to, to save you and save them, is that not enough?”

I shook my head at his anger with me, hoping that he would soon find a way past it and started walking towards camp again. His hand shot out and grabbed my wrist stopping me and my own anger finally snapped. His pity party for one was about to take a serious nosedive and I stuck my finger into his chest angrily.

“Do you think I chose death over you easily? Would it ease your mind if you knew that the last thoughts I had were of you? Because they were! At that moment before Andruil struck, I hated, I hated everything the Evanuris were. I hated what she was taking from me because of her selfish desire for you. I hated Mythal for letting her pride get in the way and allow her daughter do it. But you know what I hated the most?” I said with a humorless laugh. “I hated being bound. Bound and unable to shove that dagger into that bitch’s heart like she did mine.” My heart was racing with anger and adrenaline. He had to know that the choice was not one that I would willingly choose if there was another way.

Solas grabbed my shoulders turning me towards him. His stormy blue eyes searched mine for a long moment. I had not expected him to have any answers for my angry rant and I glanced away from his tender gaze and took a calming breath.

“What’s done is done and we can’t undo the past, we can only go forward,” I tell him gently before slipping from his grasp.
Solas stared at the ceiling of his tent as her words replayed through his mind.

*Would it ease your mind if you knew that the last thoughts I had were of you? Because they were!*

Those words made his heart ache. She had done it for him and the people.

They would arrive in Skyhold soon and for over a week she had not spoken to him, and her anger with him was not misplaced. He had been less than pleased to find out what Mythal had done. In the years that followed her death, not once had his sister confided in him the whereabouts of Assan’s spirit. She had done nothing to curb Andruil’s pursuit of him; it was only after the threat of death, did she finally stop.

Instead, his sister had sent Assan’s spirit to be reborn in another realm, over and over again until such time that she needed her. It astounded him how Fenlin could not still have hatred for his sister’s audacity to play with her life in such a manner, he knew he did right now.

However, Mythal was not wrong, he wouldn’t have helped her by creating the Veil to lock the others away had Assan been alive. He had been completely focused on her ascension and freeing the people. Had she told him what would happen with its creation, Assan’s death would have mattered little; he would have told her no. With his focus on her death and his need for revenge against the others, he had allowed the manipulation to happen.

Rubbing his face in frustration, he needed to focus on what he would do now. Mythal bringing Fenlin here was not a happenstance. Her interruption of Corypheus’ plan and absorbing his orb was not a mere coincidence either. He knew Mythal well enough to know she had plans, and her reasons were her own – for now anyway. Sighing heavily, his suspicions leaned towards believing half of what his sister had told him as truth, and the other half a lie.

She had returned Fenlin’s memories of her time as Assan, and ascended her to an Evanuris as was her rightful place especially after what she had done. This action resulted in releasing Fenlin from her duty to her, which made him breath easier. Her urging him to finally take his mate, and then warning him that he would need her for the coming battle, gave him pause. A battle there would be, but what else did his sister see that she would not share?

Solas threw his arm over his eyes and let out another heavy sigh. For the second time in his entire long existence he did not care about his duty to the people, what he cared about was obtaining Fenlin’s forgiveness. He could not continue to endure her silence. If he had learned anything in thirteen hundred years since she was taken from him, second chances of this magnitude did not come often.
The loud horns announced their arrival and I steered Etta towards the barns. I was exhausted, and all I wanted was a hot bath and lots of sleep. Not having Solas sleeping next to me made sleeping more difficult than I had imagined, and two hours a night was not cutting it. Covering a yawn, I slipped out of the saddle and jumped to the ground. Removing my pack and dropping it, I started removing Etta's tack. Master Dennett came over and laid his hand on mine stopping my actions.

“Girl, you look done in. Go, get yourself some rest and leave Etta to me,” he offered.

“I am going to take you up on that Master Dennett, thank you.”

I gave him a tired smile, patting his arm and picking up my pack, I left the barn. Taking the back entrance into the castle I passed the dining hall, ignoring the warded door and took the stairs to the main hall. Josephine and Leliana caught me trying to sneak past the group gathered in the hall and stopped me quickly.

“We understand that you’re tired, Inquisitor and we only need a moment,” Josephine said quickly.

*Son of a…ugh!*

I followed them to Josephine’s office and sat in the nearest chair.

“Oh, what is the problem?”

Josephine looked nervously around before finally looking at me.

“It is about Duke Gaspard,” she started and my body stiffened at the name.

“What about him,” I ask sounding annoyed and bored.

“He has not left Skyhold, Inquisitor,” Josephine informed me with a worried expression.

My eyebrow rose with tired surprise.

*I’ve been gone for almost two months…seriously?*

“It appears that your last encounter did not encourage him to leave like you had hoped,” Leliana teased.

I rubbed my face and gave a tired sigh.

*Just what I did not need today…this, oh well, fuck it.*

“Okay”

My simple answer surprised both of them. Grabbing up my pack, I stood. Leliana and Josephine gave each other worried glances before focusing on my clear movements to leave.

“Is there anything you would like me to do, Inquisitor?” Josephine asked before I could escape.

I shook my head and gave them both another tired smile.

“No Josephine, I am sure you have already done all that you can. You let me deal with the Duke.”

I left her office and went to find Solas. First of all, I needed sleep – badly, and second of all, I needed him - just as badly. I was tired of all the distance, it was time for us to figure it out and move forward if we could. Crossing the main hall towards the Rotunda, I saw Gaspard stand up from his chair in
the corner when I reached the door. Adjusting my pack on my shoulder, I let out another tired sigh before pushing the door open. My heart skipped a beat at the sight of him moving things around on his desk and I closed the door behind me walking into the room.

“Solas,” my voice sounds slightly shaky as I say his name and I wished it didn't.

He turned to look at me as I approached and I stopped right in front of him feeling suddenly nervous.

“Will you…”

“There you are my lady,” Gaspard interrupted and I closed my eyes in annoyance dropping my head.

The sudden pulsing of Solas’ aura told me that Gaspard had finally snapped the ancient’s last nerve. Opening my eyes to look at him, his blue gaze was steely focused on Gaspard.

“I need a fucking vacation,” I mumble to myself before turning to address the Duke.

“Grand Duke, I am surprised you are still here. Surely your business in Skyhold has been concluded?” I said with false pleasantness.

“It has not. I am looking forward to the continuation of our conversation.”

My eyebrow rose at him not even trying to mask my extreme dislike for the man.

I am too tired for this shit.

Turning back towards Solas, I placed my hand on his arm to get his attention. His eyes glanced down at mine with a coldness that made me shiver and I give him a tender smile.

“All this distance between you and me is painful. I miss you, want you, and I can’t sleep without you, will you please stay with me in my room from now on?”

His eyes held surprise with my honesty before warming at my words while we gazed into each other’s eyes. Large sounds of sputtering, and throat clearing came from Gaspard behind me, and I ignored them focusing on my goal…which was Solas.

“I was a fool vhenan, and it has hurt me as well. I would like nothing more than to end this distance and have you in my arms once again,” he said running his finger lightly over my cheek and I smiled grabbing his hand.

“Then come on, I need more than two hours of sleep,” I inform him as he let me pull him behind me.

“Perchance we shall speak later then Inquisitor,” Gaspard offered unwilling to accept his loss as we began walking by him.

Dorian was just coming down the stairs from the library with a cat that ate the canary grin on his face and I knew this little moment would be spread so quickly around Skyhold that by the time it got back to me I would be either married, pregnant or Gaspard was challenged to a duel or something equally stupid by Solas.

Solas stopped and glanced at the Duke angrily as I stood next to him with my fingers laced tightly within his and bit my lower lip. With Assan’s memories, I knew the levels of anger Solas could reach if he were continuously challenged and the Duke was hitting on his last level. I glanced at Dorian nervously and caught his quick wink and larger grin as he leaned against the doorframe with his arms crossed waiting to watch the show.
“Perhaps Grand Duke, you do not understand so I shall simply explain it to you. The Inquisitor is unable to engage in further dialogue with any suitors, worthy or not, as she has already chosen. It is understandable that this is a very difficult notion to appreciate but I must regrettably inform you that it is not you, Grand Duke, she has chosen. Perhaps, that will clear any misunderstandings you might have.”

Gaspard’s face was cold and unmoving at Solas’ words.

I smile up at him impishly and tug him along behind me out of the Rotunda hearing Dorian’s loud laughter and applause echo out the door behind us. We dodged nobles, ignored curious looks at our clasped hands before finally reaching the door leading to my room. Solas opened it not letting go of my hand and I slid under his arm tugging him along behind me.

“I am totally going to sleep on you, and I really do mean that literally, for eight hours and then have my way with you,” I tell him as we started up the stairs to my room after warding the door.

Solas laughed from behind me and swatted my ass making me giggle as he followed me up the stairs.

“I will hold you to that,” he growled.

Cresting the top of my steps I drop my pack and began peeling layers off.

“I’m gonna run a bath, wanna join me?” Glancing at him over my shoulder his eyes held mine steadily hinting at a quiet hunger hidden in the blue depths.

“I would,” he said with a wolfish smile pulling his tunic over his head and I chuckled heading to the bathroom to start our bath.

*****

The war room was silent as everyone absorbed the information I learned in the Western Approach.

“Blood magic?” Cullen commented uncomfortably.

“Yes, according to Stroud, Warden-Commander Clarel is under the impression that it will stop the Blight.”

“By binding demons through blood magic…has she lost her mind?” His tone of voice conveyed his astonishment.

I shrugged and folded my arms.

“I agree with you Cullen, this is not only ridiculous it is reckless, and it so happens that her foolishness is enslaving Warden Mages to Corypheus. Right now we can’t lose sight of the real issue. Erimond said what they were doing at the Tevinter Ritual Tower was a test. Hawke and Stroud confirmed that the Wardens are gathering at Adamant Fortress and building a demon army, one that Corypheus will use to conquer the world.”

Leliana unfolded her arms and leaned over the table studying the map.

“I will gather information on the fortress. Perhaps there are weaknesses, tunnels, areas that we can exploit.”

“Good, from what Stroud told me the fortress was built before the Second Blight. There’s got to be some cracks in that building somewhere since it has been abandoned for some time.”
“In the meantime, I will begin readying our men and making preparations for the march across Orlais,” Cullen offered.

Josephine cleared her throat and I glanced from Cullen to her.

“Inquisitor…” she began and my eyebrow rose knowing that when she started with clearing her throat followed by the title it was not going to be a pleasant conversation.

“There are rumors circulating around Skyhold that Solas has moved into your quarters?”

I folded my arms and took a calming breath.

*I hate that I have no fucking privacy anymore.*

“They are not rumors Josephine, it is a fact. Solas is living in my quarters…with me.”

Josephine blushed while Cullen and Leliana gave each other a knowing look.

“What about getting married, Inquisitor? It will appear that you do not take the sanctity of marriage seriously, not to mention all the offers that come in daily for your hand. Being the Herald of Andraste this will appear…”

I held up my hand and Josephine stopped, and I gave her a calm smile with understanding.

“I know you only have my best interest at heart Josephine and it appears I have made your job difficult once again, so let me lighten your burden. First and foremost, you guys have promoted the idea of me being this Herald, not I, and secondly, I am an elf.” I gesture towards myself and see her look of annoyance cross her features before I continue. “Solas is also an elf, we are not Andrastian, so there will be no large wedding, with hundreds of noble pricks eating our food, drinking our wine, and taking up space.”

Cullen covered his mouth as he chuckled.

“But Inquisitor…”

“Ah, ah,” I cut in with my hand up.

“Solas and I take our commitment to each other seriously, that is all that matters to me, not what the Orlesian nobility think. If at any time, we choose to validate that commitment with a traditional Bonding Ceremony then you will know. Why will you know you may ask? Well, it is because only my friends may attend. I will make my own invitations, and I will hand deliver each one. Lucky for me, you all live here.”

Josephine looked crestfallen at the idea of there not being a large wedding for her to plan, and I had to hide my own smile.

*I really do love these people.*

“Now to address the suitor issue, letters asking for this that or the next body part off of me, I will leave it in your capable hands to politely refuse their offers. If I find one more of those letters on my desk, I am going to start drawing rude gestures on return correspondence with my answer. Any suitors that come to Skyhold after they have been told no, I will allow Solas to take care of them however he sees fit. So I do suggest we get Gaspard out of Skyhold immediately if he has not left yet. Now is there anything else?”
Josephine shook her head and stared at the table and I finally allowed myself to laugh.

“Josephine, you are truly the best Ambassador one could ask for. Without you, I would be running around telling every noble to take a long walk off a short bridge.”

She nodded her head and smiled at me before straitening her clipboard always full of notes.

“Alright, I am going to try and catch up with the piles of paperwork on my desk if there is nothing else you need.”

“Would you like me to have lunch sent up, Inquisitor?” Josephine questioned me before I could open the door.

“No, I’ll need to leave my room at some point, Josephine.”

Opening the door I waved at everyone before I left.

Wedding…Sanctity of Marriage…pfft – never going to happen.

Lost in my thoughts, I never noticed the cloaked man walking towards me as I crossed the main hall.

“Excuse me, are you the Inquisitor?”

I turn at the sound of a deep voice and notice the cloak hid the man’s features from view. The overly large greatsword on his back was bigger than me and he was wearing black, leather traveling armor. Swallowing a lump of nervousness, I prepared to be attacked in the middle of my main hall.

“I am, and you are?” I say with my calmest voice.

The man pushed the hood of his cloak back exposing shocking white hair held back by a leather tie, long pointed elven ears, deeply tanned skin, sharp green eyes and white tattooing that covered his chin and down his throat. Something about him was very familiar, and I was wracking my brain trying to place him.

“My name is Fenris; I received a letter from Varric Tethras telling me that I might find Hawke here.”

Shit…Fenris. Another man my graphics totally fucked.

Relaxing my posture, I held out my hand towards him with a welcoming smile.

“If she isn’t going to be glad to see you,” I tell him slightly chuckling at his surprised look.

“She…told you about me?” The hesitance in his voice was adorable.

“Yes, she did” I answered simply and gestured for him to follow me. “I’ll show you where her room is and if she isn’t there than she is probably with Varric in the Tavern. Should I have Josephine set you up with your own room, or will you be apologizing for being stubborn and staying with Hawke?”

I wanted to burst out laughing at how fast his head turned towards me. His blush of embarrassment and the slight smirk was enough to tell me he would be apologizing.

“Well, if the apology doesn’t work, Varric has a spot over the tavern.”

He gave me a brief nod before climbing the steps to the rooms that overlooked the garden. Walking a little way’s down the open hallway, we stopped at the third door and I knocked. There were sounds
of movement and disgruntled sounds from behind the door when suddenly it was yanked open.

“I’m going to kill you Varric,” she growled shoving at the disheveled dark chestnut brown hair out of her face.

“Wrong little person my dear, but I did bring you a visitor.”

Hawke's mouth fell open and she gaped at Fenris. I couldn't hide the understanding smile and I slowly backed away.

Damn, they are just too cute; I am totally going to draw this later.

“I’ll just leave you two, to figure it out then,” I tell them leaving them in the open hallway staring at each other.

Walking back down the steps I headed for my room to get to the mounds of paperwork.

If I'm lucky, maybe I get some time with Solas this afternoon.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
The Calm Before The Storm

Chapter Notes

HOLY BAT NUGGETS - SIXTY CHAPTERS!

Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading, comments, and support - Y’all are awesome!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I need a bloody secretary, there is no end to this fucking pile,” I mumbled cursing at the stacks of correspondence while shuffling more of the papers around my desk.

My eyes drew towards the stairway as his aura softly brushed against mine in a form of greeting before he opened the door. The little action never ceased to make me smile when he did it – which was all the time. Glancing back at the papers I feel the soft push of magic as he wards the door and glance towards the stairs. His head slowly peaks over the railing and I can’t help it, but my heart starts beating just a tick faster. Solas crested the top stair holding a large covered tray and I set the papers in my hand down and moved to help him.

Clearing the papers from the coffee table in front of the fireplace, he placed the tray down.

“You have wonderful timing. I was just about to take a break,” I tell him smiling. His answering look told me that I was late.

“Josephine asked that I bring this up when you didn’t come down for lunch.”

I looked at him surprised and then glanced at the large timepiece in the corner.

It can’t be that far past lunch.

“Shit”

Rubbing my face in annoyance, it was almost three o’clock. Glancing at all the paperwork still on my desk I suddenly felt like I had accomplished nothing.

“It’s not as if that shit was all that interesting either, I don’t even think I made a dent in it,” I grumble.

Solas wrapped his arms around my waist and turned me towards him.

“Perhaps you will allow me to help you,” he offered.

I looked up at him with a large smile suddenly feeling much better about not making much progress.

“Only after you have greeted me first handsome.”

He smiled at my teasing and bent his head pressing his lips to mine in our regular greeting.

“Mmm, I think I am going to like having you as a roommate.”

His hands slid over my hips and pulled me just that little bit closer that made my heart race all the
more and my breath stumbled while he nibbled at my neck.

“I am finding benefits with this arrangement as well,” he murmured against the skin just behind my ear.

Finally lifting his head after setting me on an internal meltdown, he stole one more kiss before gesturing towards the tray of food.

“Lunch first vhenan, you did not eat breakfast as well if I recall.”

I raise my eyebrow at him and snort.

“Morning meeting ran long, besides, why are you suddenly keeping track of my eating habits, wolf?”

His deep chuckle sent a shiver of desire curling through my bloodstream to go with the rest of my tumultuous hormones and I picked up a piece of cheese to occupy my hands that always wanted to touch him.

“I will continue to do so until you gain back the weight you lost while in the Western Approach,” he chastised and picked up his own lunch.

I glance down at myself not really seeing what the big deal was.

Well, okay – my clothes are a bit baggier than usual, but I don’t think I’ve lost that much.

I look at our lunch made of boiled leeks, chicken and chunks of apple made into a stew. Taking a bite, my tongue exploded with the flavors as I chewed. Now I was totally occupied with thinking about what he said while trying to enjoy my lunch.

“I don’t think I’ve lost that much weight that you should be concerned with my eating habits,” I point out taking another bite.

Solas let out a heavy sigh that clearly stated he was not in agreement with my opinion and placed his bowl down to look at me.

“Clearly you do not see what I or any of the others do,” he said leaning back on the couch and I raised my eyebrow at him.

“I have observed that when you are worried or engaged in something that occupies most of your time, you completely stop taking proper care of yourself. You do not take time for yourself, vhenan; you are continually busy, even when we are traveling. I am not the only one who has witnessed this behavior with you.”

Leaning forward again, he picked his bowl back up and took a bite while I thought about what he said and finally shrugged.

“It is how I have always been, and I would love to take a vacation but there is no time for it. Besides, it’s not like I can just up and ignore my responsibilities so don’t worry about it. Everything always evens back out eventually,” I offer with an impish smile before shoving another bite of stew in my mouth.

Solas snorted, and I gaped at him in surprise. I don’t think I have ever heard him give an honest to goodness snort before.
“Perhaps you will allow me to worry about you a little,” he offered, reaching out to touch my cheek with a lopsided smile.

The sight of that smile always did things to me; things like making me forget what the hell I was talking about. I began to chuckle realizing he knew how I reacted to him and was using it to persuade me.

“I see what you’re doing, and it is not right, but it is totally working,” I tease and see his eyes glitter with mischief.

“Good,” he said and gestured for me to go back to eating.

Setting the bowl down on the table, I flop back into the couch and rub my full belly with a groan. Solas laughed and pulled me onto his lap, turning to lie down on the couch. I curled into his side quite content to just lay there while he played with my hair.

*I could definitely make a habit out of this. Eat – pass out on this gorgeous man for a cuddle nap.*

“I have been thinking about something you said earlier.”

The rumble of his voice against my cheek was soothing while my fingers played with the leather of his pendant.

“Mmm, what part would that be?”

“You said you would like to take a vacation but you did not see any time for such a thing. Perhaps there is,” he said simply.

Raising my head to look at him, I propped my chin on his chest.

“And where do you see this time?”

Solas slid a lock of hair behind my ear before caressing my cheek.

“We are not leaving for Adamant for a few weeks, conceivably this would be a perfect opportunity for you to take a moment, especially before a battle. No one would begrudge you the need for a little time since you have worked tirelessly for two years.”

I chuckle and lay my head back down on his chest to listen to the strong metronome of his heartbeat.

“Have you not seen the paperwork on my desk that I still need to get caught up on? I love the idea of taking a few days for me, Solas, especially with you but there really isn’t any time for it.”

He lifted my face up to look at him and brushed his lips against mine, gently – persuasively.

“There is time, vhenan, let me worry about the details. You just be ready to leave tomorrow.”

I let out a small sigh as my resolve to be an adult was shot all to hell by the softest touch of his lips. Opening my eyes slowly, I could see in his blue gaze that this getaway was something he really wanted.

“Okay, sweet talker, you got yourself a deal.”

His answering smile and sporadic kisses on my face made me giggle as he pulled me up against his
Solas’ fingers tighten behind his back as he kept his calm, patient mask in place while listening to Lady Josephine.

“This is an inopportune time, Master Solas. She still needs to sentence the Venatori that she brought back from the Approach, and with our preparations for Adamant, it would not be wise for the Inquisitor to leave right now.”

“I would disagree, Ambassador; it is the perfect time for her to take a few days for herself. It is quite obvious that she cannot get any rest here, and the battle to come will need all her focus. You, yourself have pointed out her unhealthy appearance since returning from the Approach.”

Josephine sat in her chair behind her desk staring at Solas who had refused to sit. She mentally counted to ten and tented her fingers together.

“I sympathize with your concern, Master Solas; her responsibilities do tend to take up much…”

Solas couldn’t hold it back anymore and a low groan of frustration interrupted Josephine.

“She rarely eats, she barely sleeps and she works tirelessly to make sure that every one of her advisers and the inner circle does not feel overwhelmed by their duties. She has no staff to take care of the trivial matters like you, yourself. If she continues down this path, Ambassador, she will be ill and unable to do her job at all.”

Josephine held his gaze for a moment taken aback by his obvious exasperation and shook her head again.

“I will see to getting her an assistant, Master Solas, but maybe after Adamant, it would be best…” she began again and it was the first time she had seen Master Solas become visibly angry and stopped talking.

“I will not take any more of your time, Ambassador. I came to inform you that she is leaving Skyhold for a few days starting tomorrow, not to obtain your permission.”

Turning on his heel, he left Lady Josephine sputtering at his back as he opened the door and left.

Josephine stared at the empty doorway for a moment in silent shock. She had never experienced the quiet elven man with such wonderful manners unmistakably lose his temper.

Solas continued through the main hall to advise the Commander and the Spymaster of the Inquisitor’s departure and prepared himself for more resistance from her counsel. If anything, it only strengthened his purpose in getting Fenlin out of Skyhold for a few days if just to get her away from that damnable pile of papers.

*****

The sun was just peaking over the snowcaps of the mountains when we left Skyhold on the back of a Hart. He was a beautiful dark black with kind, soft chocolate brown eyes. His horns were immense
as they stretched easily more than four feet across the animals head. I had never ridden one before even by Assan’s memories, but I knew we had received one from Clan Lavellan for the Inquisitions assistance with Wycome.

I also had not ridden bareback since I was twelve, but Solas had picked me up and set me on the large animal handing me the bed role and then hopped on behind me with a gracefulness I was sure I did not have. He snuggled in behind me and wrapped one of his hands into the animals main.

“Don’t we need at least reins?”

The soft rumble of his laughter behind me sent butterflies fluttering.

“No, the animal is adept to feeling the tension of the rider’s legs for direction. It is also offensive to the noble creatures to use such a confinement on them as they are not like common horses. These animals chose to allow a rider or not, it is not negotiable and cannot be forced.”

With his arms around me, I was thankful for the heat and the stability he offered with his chest against my back and his legs against mine as we started off in the early morning. The sound of the animal’s hooves over the bridge was a steady drumbeat that signified freedom. If even for a few days, I would be free of responsibility and paperwork. We had everything we needed for our short trip jammed into the pack on his back and shortly, I found myself enjoying the play of early morning sun over the snowcapped mountains while Solas held me back against him.

We rode for a couple of hours in silence with nothing but the sounds of hooves on the ground, and it was beyond relaxing to be with him like this. There was no pressure for conversation, no expectations and definitely no fucking work that I had to do. Taking a deep breath of the crisp mountain air, I felt myself completely relax against him and his lips pressed a gentle kiss to my temple.

“There you are,” he whispered in my ear making me smile.

“I didn’t know I had gone somewhere,” I teased him.

“Ah, not physically, no, but you have not been yourself for a time now.”

I tilt my head to look up at him curiously.

“Really? Even before Mythal gave me back Assan’s memories?”

Solas shook his head and kissed my forehead.

“It began before then. If I was to determine when it began, it would be shortly before the Winter Palace.”

Pulling my gaze away, I stare ahead realizing the time he was talking about. It was when I found the Eluvian and his means of leaving.

Do I tell him, I found it?

I had not been back to the room since, and everything in me wanted to confront him about his plans. Pushing the urge back like I did when I wanted to smash the mirror, I took a calm breath.

No – it is a getaway for just the two of us, this can be discussed later…much later.

Biting my tongue, I kept my mouth shut and shrugged indifferently gambling that he wouldn’t catch
on.

“Well, this little escape should make me right as rain then.”

He sighed against my back and that told me he wasn’t buying it and I bit my lower lip.

“Perhaps,” he finally said after a few heartbeats of silence.

We traveled through the mountain pass for hours before he directed the Hart into the forest. I was curious where he was taking us knowing only that we were not going very far, but that I would enjoy it. The man liked his secrets, and I did not mind in this case his silence but as we rode further into the woods, I was growing quite curious.

For another hour we rode before finally arriving at a small cave and Solas slid off. Holding his arms up to catch me, I slid off the animal. Glancing around at the area, there really wasn’t anything but a cave and some trees. Turning towards him with my eyebrow up, he chuckled and grabbed my hand.

“Trust me, vhenan,” he said pulling me towards the mouth of the cave.

“Well okay wolf, but this had better be worth me leaving a very large comfortable bed and a bathroom for.”

His answering laughter before kissing my hand and running his hand over the opening of the cave made me even more curious.

“Why is it warded?” I questioned suddenly very curious about where he had brought me.

Solas did not answer me but pulled me with him inside the cave. Flicking his hand out, torches simultaneously lit, illuminating the large area. The cave was much larger than one would imagine, and the more I took in, the more I began to realize that this cave was carved out magically into the mountain rock, it was not natural.

There was already a place for a fire and to the left of the fire, there were crates in a corner and the cave was immaculately clean. What amazed me more were the murals – they were everywhere on the cave walls. At the far back of the cave was another long shaft that was lit but I couldn’t see what was back there and really didn’t care as my eyes focused on the drawings. Fully curious now, I let go of his hand while he silently watched me walk towards one of the walls that held what appeared to be the largest mural of them all.

Each drawing depicted a red-haired woman, and each one held a Veil fire glyph next to it. More curious than I was previously, I conjured a ball of Veil fire to my hand and studied the glyph. The memory of standing in a large marble courtyard quickly played through my mind.

“Again, Assan – you are not trying.”

“I am trying wolf – you’re just an impossible ass.”

“Or perhaps you are an obstinate child.”
The memory ended and I stared at the red-haired woman in armor, training. *It was the first time I had actually met him, face to face not as Mithal's shadow.* Running my hand over it my mouth fell open with understanding. Glancing around the cave, there were many more of the woman. Covering my face, I couldn’t stop the tears from falling.

*They were of me…or Assan…or me.*

Moving to the next mural it was a picture of the night he presented his intentions to bond. I wiped at the tears running down my face, and read the glyph while running my hand over it as the memory washed over me.

"*Bond with me, Assan; accept me, as I will you?*"

"Do you really want that Fen'Harel?"

"I do."

"Then I would be a fool not to keep the other half of my heart."

Rubbing my face I didn’t think I could read anymore and took a shaky breath before turning towards him.

"Terasyl’an Te’las, is where I went when you were first killed. I…I needed a place to remember you that no one would discover."

I walked towards him and wrapped my arms around his middle.

"Oh, Solas…” was all I could get out and I hugged him tighter.

"I thought that perhaps while we were here, we could begin new paintings to add to our story."

He tilted my chin up and held my gaze. Running my hand over his smooth jaw, I gave him a watery smile.

"I think I would like that,” I choked out past the lump of emotion in my throat.

"Ar lath ma vhenan,” he whispered against my lips before kissing me senseless.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Terasyl’an Te’las - Skyhold
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
This cave held a treasure trove of little things that he had brought here. I rummaged through the first of four crates and found furs for bedding and pillows all beautifully preserved with magic against rot. Holding them to my face, I smelled elfroot, old parchment, crisp sharp ice – it smelled of him, and a small sigh of pleasure escaped before moving on. The next crate held painting materials and I touched the brushes reverently before moving onto the next crate and stopped.

This crate held some of my things or Assan’s things anyway from her time in Arlathan. Picking up a neatly folded shirt of forest green, I held it to my face and smelled. It smelt of Royal Elfroot, weapon oil, and Prophet’s Laurel. Smiling a little I placed the shirt down and pulled out a small set of exquisite Iron Bark daggers with Rowan wood engraved handles. Smiling a little again, I recalled that they were a gift from Mythal, and Assan kept them hidden in her sleeves. Placing them on top of the shirt, I glanced inside the crate at a bunch of little things.

These things were in his home.

That realization alone saddened me, but it was understandable that he would pack them up. There was a small wooden box that was previously hiding under the green shirt and I was about to reach for it when I was startled out of my rummaging. Solas sat down behind me and slipped his arms around my waist, propping his chin on my shoulder. It was one of those soft, ‘I need to cuddle,’ type of holds that melted me every single time.

“It is odd having these memories, emotions of a former self yet it doesn’t feel real…like it is me. Does that make any sense?”

“Yes,” he sighed and I could feel his frustration and anger roll through his aura only his voice restrained the emotion. “It was not a kindness what my sister did to you.”

I stared at the contents of the crate for a long silent moment. The former me died to preserve the pact between Mythal and him. Without him and his work in freeing those he could, the people would have all been enslaved in time. The woman I had been before didn’t want to have to sacrifice herself, but it was her duty and she was at peace with her choice when she made it. Now, I am here given all these old memories, tasked with keeping him from fucking everything up again by tearing the Veil down and saving the people, not just the elves.

How does one merge all that into a neat little doable pile?

“No, I suppose it wasn’t,” I finally agreed with him.

Putting the few things I had pulled out back inside the crate, I turned my head to say something and stopped. He looked so melancholy with his eyes staring at the contents of the crate. It was obvious he was lost in his memories and the hurt look he wore was not a look I wanted to stay. Kissing his cheek, his eyes darted back to mine and I let a silent breath of relief out as his eyes lost the look of
grieving and warmed as I held his gaze.

“I meant to ask you, what is down that long shaft at the back of the cave?”

He moved to stand and took my hand pulling me up with him.

“Come, I will show you.”

The passage wasn’t really as long as I previously thought but I did notice that it got warmer the further back we got and finally opened into a medium sized chamber with a hot spring.

“Oh, hello there beautiful,” I said softly with a large smile staring at the steaming water.

Solas laughed and shook his head at my silliness.

“We will enjoy the spring, after dinner. Come vhenan, we must still gather wood and our dinner yet.”

I quietly laugh and let him lead me from the warm room.

“Totally going to hold you to that,” I reply swatting his ass.

Cleanup was done, and I couldn’t wait to get myself in that hot spring any longer, so I began toeing off my boots and unlacing my leathers.

“You gonna jump in the hot bath with me or sit there and watch me undress?” I tease him slipping my leathers over my hips.

“Both options are equally advantageous from where I am sitting vhenan,” he offered. Giving me a wolfish grin his eyes followed my movements.

Shaking my head with a soft laugh, I grabbed the hem of my tunic and looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“You might find that the first option has more benefits than the second, wolf.”

Solas moved with ease from the ground and toed off his own boots.

“I believe you might be correct,” he said still wickedly smiling at me.

Throwing my shirt at him and hitting him in the face, I laughed as I grabbed our cleaning supplies and headed for the hot spring. His husky chuckle followed me down the corridor and a large smile spread across my lips when I heard him softly cuss at whatever was holding him up.

Dropping the supplies next to the edge, I dipped a toe in the water finding it hot, but not scalding, just to my liking and jumped in.

*Damn, this bastard is deep.*

Breaking the surface, I pushed hair and water out of my face when I caught Solas entering the chamber and my heart stuttered in my chest before taking off like a jet. He hopped over the side and slid into the water, and my mouth went dry as he glided through the water towards me.
“I am going to drown in here...especially if he keeps looking at me like that.

“Of course you can stand in this,” I croaked out and had to clear my throat while I continued to tread water.

His slow movement towards me sent the damn flutters in my stomach to turn rabid.

“I will hold you up,” his voice thick and deep caressed my skin like the hot spring water.

*I’ll bet you will – and I’ll like it.*

His hands slid around my waist and pulled me towards him. Thankful I didn’t have to tread water anymore, I wrapped my arms around his neck. His lips found the sensitive skin behind my ear and a soft moan slipped past my lips as my head tilted to the side to give him more access.

Pressing into him, I absorbed the wonderful sensation of his skin against mine. I never realized how much I had craved this feeling before I met him and now he was home to me.

“I do not want to live another moment without you again,” he said gently before placing a tender kiss on my shoulder.

Pressing myself against him, I bit at his chin softly before kissing the spot.

“I don’t want to either. I never understood why I felt so empty, until you and then the emptiness was gone.”

He leaned his head against mine and I felt every cell in my body vibrate, tuned to only his frequency. My heart was no longer just a cold heavy rock in my chest but a beating, breathing organ that he had revived the moment he had held my hand. Pressing my lips gently against his, desire swift and relentless swept through me.

I softly moaned as he drank from my lips like a man starved for water. It was rough, uncontrolled and exhilarating this darker, impatient side of him. The slightly rough bite on my lower lip flipped everything upside down. There wasn’t anything about him that didn’t wrap around my senses and pull me deeper into him.

He swallowed my soft moans while his hands wandered my back. His hand slid around to cup my breast and tease the hardened nipple with his thumb. Kissing the corner of my mouth, he trailed lips and tongue over my cheek, across my jaw, and down my throat marking me possessively at my collarbone.

My fingernails raked over his neck and his low moan against my chest sent flames licking and dancing over my skin. My hands moved from his neck to explore his shoulders and lightly scratch down his chest, discovering, admiring the feel of his skin beneath my fingers.

I wanted all of him breathless with desire, his stomach clenched and his eyes slowly closed as my hand gently wrapped around him. His whole body trembled as I slowly stroked him and it was my turn to swallow his moans of pleasure.

“Lath em,” I moaned against his lips before latching onto them again.

“Ma’neral,” he growled pulling his lips from mine.

Grasping my hips tightly, he lifted me up higher in the water and I wrapped my legs tightly around his waist as he slid into me. A loud groan of pleasure as he seated himself to the hilt echoed in the
chamber and I didn’t know if it was his or mine. My body stretched deliciously to accommodate him, wrapping snugly around him sending small little delectable shivers racing through me. His eyes held mine tenderly as they always did when we made love. This first connection, the first sensation of intimate touch and the warmth of his blue gaze was intoxicating.

He deliberately moved within me taking his time and moaning softly, my eyes slid slowly closed, biting my lower lip. His lips kissed the column of my neck, gently biting the tendon on my shoulder and my core clamped down around him as I moaned loudly panting his name. His slow methodical thrusts were dragging me over the edge to quickly, and wanting it to last did not make it so. Breathing his name on a low moan of pleasure he kept with his slow steady pace.

“Garun I em Fen’Harel,” I pleaded with him. There was something about me saying his name aloud that stirred a frenzy in him. His hand fisted in my wet hair while his other kept an almost punishing grip on my ass as he delved into me. The rush of pleasure rolled through me like a wave pulling me under the surface to be carried away by the undertow of current. Silently crying out, my whole body tightened like a drawn bow and shuddered, shattering around him.

The sensation was beautiful as he thrust into me once more before moaning my name as he reached his own pleasurable release. His body trembled as much as mine as our bodies slowly became our own again. Small little leftover shivers still raced through my body with each panted breath and soft little nibbling kisses from his lips on my shoulder. I cupped his face taking his lips with my own, and kissed him deeply before pulling away.

“Ar lath ma vhenan,” he said tenderly against the sensitive skin of my shoulder.

Grasping his face I stared into his deep blue eyes lovingly.

“Lathan na, Solas.”

He closed his eyes and held me in a crushing hug that I returned. Laughing softly kissing his neck, I nipped at his ear.

“We should finish our bathing before I drown,” I tell him teasingly.

Solas laughed freely and it was such a beautiful sound to hear as he carried me towards a small step I could stand on.

“This should help you not drown, vhenan.”

I slapped his shoulder playfully as he backed away towards our cleaning supplies with a cheeky smile.

“Ass,” I grumble making him laugh again.

The sounds of soft scraping against a stone teased me awake, and my eyes opened slowly. What I saw stole my breath. Solas stretched, painting with long strokes, making his entire body move to his command. He was shirtless, barefoot and had obviously slipped his leathers on as an afterthought since they were not tied and hung low on his narrow hips. Each stroke of the brush sent muscles in his back moving in a manner that sent a lightning flash of desire directly south and I grew wet at the sight of him.
No man has any right being that fucking beautiful at every damn angle.

I studied the new mural and a small smile of pleasure blossomed warming my chest. I recognized it as the day he was training me on barriers and knocked me on my ass with his wicked fastball of ice. He was so focused that he had a small crease in the center of his forehead as he brushed the paint onto the rocky surface.

Pushing the furs away I slipped his shirt on and walked quietly towards him wrapping my arms around his waist. He was so completely focused on the task that he slightly jolted at my touch before relaxing.

“See you couldn’t sleep,” I whisper into his back before kissing his spine.

His hand came down and laid on mine that was around his waist.

“It is almost done,” he answers patting my hand before bending over to gather more paint on his brush.

Stepping back, I silently watch him, and his attention was almost on the edge of possessed. Being an artist, I had many moments like that where I was compelled to complete something before it got away from me. I gave him his space and watched his quick strokes and it made me wonder if he was also just as possessed when he did the others in the cave.

I moved back to our fur bed and sat down wrapping my arms loosely around my knees and propped my chin on them to watch him. It was always seductive the way his body moved so gracefully with whatever he was doing. It was also seriously not fair when I still tripped over air. I watched him for a little more than an hour when he dropped his pallet and brush conveying he was finished with the picture. Soon his hand glowed a soft mint green as he brought forth Veil fire and he inscribed the glyph on the side ensuring his memory lasted.

Curious to what he would embed in the glyph, I moved from the pallet of furs and conjured a ball of Veil fire to my hand. Glancing at him, his eyes held mine for a moment and then I turned my gaze to study the glyph. I had always wondered what he had thought of me in the beginning.

She is so beautiful lying on the ground with her hair stuck to her face…no – focus you fool.

“Let’s take our afternoon meal.”

“You’re not just saying that so I will get up are you?”

“No lethal’lan, we may resume practice after we eat.”

“Why do I get the impression you are enjoying yourself while torturing me?”

“That would be counterproductive if that were the case.”

“Yes, it would be…but that doesn’t mean you’re not enjoying this.”

“I assure you Fenlin, I am not torturing you.”

“Ah…but you didn’t say you weren’t enjoying it.”

The woman prods incessantly, and I am enjoying her company more than I should.

I dispelled the Veil fire and looked to where he stood silently watching me for my reaction.

“I am glad I wasn’t the only one who found it difficult,” I said gently and stepped towards him.
Solas suddenly dropped to his knees and grasped my hands as he stared up at me, startling me.

“You know the real me – the only one that truly knows what I am capable of. I am unworthy of what you offer and I have always known this to be the truth. I struggle to be the man you deserve.”

Something about the statement brought a memory rushing to my mind.

In action, I must prove my intention.

My heart jumped as he held my gaze with all his feelings showing, his face an open book and I took a small step forward and fell to my knees in front of him.

“I love you Solas and you are worthy. You do not need to struggle to live up to your own minds expectation of what you think I deserve. I just want you…only you, and that, I know you can give me.”

Solas let go of my hands and grabbed my face gently kissing me.

Lightning flashed behind my closed eyes, and thunder rumbled through my head as heat raced through my veins. He dove into my soul with this simple touching of lips. While his lips devoured me and his tongue drank deeply of my soul.

“I cannot survive losing you again,” he breathed brokenly against my lips.

Running my hands over his face, I pulled back to look at him and waited as he slowly opened his tortured blue eyes to look at me.

“You’re not going to lose me, Solas. El lath bellanaris ma vhenan. Ar lath ma,” I tell him while my heart beat heavily in my chest and my lip slightly trembled with his words.

He grasped my face and stared at me intently.

“Will you promise this to me?”

I held his gaze and ran my hand over his smooth jaw tenderly.

“Yes, I will Fen’Harel.”

His eyes slightly widened with my words and soon I was within a crushing hold against his chest. For a long time, we held each other tightly, his head tucked into the crook of my neck.

“Ma ane ma’telban fen,” he whispered quietly against my neck.

My heart stammered with joy and fear with his words knowing that to him I was the good to his bad, the Ying to his Yang and it was an intimidating notion.

And that is how my bonding with the Dread Wolf begins, God I hope I’m ready.

Chapter End Notes

Lath em - love me
Ma’neral - my pleasure
Garun I em Fen’Harel - cum with me Dread Wolf
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
Lathan na - I love you
El lath bellanaris ma vhenan. Ar lath ma - Our love is forever my heart. I love you
Ma ane ma’elban fen - you are my white wolf
Honeymoon is Over

Chapter Notes

I do apologize for such a late post - my day has been...hectic to say the least. I do, however, appreciate everyone that is following my little story and has left such beautiful comments that totally make my f'ing day!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Adding the finishing touches to my mural, I stepped back to admire my work. Scratching my nose, I stared at the scene. It was one of him in the Hinterlands teaching me the centering technique with my staff. It was not large like the ones that Solas would draw in the Rotunda, but looking around at the other murals none of them were.

Solas came up behind me and slid his arms around me, pulling me back into him. Leaning my head back he pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“You must inscribe the glyph,” he gently reminded me.

“Curious?”

His laughter rumbled against my back and he held me a little tighter.

“I have found that your memories are quite pleasing.”

“Embarrassing is more like it,” I mumble and his lips pressed into my neck.

“You have read mine, how is it any more embarrassing for you than it is for me?”

I turn and look at him in shock.

“You’re not seriously asking that question, right? Because so far all of your memories have been virginal compared to mine.”

He chuckled before lifting me from the ground while I squealed at the sudden change of position. He nibbled at my ear and my hormones went sideways as they always did when he did that.

“That,” he punctuated with a kiss on my neck, “Vhenan, is why I remind you to add your Veil fire glyph.”

Dropping the brush, I wrapped my arms around his neck and nuzzled his ear with my nose.

“You sir, are a man who enjoys torturing me far too much.”

“It is not torture, vhenan,” he whispered against my neck sending shivers through my body. “Not when I will finish what I start.”

Such a simple statement made every particle of my being vibrate and tingle with anticipation.

“If you keep this up, I will only be finishing you and not the mural,” I point out and his deep throaty laugh made the desire I felt pool low and heavy in my belly.
He set me back down and turned me back towards the mural.

“Finish, and then I will…finish,” he mouthed against my ear.

My body flushed as his words rushed over me and glancing down at myself, I saw that my nipples were firm with anticipation.

_I can even make my nipples stand with his voice…that is just not right._

Conjuring Veil fire, I focused on the memory.

Why does he have to be so damn close…this is never going to work! I can’t think, not with him touching me like this.

“Lethal’lan, you are not concentrating”

_Sweet Jeebus, he is so warm and…solid. If I just lean back, I wonder if he...shit he is talking, focus._

“Oh I am, just not on what I’m doing.” _Did I just say that aloud? Fuck_ “Excuse me?”

“Nothing…nothing, sorry”

Finishing, I moved to pick up my dropped brush and smiled as Solas approached the glyph with a giddy expression. I went about cleaning up while he studied the memory and glanced over when I heard him laugh.

“Perhaps you should review the one I painted in the bathing area,” He offered with a wolfish grin.

“You painted one in there?” I questioned quickly putting my supplies in the crate.

Solas held his hand out to me and slipping my hand into his, he led me to the hot spring. Once inside the chamber, I saw what he had painted. It was the first night we reached the Crossroads and I had gone to the falls to bathe while he was gathering supplies for the camp. I look at him questioningly and he held a wolfish smile on his face.

“Not all my thoughts were pure vhenan.”

I conjure Veil fire and move towards the glyph overly curious about his thought since he obviously caught me bathing.

_She is naked…why am I still staring? Stop staring you fool. Her skin looks so soft and it is glowing… She is…sweet spirits, I cannot breathe. I have to get out of here._

_Why am I not moving? Stop staring at her breasts you starved fool! Fen’edhis!_

I turned and looked at him with a raised eyebrow, his eyes full of mischief.

_It was dark…how did he even see anything let alone my non-existent breasts?_

“Is this why you wouldn’t look at me for almost a week?”

My laughter echoed through the chamber and Solas strode forward with a slight smile on his face.
“It did not help matters,” he said before picking me up and carrying me out of the chamber. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I kissed the section of skin just behind his ear.

“You are a very wicked man,” I purred next to his ear running my tongue lightly over his earlobe.

Solas softly moaned at my attention and his arms tightened ever so slightly around me as he stopped at our pallet of furs. Biting at my neck in return for my teasing, he mouthed against my skin.

“If you only knew how many nights I took myself in hand just because of that one moment.”

“Oh, it excited you that much?” I joked nipping at his neck.

He laid me down and stared into my eyes with a very hungry, feral look that made my pulse race.

“Let me show you,” he softly growled.

*****

My eyes followed Solas’ naked form as he softly padded to our pack of things and pulled out a small wrapped gift and returned to our bed of furs. Slipping back under the blankets he placed the small gift on my stomach.

“I brought you here to not only share with you this place but also to give you this,” he said quietly.

Tucking the furs under my arms, I picked up the present and sat up. Looking at him curiously his eyes watched me quietly while waiting for me to open it. I peeled the paper away from a small wooden box that was carved in what appeared to be similar to Celtic knotting. Swallowing nervously, I pushed the small lid open and press my hand over my mouth in surprise at what is inside.

“Vhenan, ane emma bellanaris, la’var ar ame mar.”

His hand plucked the delicate ring of tiny Navarrite leaves entwined in a thin band of Silverite from its cushion of white silk while I stared at it stunned speechlessness.

This...this is the second to last part of our bonding...oh, my God. First, it is a declaration, proved sincere intentions, promises sworn of fealty to one another, a ring is given to the intended, then...then a ceremony. Thank you, Assan for your memories and information!

Holy shit...holy...shit

He pulled my hand away from my mouth and ran his thumb over the knuckles soothingly, letting out a small sigh.

“It is not…”

“It is beautiful,” I interrupt him quickly pulling my eyes from the ring to hold his gaze.

“It is to your liking then?”

I had never heard him sound so hesitant and unsure about something before. He could have offered me a piece of string and I would have been excited. Smiling at him, I cup his face tenderly with both my hands.

“It is beautiful, and the man I love is giving it to me which makes it even more beautiful. What is not to like about it?”
His eyes held mine for a long moment and I leaned forward and pressed my lips against his in a brief kiss.

“Am I to just look at it Fen’Harel, or are you going to put it on my finger?” I whisper against his lips and felt his answering smile.

I leaned away and with a ball of nerves wiggling in my guts as I watch him slip the ring on my third finger, and of course, I couldn’t stop myself from getting emotional as I felt the warmth of the ring on my finger. In my entire life, I never expected to love someone the way I do him.

He ran his thumb over the ring, staring at it for a quiet moment before leaning in and capturing my lips. It began as a slow building fire that ran thick as honey through my veins with a soft bite on my lower lip.

Wrapping my hand around his neck, I pull him slowly back down with me to our bed of furs.

“Lath em ma vhenan,” I mouthed against his lips.

“Bell’ana,” he intoned thickly.

*****

Sitting on the back of the Hart, I watched while Solas place a trespassing ward over the mouth of the cave like the one on the door to the Eluvian. Pushing that thought back, I glance down at the delicate ring on my finger and run my thumb over it.

*He wouldn’t go to the trouble of bonding if he was going to leave without me. I need to stop waiting for the other shoe to drop, he isn’t going to leave without me.*

Solas slid behind me and I snuggled back to him as he directed the Hart down the path. The soft clopping of hooves over the dirt and leaves as we made our way back towards the main road brought with it a mood of melancholy, and I sighed.

“I did not want to leave either,” he offered and kissed the top of my head.

“They would have sent out a search party if we were gone any longer than the three days. I bet Josephine is running around in a fit trying to organize everything.”

His soft chuckle rumbled behind me making me smile. The smile slowly slid from my face as I thought about everything I needed to do when I returned.

“I still have to sentence that Venatori when I get back, not to mention I am sure the mounds of paperwork on my desk are now a small mountain, and then there is…”

Solas tilted my face up towards him and silenced me with his lips pressed gently to mine. A small sigh escaped me at the gentle touch of his lips and I internally melted.

“You do not need to carry the entire Inquisition on your shoulders vhenan. Let others do their job,” he said gently before kissing me again. “Now, we still have a few hours of time, and I prefer to not waste them discussing the Inquisition. Perhaps you will share with me another story from your world.”

I kissed his jaw quickly and turned back to look through the enormous antlers of the Hart while I thought of something I hadn’t already either shown him or told him. Thinking of something, I snuggled further back into him and felt his arms tighten ever so slightly around me. It didn't bother
me to share the good memories, I had of my childhood.

“When I was a little girl, my parents would take my brother and me to their cabin in the mountains. I loved going there because it was the only place I could go and not have to wear a dress.”

Solas chuckled as I continued.

“My parents had been having the grounds developed so there was a lot of just fresh dirt everywhere. Well, one day it was raining hard and turned the hill beside the cabin into a muddy mess. My brother got this bright idea that we would climb to the top of the hill, and slide down.”

I started laughing at the memory and shook my head.

“I should have known we were going to get in trouble or something would go horribly wrong as it was likely to do when it was his idea. But I pulled my shoes off and ran outside with him and climbed the stupid hill. We stood at the top and counted to ten before both of us fools dove into the mud and slid down. We hit the bottom covered from head to toe in mud laughing…until my mother found us.”

I giggled as I thought of the horrified expression on my mother’s face at the sight of us.

“She was so disgusted by our muddy appearance. She lectured us all the way to the bathrooms. First, she tore into my brother because she knew it was his idea and by the time she got to me in the other bathroom she tore into me because I was the smarter one and I went along with it.”

We rode for the next few hours trading out childhood stories full of mischief that when we reached the bridge leading to Skyhold I was slightly surprised we were already there. The loud horn announcing our arrival made me slightly flinch.

“Well, I guess the honeymoon’s over,” I mumble and feel his laugh vibrate through my back.

At the end of the bridge stood Cullen, Josephine, and Leliana and as I predicted Josephine looked harried about something.

“Let’s let them wait a bit longer, take me to the barn with you,” I whisper to him over my shoulder.

“Ma nuvenin,” he answered directing the Hart towards the barn.

I covered my mouth to keep from showing my smile or laughing at the looks on their faces as we headed towards the barn.

“Fucking priceless,” I tell him smiling cheekily as he pulled me off the Hart.

“I have a feeling that all the stories about you and your brother might have lacked the ones you might have instigated.”

I chuckled and gave him a mischievous grin.

“Got to have something to talk about next time we can escape,” I joke with him before turning at the sound of Josephine’s voice.

“Inquisitor, I am pleased you have returned and looking so well rested.”

“Thank you, Josephine. I suppose there is a lot you would like to discuss?”
Josephine nodded her head at me and waited for me to start walking. Turning towards Solas who was busy grabbing our pack, I touched his arm garnering his attention.

“If they don’t release me in two hours come and rescue me,” I whisper loudly making him smile and Josephine laugh.

“Adamant Fortress has stood against the Darkspawn since the time of the second Blight.”

Leliana started rolling out a small parchment of a schematic. Cullen moved forward and pointed to specific areas on the fortress.

“Fortunately for us, that means it was built before the age of modern siege equipment. A good trebuchet will do major damage to those ancient walls and thanks to our Ambassador…”

Josephine bowed her head at him and smiled.

“Lady Seryl of Jader was pleased to lend the Inquisition her sappers. They’ve already sent them to Griffon Wing Keep.”

“That is the good news,” Leliana said calmly folding her arms.

“And the bad news?” I ask her looking up from the schematic.

“Erimond called the ritual at the Western Approach a test. He may already have his demon army waiting for us in the fortress.”

Cullen laid a hand on the pommel of his longsword and rubbed his face with the other.

“The Inquisitions forces can breach the gate, but if the Wardens already have their demons…”

“These records I found of Adamant’s construction show that there are choke points we can use to limit the field of battle. Here and here,” Leliana offered to point to them on the schematic.

“That’s good, we may not be able to defeat them outright…but if we cut off reinforcements, we can carve you a path to Warden-Commander Clarel.”

I looked at Cullen and holding his amber gaze I knew what this would mean.

“Taking this fortress is going to get a lot of good soldiers killed.”

“Our soldiers know the risks, Fenlin, and they know what their fighting for. It will be hard fought, no way around it, but we will get that gate open,” he offered to try to assure me.

“It is also possible that some Warden’s may be sympathetic to our cause,” Josephine interjected trying to spin a positive on the obvious substantial loss we were going to take.

“The warriors may be willing to listen to reason, though I doubt they will turn against Clarel directly. The mages, however, are slaves to Corypheus. They will fight to the death.”

I rubbed my face thinking about how many lives would be lost in this foolishness the Wardens had caused and it only made me angrier.
“Anything else?” I ask in general letting my hands fall from my face.

Josephine looked at me while everyone shook their heads ‘no’.

“Nothing that cannot wait for tomorrow, Inquisitor but before I forget, the Venatori Mage…what should we do with him?”

“I will sentence him tomorrow, Josephine.”

She nodded her head at me and I waved absently to them as I left the room, I crossed the main hall for the Rotunda needing to see Solas and find some balance. Opening the door I found him debating with Dorian.

“You are telling me that the works of First Enchanter Wenselus are tripe?”

Dorian sounded flabbergasted as Solas sat on the edge of his desk looking at him calmly.

“Mana is not the only measurement of one's ability to draw power from the Fade, Dorian. There are other means to obtain the magical energies available; a mage's ability to use the Fade is only one way. So yes, to answer your question – it is complete rubbish.”

I shake my head as I continue entering the room. Dorian’s annoyed gaze turned towards me and he instantly perked up and walked towards me.

“My dear, your time away has done miraculous things to your complexion. I am almost jealous that you might look better than me,” he said before wrapping me in a hug.

“Flattery will get you everywhere handsome,” I quip back making him laugh loudly before pulling back.

“I was very glad that he talked you into it,” he said pointing at Solas with his thumb over his shoulder. “You were looking very done in…now if we could just get you to gain a little more weight dear that would be ideal. Skeleton is not in, this season.”

I laugh and shake my head at him.

“Don’t you start too, I can only eat so much and my body will only gain so much.”

I watched as Dorian glanced back at Solas and saw him shake his head at him.

“Isn’t there someone else you could pick on? There has to be someone…Varric and Cassandra? Bull? Maybe Sera…oh, wait, not her, she will just play a prank to get even.”

Dorian held his hands up and gave me his most debonair smile that most women would probably fall for and I folded my arms waiting.

“Okay, okay…I will not say another word about it.”

He turned and stopped next to Solas before heading back up the library steps.

“Shove some cake in that woman, I could feel her ribs.”

Solas chuckled and Dorian moved quickly for the stairs as I chucked a book at him.

“Get out of here you weight-shaming bully!” I yell at him teasingly as he bolted.
He laughed as he went up the staircase and I looked at Solas who was laughing at the stupid scene.

“It appears you have an ally now,” I tease moving to pick up the book and return it to his desk.

“It appears so,” he said with a wicked grin.

“I am going to our room and see what kind of mountain has grown on my desk.”

Solas moved and grabbed a book from his desk.

“I shall go with you vhenan, I prefer to not have to answer any more questions on what we did or where we went, lead the way.”

I chuckled and opened the door leading to the main hall.

“Nosey bastards, all of them,” I mumble and hear his responding chuckle.

“Indeed,” he replied as we left the Rotunda.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Vhenan, ane emma bellanaris, la’var ar ame mar - My heart, you are mine for all eternity, as I am yours.
Lath em ma vhenan - love me my heart
Bell'ana - forever
Ma nuvenin - as you wish
Preparations for Adamant

Chapter Notes

*****NSFW*****

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Slowly opening my eyes, I can tell that the sun isn’t even up yet but the hand gently moving up and
down my side woke me. Stretching like a lazy cat, the hand at my side moved slowly up my side to
 tease my nipple awake.

Rolling towards him I see his flirty smile and chuckle before pressing my lips to his. The slow glide
of his tongue on mine moved in time with his thumbs light rubbing across my nipple. Sensations of
heat spread through my body in a slow rolling boil, pooling low provoking low moans of pleasure
with each caress.

His mouth moved to kiss the corner of my mouth, over my jaw and down the column of my throat
gently pushing me back. Everywhere his lips touched sent little shockwaves of desire through me.
My back arched and I moaned breathlessly with his tongues attention on one nipple while his thumb
teasingly attended the other.

Slowly his lips and tongue glided down to dance over the skin of my stomach, his fingers tracing the
patterns of muscle and bone pulling another small moan from me. He was drowning me in sensations
and my magic flared to the surface of my skin at the hypersensitivity. His low, pleased laughter
brushed over the skin of my pelvis at the reaction.

Low, breathlessly moaning his name, my hips arched up to meet his tongue that lightly traced the
outside of my wet folds. My aura pulsed brightly behind my closed eyes and along my skin as his
mouth drank from me gradually.

“Beautiful,” he breathed against my mound before his tongue licked unhurriedly over my hidden
pearl.

My body rocketed with the attention while his slow flicks with his tongue stole the breath from my
lungs. My body was rushing to that perfect place where everything went static. Heart racing, blood
rushing, ragged moans on uneven breaths are torn from me as I repeated his name while my body
climbed for it. My aura exploded in a display of kaleidoscopic light through the room.

His warm laughter against my inner thigh only intensified the hypersensitivity of my skin. He took
his time moving up my body as if he had an infinite amount of it. Each bite, kiss, lick, sent shivers
through my body as he brought me back to the sharp edge of want with his focused devotion and my
body started lightly trembling.

Moaning low, my nails raked gently over his head as his tongue bathed my nipple and lightning
arced behind my closed eyes. He placed butterfly kisses over my collarbone traveling over my neck
to my chin before finally claiming my lips. A shuddering breath left him as he slowly slid into my
welcoming warmth and my aura flashed around us with the sensation of him filling me.

Lips devouring each other, tongues gliding languidly with one another perfectly timed with his
unhurried thrusts. Breathes ragged; low moans torn from each other as the pleasure built towards a crescendo echoed through the room.

My warmth tightened around him with the slow rocking of his hips invoking a deep, breathy moan from him. My aura flashed brightly like a strobe light as he pressed against the hidden place of pleasure deep within me again, and again.

My body was racing for it; moaning low as I felt myself tightening around him. Raking my nails down his back, my aura exploded around us with my climax. My hands gripped his back as his hips thrust harder, deeper sending shockwaves through me. Grasping my hips, he changed the angle and slid even deeper provoking a crying moan from my lips at the intensity of pleasure that raced through me in a wave.

His aura rushed through me like a hurricane. Pulling, pushing, dragging me with him into the whirlwind of his release and I cried out with its intensity as I came again. Holding him closely I could feel his heart racing against mine, our labored breaths danced overheated skin.

His aura slipped through me like waves against a waters shoreline, and it was incredible. Pressing my lips against his shoulder, my hands caressed his back lovingly.

“Ar lath ma, ma’fen,” I breathed against his neck.

I felt his smile on my neck before he pressed a gentle kiss to the sensitive skin.

A large crowd had gathered to witness as I watched the guards bring in Servis from my seat on the dais. Josephine looked at me and I gave her a slow nod and she began to list Servis’ crimes.

“Before you is Servis of the Minrathous Circle of Magi. You met him and his Venatori in the Western Approach. He admits to working for Corypheus, raising monsters and using magic for conquest. He also used his connections to smuggle magical artifacts out of the Approach, without his master’s consent.”

I glanced from Josephine, back to where Servis stood with his head down.

“You stole from Corypheus? I don’t know whether that is stupidly brave or bravely stupid.” Servis’ head came up slowly to hold my disgusted gaze.

“I was hired by a third party. I’ve no loyalty to Corypheus, might you find that useful, Your Worship?”

_Ugh! This guy is as oily as the Valdez spill._

“I’m sorry, are you attempting to bargain with us?” Josephine asked him incredulously.

Servis look at her nervously.

“Bargain? I plead! I throw myself on your mercy! I also have friends in Tevinter who owe me large debts. Leave what happened in the Approach behind us, Inquisitor, and I can put them all at your disposal.”

I lean forward and glare at him.
“You’re serious,” I mutter before a humorless laugh escapes.

“Alright Servis, someone who can smuggle magical artifacts to Tevinter and back shouldn’t be wasted. Bring those artifacts back to the Inquisition, procure something really useful, and we might loosen the shackles.”

Servis bowed his head looking at me gratefully.

“Your Worship knows value when she sees it, I won’t disappoint.”

“Oh, and Servis?” I said before he could leave.

He turned back to look at me.

“Your handler is Lady Nightingale; try not to piss her off before you can prove how valuable you are to the Inquisition.”

His eyes held a nervousness as he bowed his head and followed the guards out of the main hall.

*****

Taking a sip of my wine I reread the letter while Solas sat next to me helping me weed through the mountain of paperwork I was trying to get done before leaving for Adamant.

“It is my understanding that the Soldiers are leaving for Adamant tomorrow?”

I glance over at him then focused back on the correspondence with Lady Forsythia promising to ‘flog me alive’ for my alliance with her brother.

_How Josephine puts up with this woman is beyond me._

“Yes they are and we are following them the day after. Look at this, this can’t be right, _flog me alive_?”

I hand the paper over to him and he chuckles as he reads the paragraph.

“I believe she meant to write, ‘flay you alive’ vhenan,” he offered the paper back to me.

“Oh…well that makes sense, how very nice of her.”

Putting the letter down, I grabbed some paper to write back to her when the sound of my door wrenching open and hitting the back wall startled me.

“INQUISITOR, I NEED YOUR ASSISTANCE!” Cullen yelled up the stairwell.

I slip from my chair and head for the stairs with Solas following closely behind me. Cullen is at the bottom holding the door wiping the blood from his nose.

“What the hell happened to you?”

His eyebrow rose at the question.

“Cassandra,” was all he said before heading down the next flight of steps hurriedly.

Following after him, I heard the yelling as soon as he opened the door leading to the main hall.
“WHAT IS SHE DOING HERE?” Cassandra yelled.

“She came to speak with the Inquisitor, Cass. Just calm down,” Varric replied quickly.

“Last time I checked…Varric, the Inquisitor was not in your damn chambers!” Cassandra spat angrily.

“It wasn’t what you think,” he said pleadingly.

“I heard her! Stop protecting her,” she argued loudly.

I got closer and saw that the person in question was hiding behind Varric while he kept the table between him and Cassandra.

*Smart move.*

I glance around at all the nobles standing around watching the show and I sighed before squaring my shoulders and walking forward. I caught sight of Josephine out of the corner of my eye and went to her first.

“Josephine, clear the nobles out of the hall, please. If you need help, get some of Cullen’s men to help you.”

“Right away, Inquisitor.”

I watched Josephine scurry off to start clearing out the hall before walking towards Cassandra.

“Inquisitor, my friend…” Varric started.

“Your ex-girlfriend,” Cassandra interrupted angrily.

I held up my hands.

“Quiet,” I tell them calmly looking from one to the other. Cassandra opened her mouth and I raised my eyebrow at her and it audibly snapped closed.

I turn to look around the main hall and see that the last of the nobles had been ushered towards the garden and I turned to look at Cassandra.

“Are you fucking kidding me? You chase him and his…” I point towards the Dwarven women still hiding behind him. “Whatever she is, into the fucking main hall to have a yelling match?”

Cassandra stared at the ground looking very embarrassed and then I turn to Varric.

“For fuck’s sake, Varric!” I growl at him running my hand through my hair in frustration. “Did you inform your friend here, that you were involved with the Seeker?”

Varric shook his head ‘yes’ and gestured at the woman behind him.

“Bianca Davry,” he introduced quietly.

“Didn’t take that information too well I see?” I muttered to myself and sighed heavily.

Hawke walked towards me with Fenris and she gave me a lopsided smile.

“I see you met Bianca, Inquisitor.”
I chuckle and shake my head gesturing her to follow me. Glancing at Solas and Cullen, I gave them a wry smile and pointed towards Varric and Cassandra.

“Any aggressive movements out of either one of them – freeze’em then jail them.”

Solas gave me a perceptive smile and Cullen chuckled as I walked with Hawke a few feet from where everyone was and held her gaze.

“Who the hell is this chick?”

“Varric’s first love, and for the longest time, we thought his only until Cassandra. Bianca got married to a man her family chose and broke his heart. She comes from a long line of Merchants Guild members that have threatened Varric to stay away from her, but she won’t leave him alone; she just keeps coming back and getting his hopes up.”

“Ah, got it,” I reply and we turned back towards the group.

“Miss Davry, did you actually have something you wanted to discuss with me?”

Bianca came out from behind Varric slowly watching Cassandra carefully.

“Yes, there is something I think you should be aware of, Inquisitor” she offered quickly.

I look at Josephine after gesturing for Bianca to follow me.

“Josephine, will you please have a room prepared for Miss Davry for the night so she can be well refreshed and ready to leave in the morning?”

Josephine gave me a knowing smile and nodded quickly.

“Of course, Inquisitor.”

“Actually, I wasn’t planning on leaving until…” Bianca stopped talking as I gazed at her coolly.

“Listen to me very carefully, Bianca. What you are doing to Varric is selfish. Having said that, I must warn you that I cannot protect you from Cassandra for more than twenty-four hours, after that you are fair game, understood?”

She nodded her head slowly and I opened the door leading to Josephine’s office.

“Great, now what is it you wanted to talk to me about?”

We enter Josephine’s office and I gesture towards a chair for her to sit in as I took the seat across from her.

“In the Hinterlands, Templars have been using an old Dwarven Deep Roads access to cart our red lyrium.”

“That does not sound good; do you have the location of this Deep Roads access?”

Bianca nodded her head ‘yes’, and I moved to stand as Josephine entered.

“Good, I will have Cullen get with you so you can show him where on a map. It will have to wait for when I get back from the Approach, but I believe we can take care of it on our return trip as it will be on our way.”
Walking towards the door I gave her a polite smile and nodded my head towards her.

“Now if you will excuse me, I have some other matters to attend to. I will leave you in Josephine’s capable hands. Have a safe trip back where ever you came from, Miss Davry.”

Ignoring the dwarf’s glare, I left and went back to the main hall where Cassandra and Varric were having an angry staring contest. Cassandra turned to look at me as I walked towards them.

“Inquisitor, I want to apologize,” Cassandra began and I pointed towards Cullen.

“Start with him; you punched him in the face.”

Her eyes darted to Cullen’s face taking in the obviously swollen nose and the beginnings of blackened eyes and rubbed her face.

“You two go somewhere and get your shit straightened out, will you? I need you guys together or at least on some kind of common ground by the time we leave for Adamant.”

Cassandra nodded her head and looked at Varric. Varric gave her a lopsided smile and held his hand out to her. Cassandra gave him a small, shy smile and placed her hand on his letting him lead her from the keep.

They are just so cute.

Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma, ma'fen - I love you my wolf
vhenan - my heart
Standing on the deck of the ship, I took in the slow roll of the waves and the gentle sway of the ship. I loved the water, I loved everything about it. It was always mind-blowing to think about the life that lived beneath the water’s surface. Sighing happily, I watched as a school of fish jumped and splashed off the bow of the boat and felt my anxiety about Adamant slightly recede.

Even with the serenity of the early morning fog along the shore, my mind turns to our journey back to the Approach. Thankfully our ride down the pass was not as horrible as it had been the last time. We even managed to reach Jader in three days, on schedule and board the two ships reserved for our large party. This time we would not be shoved into a cargo hold like fucking cattle.

Pushing my hair out of my face, I angle it so the wind is rushing over my cheeks. Closing my eyes and taking a deep breath of the briny air, I tried to push the nervousness of what was yet to come away.

*How many good men and women will have to die because of the Warden’s stupidity?*

The gentle caress of his aura against mine indicating he was coming and pulled me from my angry thoughts. It was comforting like the wind on my face and I needed some more comforting.

Warm arms wrapped around my chest, pulling me gently back into him. Placing a small kiss on my temple, I open my eyes to gaze up at him, and my heart skipped at the beautiful blue eyes that gazed back at me. Lifting my hand to cup his cheek tenderly, I softly smile at him.

“You are exactly where I believed you would be when I awoke…alone,” he pointed out teasingly before nuzzling my neck with his nose.

“I just needed to clear my head, besides you looked to be sleeping quite well,” I offered. My eyes take in the dotting shoreline through the morning fog and I try to push the anxiety away.

His arms tighten just slightly around me, and propping his chin on my head, we watched the scenery flow by quietly together. His peaceful manner was a balm to my crazy, anxiety-ridden thoughts.

*Maybe, just maybe we would take Adamant with little casualties and the Wardens would see the error of their ways and give up willingly.*

*Not likely, but maybe.*

*****

The loud crash of the main gate sounded through the air signaling the door to the Fortress was finally open. I followed behind Cullen while my group spread out in front of us scanning the broken courtyard seeing nothing but bodies of Wardens littering the ground.

*You knew it would be unlikely this would go easy.*

“There you have your way in; best make use of this Fenlin. We will keep the main host of demons occupied for as long as we can.”

I glance at him with a smirk on my face.

“Keep everyone, including yourself safe, Commander.”
“We will do what we have to. Warden Stroud will guard your back. Hawke and Fenris are on the battlements, they will assist our soldiers until you arrive.”

My eyes darted up at the sound of a scream from one of the men as he fell from the battlements. Cullen and I both looked on in anger at the demon that was guarding the battlements.

“There is too much resistance on the walls, they can’t get a foothold. See if you can clear out some of them and we will cover your advancement.”

Nodding my head, I hugged him quickly.

“Maker, protect you, Fenlin,” he said returning my hug.

Cullen ran towards Leliana who was perched on top of the battering ram. Wearing full rogue armor, she was firing arrows at the battlements with rapid speed while Morrigan gave her magical backup from beside the machine.

Okay…those women are fucking legends of how shit gets done while looking good doing it.

I glance around at my group pulling my staff off my back.

“To the battlements guys, Hawke needs our help.”

Seeing everyone’s nods of understanding, I ran for the opened doorway leading to a stairwell. The sudden cool, soothing feeling surrounded me as Solas’s barrier covered me and Cassandra as we hurried up the stairs.

“Maker, be my guide,” Cassandra prayed quickly from beside me before we rounded the corner of the stairwell.

Reaching the top we found warden mages with their demons awaiting us at the landing. Cole stealthed and moved quietly towards one mage as Sera stealthed while notching an arrow and made her way towards the other. They both seemed to have some unspoken sign that said ‘now’, because the mages fell quickly and at the same moment, leaving us to take care of the demons.

We rushed up to the battlements fighting through Wardens with pet demons and finally found Hawke with Fenris battling a Pride Demon.

“Okay, that woman is hot,” Sera muttered from beside me and I elbowed her.

“Focus lady you got a barmaid waiting for you,” I tease her.

Glancing at Solas, I gave him a wink and wrapped myself in the Fade as I did with Bull in the Approach and moved for the mage that summoned the Pride demon.

“What the…” Sera started and turned towards Bull who laughed.

“Yeah, Boss has some tricks,” he said before taking off with Cassandra to join in the battle with the Pride demon.

Solas moved closer to where Fenris, Bull and Cassandra tag teamed the Pride demon and my heart jumped uneasily.

After all the shit I have had to go through, he better not die on me now.

We remove the mages controlling the demon and watched as the three worked in unison to bring the
Pride demon down. Hawke strode towards me a little out of breath but smiling cheekily.

“Fenlin, about time you got here. I thought you were going to let me have all the fun,” she joked as I handed her my canteen.

“Thank you for your help, we were a bit over-run,” she said wiping her mouth with the back of her arm. I glanced at her with a cheeky smile and take the canteen back when she is done.

“Protect the men, and no getting hurt, either one of you, Varric will never forgive me,” I tell her grabbing her shoulder before leaving.

“I know…that dwarf is a pain in the ass,” she quipped and I chuckled as Cassandra snorted in agreement.

“You can say that again.”

“Yes, yes – forget the dwarf is standing right here you ungrateful assholes,” he muttered as he walked by.

*Sweet baby Jesus, what is it with all the fucking Pride demons? Where they a buy one get one half-off?*

We moved quickly to down the creature while trying to keep a good pace and get to Clarel. Varric, Cole, and Sera, crazy enough as it was, had found a good rhythm between them with dispatching the Mages. The rest of us worked on the bound demons. Running down the battlements, we finally met back up with Hawke, Fenris, and her small team of Inquisition soldiers. Pushing open the double doors we found Clarel and a host of mages including Erimond.

“Wardens, we are betrayed by the very world we are sworn to protect,” she said pacing angrily.

“The Inquisition is inside Clarel, we don’t have time to stand on ceremony,” Erimond advised quickly. Clarel shook her head in annoyance at him.

“These men are giving their lives Magister. That might mean little in Tevinter, but for the Wardens, it is a sacred duty.”

Clarel moved towards an older Warden and pulled out her knife.

“If my sword arm is of no use anymore, then my blood will have to do,” he offered before kneeling. Clarel closed her eyes and raised her blade to his throat.

“It will,” she said quietly and cleanly swiped the blade over his throat.

I watched as the blood sprayed from the warrior’s throat and felt my stomach roll at the sight of how willing the man was to be slaughtered. Erimond finally caught sight of us as we walked through the door and called out to the other Wardens.

“Stop them, we must complete the ritual.”

The Wardens moved towards us slowly and my eyes scanned the old Great Hall of the fortress. There were sacrificed bodies in piles making my stomach lurch warningly. Focusing my attention on the balcony, I felt nothing but raging anger for Erimond and for Clarel for believing his lies.
“Please, stop this Clarel; if you do this ritual you will be binding yourself to Corypheus.”

Clarel stared at me with surprise as she stopped wiping the blood from her hands at hearing the Magister’s name.

“Corypheus – but he is dead.”

“They will say anything to stop you Clarel,” Erimond pleaded with her.

Clarel glanced at our group and narrowed her brown eyes at me and I could tell she believed I was lying.

“Bring it through,” she yelled down at the Warden Mages creating a small tear to bring a demon through and my hand flashed warningly.

Stroud moved forward with Hawke to stand next to me.

“What Erimond wants, is to bind you all to the blight, what we are sworn to fight. Please, my brothers and sisters, I have trained many of you – don’t do this.”

Clarel held Stroud’s gaze and began rubbing her face in obvious conflict.

“Clarel, we are so close to achieving our goal of defeating the Blight,” Erimond reminded her quickly.

I could tell that Clarel was wavering and I gazed at her pleadingly as I pitched my voice over the crowd of Wardens.

“The Inquisition did not come here to kill Wardens. We have spared those we could, please, won’t you reconsider. He is only using you to raise a demon army.”

Erimond watched Clarel and saw her uncertainty.

“Clarel, don’t listen to them. They are lying to you,” he begged.

“If what they say could possibly be true, then we should test these allegations before any further blood is shed.”

Erimond glanced at Clarel angrily and stabbed his staff into the ground.

“My Master thought this might happen and sent a much better ally to make sure his work gets done.”

The screech of the blighted dragon caused everyone to pause. I saw Clarel look at the long-time comrade she had just killed and then the dragon. Her face contorted in rage as she slammed Erimond with mage lightning, knocking him back towards the steps. Erimond scrambled to his feet quickly and ran up them while Clarel called to her men before she gave chase.

“Help the Inquisition,” She yelled running after Erimond leaving us with a very fucking large Pride demon to fight before we could follow.

Bull charged the oversized demon with Cassandra and Fenris. I glance at the warriors surrounding the Pride demon and it was a beautiful dance between them as they alternated taunting the demon between them. Me, Solas and Dorian focused on other demons that were summoned by mages that now rushed us. Alternating between us with barriers, Cole stealthing behind me helping us take down the demons that quickly rushed us. Dorian focused on keeping those around the Pride demon protected with barriers while Varric and Sera took the higher ground.
It was Cole who must have seen an opportunity and whistled loudly grabbing Bull’s attention. Bull was holding his ax out to the side and I watched in astonishment as Cole sprinted towards Bull’s ax. Bull must have caught on to what he was doing because as soon as Cole’s foot landed on the ax, Bull flung him towards the Pride demon.

My heart in my throat, I quickly threw a barrier around him before he landed on the demons shoulders. It would be comical if I wasn’t scared to death watching Cole move like a spider monkey and shimmy to straddle the demon’s shoulders. With a downward thrust of his blades, he plunged both daggers into its head and dropped the demon like a boulder.

With the demon finally down, I sprinted up the stairs after Clarel with Solas and Cole hot on my heels. We found them on the battlements in the middle of a magical fight as the others caught up with us. I watched Clarel yell at him that she would never serve the blight. Just as she was preparing to hit him again with another lightning bolt, the tainted dragon swooped down and grabbed Clarel with his jaws, flinging her away from Erimond.

Backing slowly away from the creature, we all watched Clarel slowly crawl towards us while the dragon seemed to be focused on us absently stepping over her. Clarel rolled onto her back and staring at the dragon’s stomach she sent a last ball of lightning through its belly.

We dove in different directions while the dragon rolled ass over teakettle towards us crashing into the battlements just barely behind us.

Everything began crumbling with the force of the dragon’s weight crashing through the walkway and we watched as the creature fell before flying off. We scurried away from the constantly growing hole in the battlement walkway. Rock was falling so quickly it was like trying to hold water in your bare hands and I caught a glimpse of how far up I really was.

I couldn’t believe it with my eyes. I didn’t want to anyway. In all of my nightmares of falling they were never this bad and with this one, I didn’t have the luxury of waking up.

_I will never un-see this for as long as I live._

I couldn’t breathe; it felt as if the breath had been stolen from my lungs. My heart was racing so fast I was sure it would burst from chest and fear froze me to the spot. I wanted nothing more than to curl up into a tight ball and believe that it was all a dream.

_Im going to fall._

As soon as that thought came, I saw Stroud was hanging by his fingertips from the edge. Fight or flight kicked in and choosing fight, I slammed my fear into the back of my mind and sprinted forward. Grabbing his wrist, I yanked him up with all of my might. Thank God the man helped or I would never have been able to pull him up by myself.

We turned and ran towards the archway leading off the battlements in a fear-filled dash as the walkway kept breaking away. The air left my lungs in a scream of terror with my next step.

The ground was gone beneath me, and with a blood-curdling scream, I fell.
Chapter Notes

You guys are awesome! Thank you for your continued comments and encouragement.

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes up short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."
--Theodore Roosevelt

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Never-ending blackness sped past me.

Unstopable screams tore from my throat as I fell holding my hands out awaiting the inevitable hit to the ground. Visions of my body splattering against the rocky ground forced my screams to grow and become broken. Blinding green light flashed behind my tightly shut eyes as the feeling of magic pouring out of me opening a rift. Eyes flashing open at the realization another scream rips from me as I fell through the portal directly into the fade.

Crossing my arms in front of my face before hitting the ground, I couldn’t tell if I was right-side up or upside down when my body jerked to a sudden halt. Slowly I peered through the small space between my arms and saw that I was about a foot up in the air over a gravely surface.

What the fuck is going on? Am I dead?

Moving my arms now I stared at the ground holding my hands out towards it, and whatever had stopped my rapid fall to the surface, let go and dropped me to the ground.

THUMP!

The sound of hitting the ground eerily echoed around me. Rolling over with a groan, I looked up at a sickly black and green sky and to my right, I watched Stroud walk around on a rock floating sideways.

What the fuck?

Rubbing my eyes pretty sure I didn’t just see what I think I saw, I open them back up and through the blur of vision Solas’ head was directly over mine.

“Are you okay, vhenan?”
Holding his hand down to me and grabbing it, he pulled me into a tight hug.

“I think so,” I mumble roughly into his chest gripping him tightly. I try to clear my throat hearing the thick rough quality of my vocals when I answered him and realize I might have screamed myself hoarse on the way down.

“Where are we?” Stroud questioned looking around.

I moved from his warm embrace and saw that Hawke stood on another rock directly across from Stroud that was floating upside down.

“I remember we were falling – do you think we are dead?” Hawke made an unladylike snort as she looked around. “If this is the afterlife, then the Chantry owes me an apology. This looks nothing… like the Maker’s bosom.”

“No, this is the Fade. The Inquisitor opened a rift…and we fell through,” Solas replied absently his tone full of awe and wonder.

Cole moved quickly shaking his head in agitation, eyes darting everywhere pulling my attention from Hawke.

“No. No, no, no, no, no. I can’t be here. But I am stuck – I can’t – but why can’t I…?”

Letting go of Solas, I moved towards Cole who is steadily escalating to a level of uncontrolled panic. Placing my hands gently on his face, his watery blue eyes stare back at me in terror. His whole body is fidgeting and I hold his face making him stand still and focus on me, while I allow my aura to release soothing energy towards him, trying to calm him.

“Cole, peace, you will be alright, trust me. I will get you out of here.”

Cole took small breaths and nodded as I let him go. Solas moved forward looking around in awe.

“I never thought I would find myself here physically – this is extraordinary.”

Bull stood with Cassandra and Dorian quietly looking around uneasily.

“This place is wrong – I made myself forget when I made myself real. But I know it wasn’t like this.” Cole spoke quietly next to Solas and he looked at him and nodded his head in agreement.

“The stories told are that you fell from the fade Inquisitor, was it like this?” Stroud stared at me as Bull helped him move to the ground from his sideways perch on a floating rock, while Fenris grabbed Hawke and pulled her down to him from her upside down perch.

Looking around I rubbed my neck a sure sign that I was distressed.

“I don’t remember.”

“Ah, this is shitty. I’ll fight whatever you give me, boss. But nobody said nothing about getting dragged through the ass end of demon town.”

Dorian snorted and patted Bull’s shoulder reassuringly.

“I will protect you, Amatus.”

My eyes dart to them suddenly as I fully realize that they were a couple.
Oh, that sneaky Vint! He never said a damn thing...I need to do something to acknowledge there pairing. This is so beautiful, they are perfect...shit focus! This is seriously not the time to get all warm and gooey over their romance.

“In the real world, the rift with the demons was nearby. In the main hall; you think we could get out the same way?” Stroud pointed out pulling my attention.

Spying the large green swirling vortex in the distance, I glance around at everyone.

“Well, unless you want to wait here and ask the first demon that comes along for directions, I think we should get a move on.”

The group followed behind me in silence...me...the Inquisitor...their leader. That sudden reminder had me squaring my shoulders. I knew that at this moment, I could not show fear, even if my stomach was twisting so tightly that I was sure I would puke my guts up literally. The ride down had surely aged me by twenty years but to physically be in the Fade, this could either kill us or we could unleash something worse than Corypheus on the world. Right now, I needed to project to them that everything would be okay.

I walked next to Solas occasionally glancing up at him curiously. I could feel his excitement, and his power radiating from him. The physical Fade affected him like a Mage downing a lyrium mine – his magic was humming and his skin lightly glowed. I glanced down at my own skin and saw that it was also lightly glowing.

Is this what it is like to be immortal, an Evanuris? Can I feel the raw power rushing through my veins?

If I focus on it...it almost had a melody to it, and I realize I can indeed feel it. Glancing around the darkened, dreary and very wet area, I began to wonder where the hell we had actually landed.

“Solas, you are the expert on this place, I don’t know enough about the Fade to speak confidently about it. What advice can you offer to get us through this?”

Solas gently smiled at me and moved his staff from one hand to the other before taking my hand and lacing our fingers together.

“The Fade is shaped by intent and emotion, you know this. Remain focused and it will lead you to where you wish to go. The demon that controls this area is extremely powerful. Some variety of fear, I would guess. I suggest we remain wary of its manipulations and prepare for what is certain to be a fascinating experience.”

“Your idea of fascinating and mine are seriously different ma’lath,” I tease before nodding my understanding. We moved forward up a rock carved stairway where everyone came to a sudden halt in shock.

Divine Justinia – but how can that be?

“By the Maker, could that be?” Stroud started towards the woman’s form.

“I greet you, Warden, and you, Champion,” The Divine welcomed them.


“Cassandra,” the Divine gave her a serene smile.
What appeared to be the Divine looked at Cassandra curiously and cocked her head similar to the way Cole moved his own when he was listening to someone’s thoughts.

“It is said the souls of the dead pass through the Fade and sometimes lingers, but…” Cassandra sighed heavily. “We know that spirits lie, be wary Fenlin.”

Stroud crossed his arms and looked the Divine over carefully.

“I fear the Divine is indeed dead. It is likely we face a spirit…or a demon.”

“You think my survival impossible, yet here you stand alive in the Fade yourselves. In truth, proving my existence, either way, would require time we do not have.”

“Really? How hard is it to answer one question? I’m a human and you are…”

The Divine smiled at her and folded her hands in front of her patiently.

“I am here to help you.”

I shook my head, I already knew she was a spirit – perhaps one of faith but I was unsure having never met one before.

The spirit smiled at me pleased and bowed her head slightly.

“You do not remember what happened at the Temple of Sacred Ashes, Inquisitor. I am here to help you regain your memories.”

I watched floating wisps appear around the area warily as I shook my head ‘no’.

“I have examined memories like yours stolen by the demon that serves Corypheus. It is the Nightmare you forget upon waking. It feeds off memories of fear and darkness, growing fat upon the terror. The false calling that terrified the Wardens into making such grave mistakes? Its work,” she offered slightly pacing.

Stroud’s face became a mask of anger with the information.

“I would gladly avenge the insult this Nightmare dealt my brethren.”

“You will have your chance, brave Warden. This place of darkness is its lair.”

“Corypheus seems to have a lot of demons at his disposal, how can he command so many?” I asked pulling her gaze back towards me.

“I know not how he commands his army of demons. His power may come from the Blight itself. But the Nightmare serves willingly, for Corypheus has brought much terror to this world. He was one of the Magister’s who unleashed the First Blight upon the world, was he not? Every child’s cry as the Archdemon circles, every Dwarf’s whimper in the Deep Roads…the Nightmare has fed well.”

Well…shit

“Can you help us get out of the Fade?”

“That is why I found you,” she said with a kind smile. “When you entered the Fade at Haven, the demon took a part of you. Before you do anything else, you must recover it. These are your memories, Inquisitor…slay them, and you will retrieve what was taken.”
Everyone watched as my memory replayed for them like a Fade movie while I quietly slid to my knees overcome with dizziness that swept through me with the rush of information. Closing my eyes tightly, I focused on trying to keep the contents of my stomach from spilling while the memory replayed behind my closed eyes.

*Mage Wardens holding the Divine while Corypheus activated the orb; I heard her cry for help from down the hall where I stood next to Mythal. I turned my head towards the noise as Mythal spoke closely to my ear.*

“This is where it begins leth’lan, I shall see you soon. Dareth’ shiral,” she whispered into my ear.

I remember this part now, I realize taking an unsteady breath and slowly opening my eyes thankful the area wasn’t spinning. Solas knelt beside me with worry etched on his face and reaching out I squeezed his hand while he helped me stand. Glancing around at everyone, I motioned for them to keep moving.

“Who was that woman you were standing with?” Cassandra asked me curiously.

“Another elf I met at the Conclave,” I said smoothly not missing the darting knowing glance from Solas. It was not a lie - not a complete one anyway.

“Something on your mind, Hawke?” Stroud asked her appearing unsure while they followed behind everyone.

Hawke suddenly stopped and stared at Stroud with a very confused look on her face.

“Oh, just wondering if you noticed that the Divine was being held captive by Grey Wardens?”

“I assume Corypheus had taken over their minds as we already know he can do. But we can discuss this once we return.”

Hawke’s gaze narrowed on him crossly.

“Oh I intend to,” she offered threateningly before turning to follow behind Bull and Sera.

We walked up to another rock-carved stairway when I flinched at the sound of the fear demon’s voice booming around us.

“It is not every day that three ancients visit; perhaps, I should be afraid. Facing the most powerful members of the Inquisition,” loud, wicked laughter rang out over the area echoing off the rock surfaces.

“Are you afraid, Cole? I can help you forget. Just like you help other people, we’re so very much alike, you and I.”

“No,” he whispered looking around the darkened area for the source. I reached over and grabbed his hand feeling him squeeze it back tightly. Shaking my head at him I gave him a gentle smile.

“You are nothing like this creature Cole, you are Compassion, and all of us know it.”

He gave me a lopsided smile before letting my hand go.

I glanced at Solas and saw his face was set in his cool mask of indifference as he shook his head.

“She replied evenly. I give him a knowing smile and he returned it before I focused on our path.

Coming to a long hallway of walled rock on either side, I took a few cautious steps in when I heard the clicking of a bunch of legs. Looking up, spiders quickly descended from the tops out of small dens and attacked. Killing them quickly, Solas commented calmly while slipping his staff back onto his back.

“They were demons come to take little fears.”

“Do they come in the shape of spiders?” Hawke said disgustedly.


“Well, that is shite! I saw nothing…I’d’ave taken bloody spiders,” Sera said with a nervous and shaky tone.

“This is the Fade. What you fear is what you see manifested.”

“Not helping droopy ears,” Sera snarled at Solas.

“I wish I feared breasts,” Bull joked quickly making Varric and Fenris chuckle in agreement when the loud, booming voice echoed again startling us.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
ma'lath - my love
Dareth' shiral - safe journey
Dirth ma, harellan. Ma banal enasalin. Mar Solas ena mar din - Speak rebel. You care for nothing but victory. Your pride will be your death.
Banal nadas - Nothing is inevitable
Thank you, everyone, for your continued comments and support of my story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Did you think you mattered, Hawke? Did you think anything you ever did mattered? You couldn’t even save your city. How could you expect to strike down a God? Fenris doesn’t love you…and everyone you ever cared about is going to die, just like your family.”

“Well that’s going to grow tiresome quickly,” she replied rubbing her forehead. Fenris wrapped his arm around her shoulders and kissed her temple whispering his love into her skin and she softly smiled.

We rounded the next small corner and found the Divine prepared to give me my next group of memories.

I saw myself running down a hall into the room at the urgings of Mythal. The Divine was suspended in the air and Corypheus was draining her life-force into the orb. My asking what he was doing distracted him just long enough for the Divine to smack the orb out of his hand. I snatched it as it rolled on the ground, and somehow my body absorbed the entirety of the orbs magic.

Glancing down at my hand, I shoved the sleeve up and looked at the silver like scars that ran up my arm making it look like a shattered limb put back together horribly. Looking at Solas for confirmation, he gave me a small nod and I gazed at my hand with a resigned sigh.

There would never be a way to remove it, why didn’t he tell me?

I stood silently staring at my hand and slowly began pulling the sleeve back down while Hawke spoke angrily to Stroud.

“So far we have found out that the Inquisitor was ushered from the fade by the Divine, not Andraste, and that the Wardens are the reason for the Divine’s death. Did I miss anything?” Hawke looked around and let her gaze fall on Stroud.

“The Wardens were wrong Hawke, but they were doing what they thought was right.”

Hawke snorted in disbelief.

“Yes, blood magic – summoning demons. Those sound like wonderful ideas for the greater good of mankind,” she snarled throwing her arms in the air angrily. “They killed the fucking Divine and you stand there saying that it is justified if it is done in the name of fighting the Blight?”

Stroud moved closer towards her trying to instill a sense of dominance with his height difference as he yelled back.
“You dare stand there accusing me? You tore Kirkwall apart with your rebellion, and for what? So mages could have freedom?”

Hawke slid right into his face as she snarled back disgustedly.

“I did it to keep mages drunk on blood magic from taking control. It would seem I might have been a little too immature to think I could stop that when the Wardens seemed to just pick it right up.”

I shook my head in annoyance; there was no time for this shit. Walking towards them, I reached up and slapped them both hard shifting their attention back to the present.

“We don’t have time for this bullshit! Get your shit together or I swear by any Gods listening that I will stab you both myself with your own knives, is that understood?”

Hawke nodded her head as Stroud moved away. Turning to gaze at everyone, I sighed with frustration.

“Everything we know we will look at once we get the hell out of here. For now, we keep going towards the rift. If we are going to have to fight this Nightmare demon then we will need to do it together.”

Everyone nodded their agreement and we left the flooded area and started down another long rock walled hallway. Glancing up, I looked for the little burrows or dens of possible spiders that could attack.

“Ah, Inquisitor…or should I say banal’ras? I should be very afraid of you here. No matter what you do, he will leave you, in the end, to die alone…again.”

I ignored Solas’ sudden look and steeled my emotions to express cold indifference.

“Then so be it, creature, I am not afraid of my future…but you are smart to be afraid of yours, I come for you,” I warned it menacingly.

I saw that Solas was watching me carefully and glancing around at the others, I could see their confusion at what the Nightmare had said. The touch of his hand on mine brought my eyes back to him and he looked at me tenderly.

“It is afraid and becoming more desperate as we draw closer. Shall we go and kill it now, vhenan?”

I gave him a lopsided smile nodding my agreement as we pushed onward.

After traveling through a wet cave, we came upon the Divine standing in a doorway leading to the Nightmare demon and it’s very large pet spider that he used to house all the fears and nightmares. The creature resembled a bloated beetle the size of a gas station with eight legs.

Why did it have to be fucking spiders? I hate fucking spiders!

“To get out you must kill the Nightmare. When you are through the rift, you must close it quickly, slamming the door shut between this world and yours…good luck Inquisitor,” she said as everyone watched her change into her true form as a spirit of Faith. Moving towards the large bloated pet spider the spirit spoke back to me.

“Tell Leliana…please tell her I’m sorry – I failed you too.”
She slowly ascended towards the creatures, blinding the Nightmare and his pet with her radiance as she gave her life to buy us time. Everyone who had tried to watch ended up shielding their face from the brilliance of a thousand suns shining back at them.

*Another senseless death of a rare spirit… just like Wisdom’s fate.*

My eyes adjusted quickly and I walked down the four steps leading me to stand in front of the Nightmare Demon. Staring directly into the cold onyx colored gaze, the hideous creature that resembled a half-skeletal man and the other half arachnid, tented its bony fingers as it cackled loudly at us. This thing had three spider-like legs sticking from each of its sides, and they curled menacingly forward.

The creatures head was shaped similar to a dragon’s head, except it had two long appendages that hung from the sides of where its cheeks would be and fell about halfway down its chest. The demon’s body was quite similar to an actual bug with the design of the exoskeleton.

*Jesus, you just don’t get any fucking uglier than that.*

“I am pleased to see you made it Inquisitor. Shall I take your fears away again and let you go home – your real home.”

My head cocked just slightly at his comment about my real home. I shook my head ‘no’ while pulling my staff from my back and slowly stalking towards the demon with an obvious dark intent.

“You time of feeding off fears is over Nightmare, you will never hurt anyone else again – you die today.”

The Nightmare demon hissed at me with my advancement towards it, side legs clicking against each other as they moved slightly around him with his displeasure.

“Then so be it, you shall die here as will all of your friends.”

I shrugged my shoulders conveying unimportance and gave him a humorless laugh glancing around at the others standing behind me with hardened glares and impassive expressions.

“You think they are afraid to die?” Snorting, I shook my head at the demon. “I thought you much more capable than that, Nightmare. Regardless, they will not die today, you will.”

With a bursting sarcastic laugh, I cocked my head studying the demon’s bone-like features and the nervous clicking of its fingers and arms.

“Good, you should fear me creature; I am your nightmare.”

I twirled my staff around me, the Fluorite crystal glowing brighter as I pull the fade energy surrounding me to me. From out of the corner of my eye, Solas was also moving in the same manner and reaching out with my aura, we combined our magic, intensifying its power. The blinding beam of energy that shot from the crystals that adorned the tips of our staves pierced the demon’s head, making it cry out in surprise and fade step to across the small area out of the beams light.

“Where are you going Nightmare? The party just started,” I called out to the demon sarcastically.

Nightmare hissed out angrily like a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach and summoned to him a wave of little terrors to help him. After a few waves of focusing on little demons that the Nightmare called to him, it fade stepped back to where it had been previously and I had an ‘ah ha’ moment.
I counted to fifteen before wrapping the fade around me and moving to where I believed the Nightmare would teleport at the opposite side of the room. Blending into the shadows behind a large rock, I waited for the demon cloaking my position.

The Nightmare landed exactly where I hoped it would and silently, I climbed up the short rock to stand on its top. Focusing my power through my staff and channeling all the fade energies I had gathered taking in more that Solas fed me through our shared link and twirled it over my head before stabbing the blade-end through the back of the Nightmare.

The pure energy I channeled through the staff initiated a kaleidoscope of light to splinter and fracture from inside the body of the demon. The sudden charge of energy rushing through its body ripped it apart from the inside out, causing it to split and then rupture into a million pieces. Turning my face away at the explosion of the demon, I felt its body parts pelt against me with medium impact, dousing me in ichor.

Glancing down at my gear, I grimace at the sight of demon ichor drenched over the front of me and try to keep my stomach from turning. Solas rushed towards the rock and grabbed me around my waist swinging me down while turning towards the rift for our retreat.

“Everyone – get the hell out of here,” I yell at them pointing at the opening. I waited and made sure everyone stepped through, turning at the sound of clicking behind me. Solas waited for me at the portal and yelled for me just as the pet spider was starting to waken from the Spirit of Faith’s attack.

“It is time to leave this place,” he told me quickly grabbing my hand and pulling me through behind him. Holding my marked hand towards the rift, I clenched my fist tightly slamming it shut just as one of the long legs was entering through the portal. The sudden shutting of it left one clicking appendage from the creature to dance and skitter across the floor.

“Fen’edhis,” Solas cursed.

“Vishannte Kaffas,” Dorian cursed at the same time.

When the two noticed the twitching leg clicking across the floor, they both let loose fire with extreme revulsion. It was almost comical watching the two rub their hands up and down their arms in disgust.

Sliding to my knees in the main hall, I closed my eyes exhausted as Cullen walked towards me.

“We have Erimond in custody, Fenlin. I will have him transported back to Skyhold. In the meantime, what do you want to do about the Wardens?”

I looked around and when my gaze found Stroud, he moved towards me as I slowly stood back up.

No rest for the fucking wicked...

“Take the Wardens as far from here as you can get until Corypheus is killed. Kill any demons along your travels and stay away from Venatori. We do not want a repeat of what happened here tonight. In the meantime, we will look for someone outside of your order that can give oversite and council to the Wardens. They cannot be allowed to just do anything they want all in the name of fighting the Blight. They must have some kind of oversite.”

Stroud bowed towards me gratefully, while Hawke and Fenris stared at the Warden waiting to see if he would accept.
“Agreed, and thank you, Inquisitor, we shall endeavor to not make such a mistake again.”

Turning from everyone I walked towards Solas and grabbed his hand.

“Come on handsome, let’s get cleaned up, I look like something threw up on me,” I tell him lacing my fingers with his. His answering chuckle as he laced his fingers with mine was just what I needed to hear to bolster my spirits.

Chapter End Notes

ban'al'ras - shadow
vhenan - my heart
Fen'edhis - wolf dick (but mostly used as an overall curse word)
Vishannnte Kaffas - (Tevene) you shit on my tongue
Aftermath

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you, for your continued comments and support. I am so pleased with how many have really enjoyed the stories progression.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sitting between his bent legs in the bath, a sigh of contentment escaped as he moved the washcloth over my back. Laying my head on my raised knees, he poured hot water rinsing the soap from my skin before placing a gentle kiss on the middle of my shoulders. The silence and simple actions were soothing after what we had been through in the Fade.

I stare at my arm with the silver scars that is loosely wrapped around my legs and I couldn’t help but wonder again why he hadn’t told me it was permanent. His hands rubbed over my shoulders soothingly, and I sigh again at the lovely feeling letting my eyes close.

“How long have you known it was permanent?” I finally ask him with my gravelly voice from all my earlier screaming.

He sighed heavily before answering, alerting me to the fact he had known for some time.

“Since the Hinterlands,” he finally replied.

Lifting my head from where it lay on my knees, I turn to look at him over my shoulder with silent surprise and his hands stop massaging my shoulders. His troubled blue eyes held mine that gazed at him questioningly.

“I did not know how to tell you,” he offered softly his tone full of misery.

“Did not know how, or did not want to?” I questioned him with a small thread of irritation in my tone.

Solas shook his head pulling his hands from my shoulders.

“Perhaps a bit of both,” he said glancing down at his hands.

I gaze at the delicate ring on my third finger as I process his words. Suddenly standing and stepping from the bath, surprising him with my sudden movements, I grab a towel and wrap it around me walking away from him towards our bed.

“Even with the orb, I will only be able to transfer some of its power back into it not all of it,” I muttered to myself as I stare at the mark on my hand with loathing. “I’m going to lose my arm aren’t I?” I ask him with my back to him.

The sound of him leaving the bath, and the soft whisper of cloth as he wrapped a towel around himself met my ears before his arms wrapped around me from behind.

“No vhenan, your ascension has granted you the ability to control the power embedded in your hand. Before you were ascended…yes, that was my only option.”
I nod slowly in understanding feeling slightly relieved that I wouldn’t have to lose an arm or die because of the ancient magic, but now my mind is playing devil’s advocate. I could totally get the idea of why he wouldn’t have wanted to tell me before…I had not ascended, I was mortal. But after I ascended?

_Have I traded being bound to one Evanuris for another? Is this just a different vallis’lin?_

“In the Fade, the Nightmare focused on your fear of losing me. Will you share with me why you believe I will leave you?” He asked me gently and I stared at my marked hand before clenching it into a fist deciding on honesty.

“Because of the supplies next to the Eluvian I found hidden in the castle.”

I felt him slightly stiffen against my back at the information and let an unhappy sigh out. Solas grabbed my shoulders and turned me around to look at him.

“Why would I bond myself to you if I was going to leave you?”

“I had been asking myself that same question, but knowing that the anchor can never be removed inclines to give me my answer.”

He looked at me as if I had just slapped him and he let go of my shoulders and stepped back. His expression of stunned shock swiftly turned to anger not a surprise to me.

“Am I to understand that you would rather believe I would pledge myself to you for the anchor than believe that I would do so because I love you?”

I shook my head at him and held his angry gaze calmly.

“I do not _want_ to believe that Solas if I did I wouldn’t be here. But even you have to see why I would suspect deception,” sighing miserably I rubbed my face. “I _want_ to believe that your feelings for me are real, that what we have is real. I _want_ to believe that this fucking thing,” throwing my hand up in frustration, “is not another way for you to fix a perceived mistake made.”

Solas held my gaze for a long moment before turning away from me rubbing his neck in agitation. I stared at his beautiful back for a moment wanting to reach out to him, to comfort him, instead I turned away and reached for a nightshirt.

_I really wished I could read his damn mind; this would be so much easier._

His hand shot out and grabbed my wrist halting the action and my eyes darted up to meet his stormy blue eyes that held anger, frustration, and hurt.

“I will prove to you my promise it true, Fenlin,” he growled before crashing his lips against mine angrily.

*****

Because we were going to take the route through Val Royeaux, I requested Cullen send a group ahead to check out the Deep Roads Access that Bianca had mentioned in the Hinterlands. Surprisingly, Hawke and Fenris decided to go with them. I was relieved to have them return with me to Skyhold because I really liked having Hawke around.

The cool aura that caressed mine pulled my wayward thoughts back to the present and I glance over at Solas while dismounting Etta. The insufferable man had been silent for most of the return trip
unless directly spoken to and it was making me irritable. Sleeping next to him had been a silent battle between him wracking his brain for ways to prove me wrong, and me trying to figure out how I could forgive him for not telling me.

I knew he was angry with me, I get it, and I deserved it…to a point. What was currently starting to piss me off was his complete lack of seeing how he played any part in my questioning him or his motivations.

Seriously, hide an Eluvian in a hidden chamber behind a magically sealed door and forget to tell your girlfriend that oh, by the way, my magic that is now the anchor in your hand is permanent.

“Inquisitor,” Cullen called for me pulling my attention from my tumultuous thoughts.

“Cassandra will gather rooms for us in the central district; are there any accommodations that you would prefer us to secure?”

I was about to tell him not to worry about it, but with the way Solas had been acting the past week, I was unsure if my suggesting it would be a good idea. About to tell him it didn’t matter, Solas walked forward and grabbed my pack from me before addressing Cullen.

“That will not be necessary, Commander. The Inquisitor and I have accommodations already prepared for our stay. We shall meet up with everyone in the café for dinner at six.”

Cullen spared us a brief glance and then nodded before turning away leaving me stunned speechless to stare at Solas. He took in my surprised look and gave me a tender smile.

“Unless you would prefer…” he left the question open and I immediately shook my head.

“No,” I started with a slight croak to my voice and cringed before clearing it. “No, I would prefer the privacy of our room in the alienage with you.”

Solas turned away with our packs and I trailed behind him still stunned as we made our way to the shopping district towards the inn. Whatever had caused the change, I was not going to look a gift horse in the mouth now that it appeared his brooding was over.

The small inn was just across from the Vhenadahl tree and as I passed, I slipped a few coppers into the offering bowl. This time the tree was brightly decorated with ribbons of different colors and the base was surrounded by offerings and candles. Entering the inn, the owner, Tavin, gave us both a large smile.

“Aneth ara, Fenlin,” he said quickly as we approached the bar.

“Savhalla Tavin, how have you and your wife been?”

Tavin smiled and pulled out a key from under the counter.

“She is doing well, thank you for asking after her. I have your room prepared,” he said sliding the key across the counter. Placing the small pouch of twenty sovereigns on the counter Tavin shook his head when he saw the size of the leather pouch.

“That is too much…” he began pushing the bag back towards me and I placed my hand on his.

“If you will not accept the gift for keeping our secret, then take it as pre-payment for the next time we are in town.”
Tavin’s dark green eyes held mine for a moment and I squeezed his hand before removing it and taking the key.

“Ma serannas,” he finally said sliding the small bag into his apron.

I smiled at him brightly before following Solas up the stairs. Once in our room, he dropped our bags while I shut the door and warded it.

“Would you like a bath before dinner?” I asked him removing my cloak before moving towards the large tub in the corner while he pulled out clothing.

“That sounds very nice,” he replied still digging through his pack. “Perhaps if you will share it with me it will sound much better,” he said quietly and I turned from preparing the bath to look at him.

“I might be persuaded to join you,” I teased him and saw his returned lopsided smile.

It was during our bath that I decided that I needed to get frilly cakes for our night alone and almost giddy with anticipation, I was teasing Solas as we left the inn while slipping my staff onto my back.

“If you would stop antagonizing her, she wouldn’t do things like put lizards in your pack.”

Solas closed the door behind us and slid his hand to the small of my back as we started across the courtyard.

“Vhenan, it is not as simple as just lizards…” he began and we both froze at the words that came from behind us.

“Knife-ears are not allowed weapons, hand them over.”

We slowly turned towards the direction of the voice and found a large metal clad Chevalier with his hand on his sword, while staring at us with contempt. I gave him a pleasant smile as I took a step forward and he pulled his sword. I immediately stopped, the smile sliding from my face as I held his cold gaze. Solas’s aura pulsed angrily next to me and for a moment, I wasn’t sure if it was his or mine that was stronger.

Damn if I don’t get tired of the fucking racist assholes in this town.

“I would have preferred to be polite, but I see that you are incapable. I will not be giving you my weapon. This is all just a misunderstanding, I am…”

The man spat at the ground at my feet and my eyes narrowed at him coldly.

“Hand over your weapon NOW you knife-eared bitch before I gut you like the dog you are.”

Solas had his hand wrapped around the man’s throat before I could even blink and realize that he had moved. His anger was swirling with thick black tendrils menacingly through his aura as he commenced in picking the man up by the throat.

“You do not know to whom you speak shem,” he growled into the Chevalier’s face.

The deep, powerful vibration of his voice told me it was Fen’Harel who had met the Chevalier’s challenge and promised death for the offense. Glancing around worriedly as we were starting to gather a crowd, I shifted on my feet uncomfortably. At that moment another Chevalier came around the corner and saw his comrade held in the air one-handed by an overly tall elf, and pulled his sword
quickly rushing forward.

Oh, come on!

Drawing the Fade around me quickly, I hit the rushing Chevalier with a Fade Fist square in the chest. I heard his loud “OOMPH” as it knocked him to the ground, and cringed at the sound of metal scraping loudly along the cobblestone as he finally came to a sliding stop against a building.

“ENOUGH OF THIS!” I yell at the men.

“My name is Inquisitor Lavellan – this is…”

More Chevalier’s came around the corner all focused on Solas and I groaned at how horribly wrong this was going.

Are you fucking kidding me?!

“Solas – for the love of the spirits, drop him,” I pleaded with him quickly.

He glanced at me angrily before throwing the man away from him towards his comrades and stared at the small group of Chevalier’s that had assembled defiantly.

Oh my God, what happened to my calm as a cucumber, quiet as the proverbial church mouse, Apostle?

“As I was trying to explain, I am Inquisitor Lavellan…” I started as I began removing my glove over the marked hand that would effectively hide me.

“And I’m the Divine,” one man joked making some of the other Chevalier’s snort and laugh and I abruptly stopped.

Tavin peeked out of the inn’s doorway and looked at me nervously. Motioning him towards me, he looked at the gathered Chevalier’s anxiously before he moved a bit closer.

“Tavin, please find Commander Cullen. I suspect he is staying in the Val Jerdavain with the others.”

Tavin gave a quick nod and ran for the Central District while Solas and I stared at the Chevaliers.

“What are we waiting for? There are enough of us to take them,” one man groused from behind the small group.

“Have you learned how to stop magic? We wait for the Commander, besides, that knife-ear is strong,” he said rubbing his still sore neck from where Solas had gripped him.

Solas gave him a menacing smile that only made me internally groan at how the Chevalier’s tightened their grips on their swords. Their Commander Milieu moved through the small group of men eyeing us disgustedly.

“What seems to be the problem, Lieutenant?”

“The knife-ears are resisting Commander,” the man that Solas had thrown replied with a raspy voice.

The Commander’s eyes looked directly at Solas and then let his cool gaze slide to me.

“Are they now…perhaps they need a lesson in maintaining their place,” he said loudly for everyone to hear.
I could feel Solas’ aura expand in expectation and I linked mine with his. This was not going to end well for the Chevalier’s, that much I could be certain.

“Excuse me Commander, but as I was trying to explain earlier…”

The Commander spat at me and I clenched my fists.

“Must be something you learn in Chevalier school…good to know.”

Thank God we didn’t have to wait long as Cullen cut through the group of Chevalier’s with Cassandra and Leliana closely behind him.

“What in bloody hell is going on here,” he growled looking at the group of Chevalier’s with drawn weapons and finally landing on the Commander.

“We will not tolerate any resistance from knife-ears in Val Royeaux.”

Cullen yanked the Commander by the collar of his cuirass towards him roughly.

“Do not call her that,” his voice was angry steel as he yanked him even closer. “She is the Herald of Andraste, and you will treat her with the utmost respect or die like a cur in the gutters of Val Royeaux – understood?”

There were small gasps from the group of Chevaliers and some from the crowd of elves that had gathered in the courtyard. Fully embarrassed now at how our hiding spot had been completely ruined by me just wearing a fucking staff and stared at the ground.

Cullen let the Commander go and glanced to where Solas and I stood.

“I can explain,” I began and his tawny colored eyes narrowed on me. “Or not,” I mumbled deciding to keep quiet.

Cullen turned back to the Commander of the Chevaliers.

“I want these men reprimanded for their dreadful behavior. Without the Inquisitor, your Empress would be dead.”

“Would you please escort the Inquisitor to dinner Master Solas,” he requested with a tone that made it an order.

Solas gave a quick nod towards Cullen and slid his hand to the small of my back steering me towards the dining district and I glanced up at him with a small uneasy smile.

“I believe I am in trouble,” I tell him quietly.

He chuckles softly and glances over his shoulder before gazing down at me.

“No vhenan, I believe they are the ones in trouble.”

Chapter End Notes

Aneth era - less formal greeting
Savhalla - return courtesy greeting
Ma serannas - my thanks
shem - quickling/human
vhenan - my heart
Seated in the plaza courtyard café, Cullen walked towards our table with a harried, angry gaze making me flinch knowing it was I that gave him that look and was more likely in for a lecture.

“Cullen, I am sorry,” I began as he sat next to me to my left.

“You do not need to apologize, Inquisitor. You did nothing wrong,” he said taking the mug of ale from Varric.

“What were you guys doing in the alienage anyway,” Leliana asked us with a knowing grin.

“Trying to keep a low profile,” I muttered and heard her soft answering laughter.

“That didn’t work so well Sketch,” Varric commented with a teasing grin.

Solas’ hand slid over my knee beneath the table and he gave me a gentle smile instantly making me feel a bit better about the situation. I would never regret just wanting time alone away from everyone. Digging my fork into the fish on my plate, I caught Leliana’s sudden narrowing look at my third finger and began blushing as I took a bite of my dinner.

_Damn it! I’ve jumped from the frying pan into the fire._

“Perhaps you will enlighten us to when we will all be getting invitations,” Leliana led with a knowing, teasing smile.

_No, no, no…today is seriously not going to be my day._

“What?” Cullen questioned his fork midway to his mouth.

Cullen glanced at Leliana confused for a moment and then his startled understanding gaze swung back towards me and saw the ring before I could slide my hand beneath the table nonchalantly.

I caught Solas’ questioning gaze out of the corner of my eye and the red in my face only deepened. Putting my fork down, I grabbed my wine and took a small sip before looking at them.

_Well, it was a good run…I’ve worn the ring for over a month and no one had noticed until now._

“It is not something we have discussed, there really hasn’t been time with so many other pressing matters it totally skipped my mind.”

“What has escaped your mind?” Solas’ soft baritone questioned from beside me.

Clearing my throat, I finally look at him uncomfortably.
“It’s really a funny story…and…well, it started when Josephine questioned me about you moving into my quarters during one of our meetings.” Swallowing nervously, I folded my hands in my lap and looked at him.

“She brought up marriage and got that little glow of excitement at the thought of planning a wedding, because that is so Josephine, right? And I…I told them that if we were to marry it wouldn’t be an Andrastian wedding, I mean we are not Andrastian,” fidgeting nervously I mutter aloud, “this is all Josephine’s fault.”

His eyes held mine as he listened intently and my voice wobbled as my anxiety jumped another notch.

“Well,…anyway, then I said if we were decided on that sort of thing, it would be small and personal and that I would personally give my invitations to only the people I wanted there…and well…but we haven’t talked about all that.” I had started off strong and somewhere in the middle my voice started to waver and by the end, I sounded quite unsure of myself.

His blue eyes twinkled with a mischievous glint in them as he slowly smiled and picked up my wine glass taking a drink. I could feel everyone’s eyes on us from around the table and I just wanted to fall through the floor.

This is NOT how I wanted to tell anyone.

His eyes glanced around the table at those staring at us intently and took another drink of my wine.

“It is true, we have not yet discussed a time for our bonding ceremony,” he finally gave them simply before handing me my wine back with a very pleased expression.

Please, Lord, take me now! Why does he have to look so damn smug about all this?

“Well there is no hurry,” I injected quickly before anyone could say anything. “I mean…it’s not like I’m pregnant or anything,” I countered quickly earning me a raised eyebrow from Solas and I snapped my mouth closed.

Eat; you won’t get yourself into trouble if your mouth is full you idiot.

The laughter around the table made my face flame even hotter and I picked up my fork and tried eating more of my dinner. Leliana gave me a smile larger than I had ever seen light her features before.

“No, of course, there is no hurry. I will, of course, keep my eye out for mine though,” she teased before taking a drink of her wine.

“As will I,” Cullen joked before taking a drink of his ale.

“Perhaps we could have a double ceremony, my dear,” Dorian jibed and my face only grew redder.

How do I find myself in these situations?

“You know this fish is really good, you guys should really try eating some of it,” I tell them before taking another mouthful.

The loud laughter from around the table at my obvious embarrassment was enough to get everyone back to talking about everything else but our engagement and I let out a small breath of relief.
After our dinner in the plaza courtyard café, we wandered towards the baker who sold the frilly cakes across the plaza market square. I was really looking forward to the sugary sweet when his fingers laced with mine, slowing me down, obviously wanting to talk. I refrained from sighing and knew that I could happily kill Leliana at this very moment.

“I agree with what you told them, that there is no hurry, vhenan; but it is something we should discuss.”

I shook my head and let out a small sigh of annoyance barely stopping myself from letting my eyes roll.

“Why, because they brought it up?”

He pulled me to a halt and tilted my chin up gently so he could look me in the eye and I wanted to flinch from his intense gaze.

“Did you not want them to know or were you not ready for them to know?” his softly spoken question was not a surprise, though I seriously wish I had a poker face right about now because my insides were wiggling nervously.

“No, I…it’s just…I wanted it to be just for us for a little while longer, that is all.” I internally cringed at how that sounded even to my own ears especially after our discussion in the Approach.

His eyes studied mine for a few heartbeats not letting me know what was going on behind those beautiful blues before he caressed my cheek and returned to walking towards the bakery.

“I believe you desired frilly cake for this evening’s dessert,” he said softly.

“Yeah,” I replied absently now thinking about why I hadn’t wanted anyone to know yet.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Carrying our small box of tiny cakes back towards the Alienage, I was completely lost in thought.

Why didn’t I tell them? Didn’t I want them to know? Do I unconsciously believe he will not go through with it? Do I really think that he is only after the damn foci now embedded in my hand?

Sighing heavily, my brain an absolute mess, I walked through the door he held open into the inn. Smiling absently at Tavin, I headed for the stairs still struggling with my thoughts as he gave us a welcoming nod. I waited for Solas to remove the ward on our door and entered placing the small box on the desk as my thoughts swirled in different directions. I was definitely distracted and a little surprised when Solas spun me around with an aggravated look on his face.

“You have been distant since dinner, what is the real reason you didn’t want them to know about our bonding?”

I stared at him wide-eyed and unsure of how to answer without being brutally honest.

Well, maybe that is what I need to be.

I shrug from his grasp and went and sat on the bed and stared at the floor.

“I…I know that I love you, I just wonder sometimes if that will be enough for you.”

Knotting my fingers together, we sat in silence.

“Enough for me?” he questioned sounding absolutely frustrated and confused as he leaned against the table and crossed his arms.

“Yes, for you,” I reply and then unknot my fingers finding the courage to forge ahead. “Let me ask you,” I said with a softened voice and taking a deeper breath for the courage to continue. “Do you still want to rip the Veil down? Rebuild Elvhenan to its former glory?”

I glance up at him now and see his look of surprise at the direction of my question.

“I…I am uncertain,” he finally answered.

I gave him a small, pleased smile encouraged by his admission of indecision before I continued. Mythal was not wrong; if I failed not just the people would perish but I would too and it would not matter that I was now ascended to an Evanuris or his bonded mate. One simply could not live without their heart.

“You know by doing that, not only will you be releasing the Evanuris but this world will burn in the raw chaos – where everyone will most likely die, right?”

He slowly nodded his head at me not voicing his answer and I let out another heavy sigh as his face has not changed expression and it was frustrating not know what he was thinking.

“And you would willingly do that, so you could rebuild Arlathan? A corrupt city that will gladly enslave the elves of today – that’s if any of them actually survived the sundering of the Veil.”
We stared at each other in silence for a long time. It was comforting to feel his indecision through his aura and the look of uncertainty his eyes held, though his face gave nothing away. I pressed on.

“To recreate the Elvhenan Empire is not worth wiping out every race on the planet to make it happen,” I tell him softly and rubbed my face before standing and moving towards him.

Placing my hand over his heart, I gently smiled at him letting my aura soothingly brush against him lovingly. I needed him to understand that I was not angry at him for his indecision, that my love for him was real and that I believed in him to be a good man and not what the Dalish would pretend he was.

“I was not brought back just so I could watch the last shreds of your humanity be torn from you, Solas, it would kill me. Please think about what I have said because once we are bonded, we can never sever the ties between our souls that will be forged with the ceremony.”

The loving feeling of his aura surrounded me and for once I finally felt like I might actually have a shot at turning him away from the path of destruction he had set himself on. His head bent towards mine and placed a gentle kiss on my lips. The soft heat of desire spread low in my middle and I slipped my other hand up his chest to curve around his neck holding him closer. His hands slid around my waist and reciprocated the movement by pulling me in closer and I melted against him.

I would die a thousand more deaths just to be right here if even for a moment.

Softly moaning, I nibbled at his lips as he picked me up and carried me towards our bed.

“Ar lath ma, ma vhenan,” he mouthed against my lips as he laid me down.

“Sul bellanaris ma’lath,” I mouthed back enjoying the loud moan torn from his lips.

*****

After yesterday’s complete goat fuck in the Alienage, Cullen now required that guards be posted outside our inn for protection. Seeing them as soon as we left the inn was not how I wanted to start my day out. I just wanted to shop and not have the guards trailing after us, but when I tried to ask them to leave they looked at me as if they were more scared of what Cullen would do to them than me.

“It was the Commander’s order’s Inquisitor, we can’t,” one of them replied quickly.

Well shit, so much for the idea of incognito shopping with my sexy man.

I ignored the soft chuckle coming from Solas who stood behind me while I slipped the gloves into my pocket and crossed my arms.

“Well then, let’s get going boys, I don’t want to get you in trouble with the Commander. I have things I need to buy before we leave tomorrow, so I hope you’re ready for boring girl stuff.”

Moving past them, I take off for the clothing shop in the Alienage while the two soldiers gave each other an understanding smirk. Crossing the short courtyard past the Vhenadahl tree, I reached the doors to the shop and saw them both move to take up a place out of the way. Giving them a pleased smile, I passed through the door thankful they weren’t trying to follow me inside.

I notice that Solas is walking around looking at different items while I spoke with the shop owner for a moment. She brought me to the area that held undergarments and I saw Solas’ slight blush as he realized where the shop owner had led me to and moved away leaving me to laugh at his retreating
back. The man killed me with his embarrassment over undergarments. I caught his eye at one moment and held up a pair of small, lacy red smalls, and his ears reddened brightly. Giving him a wicked smile I handed the garment to the shop owner.

“I am definitely taking a pair of those, one in black and red,” I said quietly making the woman giggle.

The lovely owner pulled out some more silky underthings that I picked between and chose a few lovely camisoles and another bathrobe that she quickly wrapped for me. I followed her to a small little platform where she could take my measurements and she clucked her tongue behind her teeth.

“You are smaller than most Mademoiselle,” she said softly before pulling out some soft summer-like dresses.

Solas gave me a smug look with a raised eyebrow as if he was trying to say, ‘I told you so’. Shaking my head at him, I stuck my tongue out just as the woman brought a summer dress out of the back room.

“This would look very nice with your coloring…I might need to take it in a bit, but I could have that ready for you today.

It is very pretty in a light yellow but it was sleeveless and I shook my head.

“I need something with sleeves preferably, madam.”

She glanced at me for a moment and I pulled up the sleeve of my left arm just enough to show her the pale scars on my forearm. Her eyes widened as she took in the winding scars and then her eyes slid over the mark on my hand and promptly fell to her knees, scaring the crap out of me.

“My lady, Inquisitor – you honor me by coming to my humble shop. They said you were Dalish…I thought it only a rumor.”

Jumping from the small box I stood on, I bent to help her back to her feet with a gentle smile glancing quickly around to make sure she hadn’t drawn unwanted attention. I hated that they all thought me Dalish and Solas held my gaze reflecting humor while I grimace at the situation.

“Now none of that business, you don’t need to bow to me. I put my pants on one leg at a time just like you.”

She gazed at me with large brown eyes full of uncertainty and slowly rose.

“But my lady,” she began again and I gave her another easy smile.

“Really, just one leg at a time, I promise, no divine intervention involved. Besides, we can’t have you doing this every time I come to Val Royeaux. Your shop is not only wonderful and full of everything I need; it is the only one in all of Val Royeaux that will make clothes that fit me.”

Patting her shoulder, her face changed from unsure, too one of pride with my compliment. I turned towards another area that held leggings and what looked like nice long, warm looking tunics.

“Now I did see a nice little green dress with sleeves over this way,” I began leading her towards where I saw it uncaring that I really didn’t like wearing dresses but today I would buy one.
Within an hour I had everything I needed including a few pairs of some nice comfy leggings, two pairs of soft ram-skinned boots that came to the knee and two dresses that she talked me into with matching slippers. Getting her information so that I could order clothing from her if needed, we left with her promise to have everything delivered to the inn that evening.

“I need some more sketchbooks,” I mumble mostly to myself as we walk out of the shop. Solas laced his fingers with mine before I could take off in any direction to find one as I was likely to do.

“There is a bookstore around the corner in the plaza that Master Tethras and I went.”

Letting him lead the way, the two guards followed along behind us causing people to stare as we passed and my fingers tightened their hold on his. I understood why Cullen felt the need to do it, but this was just a little uncomfortable. I was going to have to school him on the ways of plain-clothed bodyguards if they were going to be a regular thing.

We entered the small shop and I went one way while Solas went another. Moving through the narrow isle’s filled with parchments and materials for binding your own books, I found myself suddenly in front of the card stock. I thought about what Leliana had said the night before and smiled as I ran my hand over one of the thick sheets. Jumping slightly, his softly spoken words whispered in my ear.

“I like the light blue,” he advised and kissed my temple before walking off towards a shelf of books.

I stared after him for a moment and shook my head. Taking a small breath for courage, I picked up a thick stack of the light blue cardstock with beautiful matching parchment envelopes and moved towards the different quill pens to gather my supplies.

After about an hour, we met back up and I had a large supply of drawing materials and a couple of books. Solas had some drawing materials and a large supply of books. Laughing at the obvious differences, I placed everything down and enjoyed the small look of surprise that dashed across his face when he saw the large bundle of light blue cardstock mixed in with my art supplies. Giving him a small grin we paid for our purchases setting up their delivery for later and I glanced at the men as we exited.

“Come on boys, let’s get some lunch; I’m starved,” I tell them and headed for a café in the plaza courtyard. Much to their surprise, I had them sit down with us as I took the time to get to know them.

Carl Mumsford and John Shilling were childhood friends and both from the Hinterlands. They were both twenty-three and they joined the Inquisition after the fall of Haven together. To me, they were so young, but after seeing the horrible things that happened around Thedas it did not surprise me at how quickly someone would grow up. Hell, even Cullen began training to be a Templar at thirteen, and he said that he wasn’t even the youngest.

“When was last time you two went home to visit?” I asked taking a bite of honey slathered bread.

Carl shook his head and finished chewing before answering.

“We haven’t, not since joining,” he finally replied before taking another bite of his roasted ram.

I glance at him curiously for a moment as I finish off my slice of bread and dust my fingers.

“So you have been with the Inquisition for a year and have not had a chance to visit your family?”

Solas unsuccessfully tried to hide his knowing smile from me and I shake my head as both men look at me with blank stares.
“Well, do you want to visit them?”

John and Carl both shrug and give me a shy smile.

“Well of course we do, it is just not allowed.”

I glance at Solas again and he is now no longer even trying to hide his smile as he holds my gaze.

“Well that is going to change,” I mumble holding his gaze for a moment before taking a bite of my ram.

*Not allowed – my ass!*

After our lunch was finished, Solas excused himself and I continued talking with the men. Our conversation was quite enlightening, and I was making a mental list of all the things that I wanted to discuss with Cullen when we returned to Skyhold when Solas finally returned.

Solas held a small box and with a knowing smile, I knew immediately that he had gone to the bakery and purchased more of the nummy frilly cakes. After our heavy discussion last night, we made love and afterward sat in bed and devoured the frilly cakes we had brought back to the room.

It made me smile to think about it now. There we sat, two grown adults in the middle of our bed, devouring tiny cakes with the enthusiasm of children. Little moans and groans full of delight with each nibble, it was as if we were like children who never got sweets. It had been a wonderful way to end our evening and apparently, he thought so too, if the sly grin on his face meant anything.

We walked from the café and I eyed the box and glanced up at him.

“I think you’re either spoiling me or trying to fatten me up,” I tease and hear his soft chuckle.

“Perhaps a bit of both,” he offered with a cheeky grin.

Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma, ma vhenan - I love you my heart
Sul bellanaris ma'lath - For eternity, my love.
Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support. Your comments keep me plugging along.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

We finally left Val Royeaux and reached Jader. Our disembarking of the vessels went rather swiftly and everyone was in cheery moods having had a couple of nights to relax and let loose a bit back in Val Royeaux. It was definitely needed after Adamant. For some, however, the letting loose part almost got them into a wee more trouble than it might have been worth.

I still didn’t know how Bull talked Sera into letting him throw her. There had to have been serious amounts of alcohol involved. But somehow he had, and to Sera’s delight, she plowed through three Chevaliers like a wrecking ball knocking them down. To Cullen’s utter dismay, he had to go and bail out Sera and Bull from the jail and I would have paid to see that.

Pulling an apple from my pack, I polished it on my leg before taking a bite as I thought about everything Solas and I had discussed over the past few weeks. Something needed to give, and it wasn’t him that needed to at this time but me. Taking another bite, I caught Dorian’s nasty glare. The poor man looked extremely pale under that beautiful tan of his. He was obviously massively hung over, and I hid a giggle as he eyed me looking slightly annoyed as I bit into the apple again making loud crunching noises.

“My dear, could you at least bite quieter,” he requested rubbing his temple.

I softly chuckle as I glance at him wearing an obviously pained expression.

“That whole pain-cave look you having going on right there my friend,” I say while gesturing at his entire body, “is the main reason I don’t get drunk.”

He glared at me before pulling out a little purple flask and downing it quickly like a Tequila shot.

“This should fix me right back up,” he said with a snarky grin. Shaking my head at him, I take another bite of my apple making him slightly groan while I gave him a big, cheeky smile.

“Wait…you can’t get drunk?” Bull questioned me sounding skeptical.

I shook my head at him, pointing at him with the hand that held the apple as I chewed quickly and swallowed.

“I did not say I can’t, I most definitely can, I just choose not to is all.” Pointing at Dorian who was just starting to get a little color back into his cheeks from his hangover fix-it potion and I smirked. “Why wouldn’t I want to miss out on all that?”

Bull chuckled and shook his head and I could see where this was already going as he was now giving Varric a knowing smile.

“This is going to turn into a bet isn’t it?”
“Hell yeah, it is,” Bull commented simply making everyone else that was within earshot laugh.

“Shit,” I grumble. I hadn’t been drunk since college and that was not a night I really wanted to remember. *I never did find my left shoe,* taking another bite of my apple I glance over at Solas who also had a mischievous glint in his eye.

“Oh come on, not you too,” I groan.

“I am sure that it would be quite fascinating to watch,” he commented with a hint of humor in his voice.

“We really need to work on your idea of fascinating and mine,” I grumble and feed the rest of my apple to Etta ignoring everyone’s laughter.

*****

The loud blaring of the horn signaling our return was annoying but also very comforting. I never really liked the sound of the horn, but to hear it always told me that I was finally home. The soft clopping of multiple hooves over the bridge echoed over the valley below and I led Etta towards the barn along with the others.

Dropping down from the saddle, Master Dennett came over and handed me the brush for her while he pulled her saddle off. Smiling at him gratefully, I began brushing her as soon as her gear was removed. The Hart that Solas and I had taken on our mini vacation eyed me from over his gate as I continued to care for Etta, and the large brown eyes made me feel guilty for paying so much attention to her.

“It would appear you have an admirer,” Solas commented next to my ear making me chuckle and shiver with a bone-deep want for him at the caress of his breath against my sensitive ear.

“Should I tell him to stand in line?” I tease hearing his soft laughter as he picked up my pack to take to our room.

“Perhaps, or you could give him the attention he is soulfully pleading for. I can understand how the poor creature feels,” he said cheekily.

“Venavis,” I tell him slapping his arm laughing as he backed away.

“I shall go and prepare a bath,” he said with a large smile and I turned back towards Etta smiling at the sound of his soft laughter.

Eyeing the large animal as I led Etta to her stall, I made sure she had everything she needed before shutting the gate and walking to where the Hart waited.

“Okay big guy, come here,” I said calmly opening the gate and entering his stall.

Brushing him and rubbing his face, the large elk-like animal rubbed his face into my chest almost adoringly making these little chuffing, gurgling noises in the back of his throat that made me giggle with his antics.

“I’m already spoken for you silly fool,” I mutter scratching his forehead.

“He has been very particular about who gets near him since you and Master Solas took him out,” Master Dennett commented resting his arms on the gate while watching me.
“Solas told me they are noble creatures that either let you near them or didn’t. Something I can relate to I guess,” I tell him as I continue brushing the dark short fur.

“Well he has obviously taken a liking to you; maybe he will get a name now since he won’t tolerate anyone else.”

I glance over my shoulder at Master Dennett for a moment and then look into the deep brown eyes of the Hart and touch his face. Studying him for a long moment as I memorize his features, taking in the small dark grey streak that ran down his forehead and the thin, dark grey stripes over his hindquarters, not unlike a Zebra’s.

“What name would you prefer good sir,” I question him making Master Dennett chuckle.

The creature pressed his head into mine very gently and it made me smile as I held his face. His eyes were so expressive, showing an intelligence and charm as they gazed at me.

“Inansha, would that suit you?” I whisper to him and the Hart butted its head against mine like a nod.

“Inansha it is then,” I tell Master Dennett who nods his head at me.

“Spell it out for me and I’ll carve the name into the gate,” he replied walking away.

Scratching the animal’s forehead one more time, I give him a quick peck on the nose.

“Okay Inansha, I have to be going but I will return to see you soon. Solas is going to have to teach me to ride you.”

Leaving the barn with a backward glance, I took the back entrance through the kitchens and waved at some of the staff as I glance around at the large amounts of food everywhere.

“What the…”

Francois looked at me from his normal spot in front of the wood stove with a harried expression.

“It is for the celebration tonight for your victory in the Approach,” he offered before turning back towards the stove.

_UGH…ANOTHER F**KING PARTY, I REALLY NEED TO WORK ON JOSEPHINE ABOUT THESE._

I continued through the kitchen and took the steps to the main hall and slipped through the door into the room unnoticed. I couldn’t believe my luck as I let my eyes glance around the large room and not seeing any of my council, I moved swiftly to the stairs to my room. Slipping behind the door I warded it quickly before sagging against it and letting out a breath of relief. My eyes dart upward at the sound of laughter towards the top of the staircase where Solas stood staring down at me laughing.

“You don’t understand…it’s the first time I have ever made it to this door without getting stopped,” I finally reply as I move away from the door and walk up the stairs.

“Perhaps you should employ your shadow technique to avoid your council,” he teased and I gave him a dirty look.

“Oh, hardy har har, such a funny guy now,” I tease back with a lopsided smile as I crest the top step. Solas lifted my chin for me to look up at him before placing a gentle kiss on my lips.

“If only for the chance to see such a beautiful smile, I would play the fool gladly,” he whispered and
kissed me again.

“Oh, that is smooth – do you write all these down, because I am sure other men could use your lessons on how to seduce a woman with words.”

He chuckled and kissed me again. Wrapping my arms around his neck, I melted into him. When he pulled away, my eyes slowly opened to his beautiful blue gaze and my stomach buzzed with the flutters of a billion little wings rushing around.

Holding his gaze I suddenly knew what I wanted…I wanted nothing more in this world than him and if I wanted to be honest with myself, I was tired of waiting.

“I want us to start planning our bonding ceremony,” I tell him.

He gazed at me for a moment with a crooked smile.

“Truly?” he questioned while holding my gaze his thumbs grazing over my hips in slow circles.

“Yes, I think we have waited long enough, don’t you?”

Solas’ eyes grew slightly larger as my words sunk in and his face broke into a generous smile. Picking me up, he twirled me around as I slightly clung to his neck and squealed at the sudden change of position. His lips peppering kisses on my face and neck making me giggle as he held me tightly to him.

“Yes, we have,” he mumbled against my neck carrying me towards the bathroom for our bath.

I slipped on the dark brown tunic and black leggings from my recent purchase in Val Royeaux and pulled out the matching ram-skinned boots. Solas pushed my hair to one side and placed a soft kiss on the nape of my neck as I pulled the boots on. Glancing at him over my shoulder I give him a soft smile.

“I find it hard to want to celebrate our victory with so many dead,” I tell him with a voice full of regret.

He sat behind me on the bed and slid a leg to either side of me while pulling me back into him.

“Perhaps it is the purpose of celebrating the lives of those we lost and not the victory itself that you should focus on.”

I lay my head back against him and close my eyes enjoying the soft rumble of his voice as it surrounds me. Something about it was just so damn sexy. A little sigh escapes as I thought about what he said.

“I would have preferred them not dying at all for those fools, but you are right. I need to celebrate their life and not focus on their death.”

He placed a kiss on my temple.

“Then we should get going vhenan; you cannot hide up here for much longer before Josephine will come for you.”
I sigh again knowing he is right, but I was so comfortable in his embrace that I really didn’t want to move. He began moving away and I pulled his arms back around me making him laugh.

“Vhenan,” he said with a teasing tone.

“Just a few more moments,” I said with a pouty tone making him laugh even more. But it worked as I felt his arms settle around me.

“Now isn’t this much better than drinking with a bunch of stuffy nobles?” I tease and feel the vibration of his laughter through my back.

I groan at the sound of someone knocking and my head drops forward.

“Inquisitor – everyone is waiting for you to say something,” Josephine called through the door.

Solas placed another kiss on my temple and I could feel his smile against my skin.

“She is on her way, Josephine,” he answered as I slid off the bed and headed for the stairs.

“See you down there handsome,” I tell him with a smile before walking down the stairs.

I stare at the list of names of those we lost at Adamant and glance up at him with a cool expression.

“I am, let’s get this over with.”

Leaving our meeting, Josephine took the side corridor that led to the dungeons to have Erimond brought up while I walked into the main hall with Cullen and Leliana. Every part of me wanted to electrocute that man for what he did by taking advantage of the Wardens. I had barely gotten any sleep last night thinking about what I would do today.

Only Solas knew what I was about to do, and agreed with me. Erimond’s fate must fit the crime he committed. Rubbing my face I made my way through the gathering crowd noticing Dorian, Bull, and Solas leaning against the side wall next to the door to the rotunda. Taking the small steps up towards my chair, I caught Josephine exiting the doorway to the dungeons and moving towards me.

Squaring my shoulders, I took a small calming breath and sat staring out at the gathering crowd. I hated this part of the job, but I was confident in what I had decided to do with Erimond. I gave Josephine a small nod as she turned and addressed the large crowd of nobles.

“Are you prepared for the judgment of Erimond?” Cullen questioned me from across the table.

I stare at the list of names of those we lost at Adamant and glance up at him with a cool expression.

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“Adamant’s influence continues, your Worship. I submit Lord Livius Erimond of Vyrantium, who remains loyal to Corypheus. We found him alive, offering extreme resistance, likely because the order will ask for his head, in more colorful terms. To say nothing of justice you might personally require for what was suffered in the Fade.”

I stare at Erimond with obvious disgust and found a perverse pleasure in seeing the blackened eye and the swollen jaw he presented.

“I’m struggling to understand how judging you can make up for anything that happened.”

Erimond gave a sarcastic smile and yanked his arm away from the guard holding him as he stared coldly at me.
“I recognize none of this proceeding; you have no authority to judge me.”

Josephine stepped forward with her ever-present smile on her face as she gazed at Erimond.

“On the contrary, many officials have communicated that they will defer to the Inquisitor on this matter.”

Erimond snarled at her in response.

“Because they fear; not just Corypheus, but Tevinter, rightful ruler of every piece of ground you’ve trod in your pathetic life. I served a living God. Bring down your blades and free me from the physical, glory awaits me.”

My eyebrow rose at his obvious want for death and I gave him a cool smile.

“Erimond, glory doesn’t await you, that I can promise. Any protection you thought you had has apparently been withdrawn. You will die, by my hand – painfully.”

“ Petty actions, the truth lies in the next world.”

I stood up and smiled at him menacingly.

“There will be no next world for you Erimond,” I promised as I walked towards him.

Erimond’s sarcastic smile started to slide from his features the closer I got to him. I spoke to the guards standing behind him.

“Take him outside and prepare him.”

The guards slid their arms through Erimond’s and drug him backward as he stared at me. Once he was through the door I turned to look at Josephine who looked very uncomfortable and walked towards her to speak to her quickly before addressing the crowd.

“This will not be a public death Josephine,” I tell her quietly before pitching my voice above the crowd.

“Lords and Ladies – Erimond’s death will not be a public matter. I request that you all stay within the castle’s walls.”

The sudden flurry of conversation sounded like a loud pulsing drum as I left the main hall and out the door ignoring the looks from my friends and my counsel. The soft brush of his aura against mine was soothing and I gave him a small nod in acknowledgment before closing the door behind me.

The spell I wanted to use was one of Assan’s memories and it was vicious, it was also a spell only known to two people, myself and Solas. The spell would first, bind Erimond’s spirit to his body leaving him aware that he was trapped inside to never die, secondly, the body would die but never decay, thus keeping him trapped and bound for all time until released.

Normally, the people burned there dead – but not today they wouldn’t. This sanctimonious asshole was going to get buried. I looked at the guards and gave them both a pleasant smile.

“Leave us,” I tell them and see their hesitation before following my orders. I watched to make sure they were gone before turning my attention back to Erimond. Moving my hands slowly, in a fluid motion while smiling at him coolly, my eyes stared into his coldly as I began the ancient spell in elvish.
“Erimond, I bind you by removing your power and locking you to your physical body. I remove aging of your corpse so you may never leave. I sentence you to an eternity of never-ending. You shall never, find peace and glory, only madness and chaos.”

With a small circular flourish of my hands, a black tendril of smoke slowly curled towards him from my fingertips until it was wrapping around his throat, slowly choking him. I watched as he stared at me in horror while the smoke cut off his air and with his mouth open to gasp for breath the black smoke silently slipped into his mouth and down his throat.

Erimond’s body jolted and shook as the spell took over, his eyes staring at me in alarm.

“I told you Erimond, there will be no next world for you.”

I watched as the spell completed and his body fell to the ground, his face twisted in anger and despair. Turning away from him, I found the two guards just inside the keep’s doors and told them that I wanted Erimond buried not burned and saw them both share a confused look but went about fulfilling my orders.

Chapter End Notes

Venavis - stop
Inansha - Happy eyes
vhenan - my heart
“Have we made the arrangements for the soldier's families that died at Adamant, Josephine?”

She nodded and shuffled a few papers on her always present clipboard.

“Yes, I was able to obtain the money with the outpour of generosity from both King Alistair and Empress Celine.”

*I guess that wiggle room I garnered is paying off. Good to know they aren’t all for a show.*

Leliana stepped slightly forward drawing my attention.

“I received a report from Warden Stroud. He found a large grouping of Venatori in the Hissing Wastes on his way to Weisshaupt. They encountered no troubles, but thought you would like to know that they are obviously searching for something.”

Nodding my head in acknowledgment I tap my finger on the table.

“I am glad he didn’t have any troubles and we will, of course, need to address their presence there at some point. For now, I would like us to focus on obtaining the information that Cullen needs to find out more about this Sampson.”

Cullen nodded his head and pointed towards the map stretched over the table to an area called the Emerald Graves.

“With the information from Sir Baris, we knew that the Red Templars came from Therinfal Redoubt. The knights were fed Red Lyrium until they turned into monsters. Sampson took over after their corruption was complete.”

I could see his face was torn with anger at the idea that anyone would willingly take that stuff.

“How do you know Sampson?”

“He was a Templar in Kirkwall until he was expelled from the Order. I knew he was an addict, but this…” Sighing heavily he rested his hand on the hilt of his sword. “Red Lyrium is nothing like the lyrium given by the Chantry. Its power comes with a terrible madness.”

“The Red Templars that swarmed Haven were proof enough of that.”

“We cannot allow them to gain strength. The Red Templars still require lyrium. If we find their source, we can weaken them and their leader.”

I could tell that Cullen wanted revenge for what occurred at Haven and I couldn’t fault him, I did too.

“Well, how do you suggest we do that?”

Cullen gave me a pleased smile at my ready acceptance to stop Sampson.

“Caravans of Red Lyrium are being smuggled along trade roads. Investigating them could lead to
where it’s being mined. If you confront them, be wary. Anything connected to Sampson will be well guarded. But any information we could gather would help greatly.”

His eyes held mine for a moment and I nodded.

“Okay, then we go to the Emerald Graves and kick Sampson right in the dangle bag. I will gather a small team and leave tomorrow.”

“I will prepare your horses for an early departure,” Cullen offered and left the room with a smile that I hadn’t seen on his face in a while.

“Scout Harding will meet you there,” Leliana said making me smile.

“Good, I seriously love that woman.”

Leaving the war room, I headed for the rotunda to let Solas know we would be leaving before telling the others. Passing through the main hall, Hawke stopped me.

“Hey Inquisitor, how goes the effort” she joked making me laugh.

“Oh you know, the fun never ends here in Skyhold. I’m off to gather my team for yet another exotic adventure into the unknown.”

Hawke laughed and patted my shoulder understandingly.

“Mind if Fenris and I tag along? We aren’t used to all this sitting around,” she offered.

“Hell yeah, that would be wonderful. We leave at dawn,” I tell her with a large smile.

“Good,” she said and with a wave, we parted and I continued on to the rotunda to find Solas.

Opening the door I walked in and found him painting the outline of Adamant. Watching the way he stretched always made me sigh in pleasure.

“Vhenan,” he said without turning making me smile.

“Handsome,” I purr making him turn with a lopsided smile.

“What do I owe the pleasure of your company,” he said laying his brush down on his table.

“What would you say to an exotic getaway to the Emerald Graves with me and a few others?” I tease enjoying his chuckle.

“When do we leave?”

Smiling, I move towards him and slide my arms around his waist enjoying the solid strength I felt.

“Dawn,” I answer sighing a little as his arms wrapped around me and I felt his lips brush the top of my head.

“Ma nuvenin,” he said softly.

“Good, I don’t like sleeping without you,” I mumble against his chest squeezing him before letting him go.

His hand slipped under my chin and tilted my face upwards towards his.
“Nor I without you,” he replied before pressing his lips gently to mine.

“Good to know,” I mouthed against his lips before kissing him again and stepping back.

“I guess I better tell the others – take your lunch with me?”

He nodded and smiled at me gently as I took the stairs to the library to find Dorian.

*****

“Good to see you again Fenlin, hope you’ve got your comfortable boots on. The scouts have seen a number of rifts all over the forest. We’ve located this mysterious ‘Fairbanks’. He won’t share this information with anyone but you. He and his men are camped out at Watcher’s Reach, on the path ahead. From what we can tell, they’re refugees from the war, peasants mostly.”

“Tell me everything you know about Fairbanks.”

“We don’t know much about him. He appeared after the Civil War, started by helping people fleeing from the destruction. ‘Fairbanks’ is likely not his real name.”

“Anything else I should know about the region?”

“Legend says that the reason they call this place the Emerald Graves is that a tree grows for every Elven Knight of Halamshiral who perished in its defense. Makes you sad, doesn’t it?”

“It does,” I reply glancing around at the many trees in the area.

“Oh, and before I forget, the Freeman of the Dales have taken to running the area so be careful.”

Lovely

Standing within the silent grove of strong, sentinel poplar and ash trees, with their lush green canopy hanging over us, I felt at peace. The surrounding dense foliage made it difficult to move through, but I still preferred this to the Mire they had trudged through.

The history of the place was bloody, especially if you thought about how the forest was created. But before leaving Skyhold and reading a bit about the area it appeared to be another area where humans took what they wanted – again. But being here made me feel that somehow knowing about all that death brought about such a beautiful rebirth and the Emerald Knights would have been hopefully satisfied with the gesture.

Finding a tree with low enough branches, Sera made a quick sprint and ran up part of the trunk grasping the first branch and pulled herself up. Slowly climbing the enormous tree, she finally reached a place where she could see over the area.

Giving me a thumb’s up sign before she shimmied back down the tree while I held my breath. Damn, I envied her for the ability to not be afraid of heights. She jumped softly to the ground and I pulled out the map from my pack and spread it on the ground. Sera pointed to the camps she had spotted by making a small mark with charcoal showing everyone where they were. It looked like the Freemen were the closest, so they would dispatch them first.

“I think we should take the Freemen camp first then hit the other two quickly before anyone can send word. Any thoughts?” I looked around at them waiting to see if there were any ideas.

“How many Templars in each camp were you able to count, Sera?” Fenris asked seeing Bull’s nod
of approval at his question.

“A big’un with two metal-heads to watch it and one archer in each site, they're close together tho. One might call the other to them when we attack.”

Seeing everyone’s nod of understanding, I collected the map and charcoal from the ground and placed them into my pack. Sliding it over my shoulders we moved out.

The Freemen fought as if they were children playing war, and it disgusted me. All the devastation these assholes had caused was sickening.

*These were the fuckers tormenting people here?*

Even the Freemen I encountered in the Plains were much more experienced. These fools anyone with a decent bow could rid the area of most of them. By the time we reached the Templar camps, everyone including my normally calm Solas was broiling for a good fight.

Sera and Cole slid into stealth and moved through the foliage silently to place themselves behind the archers waiting for Bull’s charge. When he came in yelling at them all hell broke loose. As one of the archers nocked his arrow in place, Cole slid his knives over his throat spraying blood out away from his body and moved onto the next.

I froze a warrior bearing down on Dorian while Fenris slammed his greatsword into him instantly shattering him. Hawke set out lightning dancing over the ground stunning most of the metal wearing warriors. I turned at the sound of thrashing through the brush and realized Sera had been right, the other camp came running at the noise.

Whistling loudly, Bull turned at the sound and saw the second wave. Laughing robustly he ran for the behemoth while Cole moved swiftly to take out the other archer.

Dorian grumbled under his breath, “I am never going to get this blood out.”

Solas froze the behemoth just as Bull jumped with a heavy downswing shattering the blighted thing. Fade stepping towards the warrior bearing down on Solas’ turned back, I tripped him quickly with my staff, giving Solas time to fade step out of the Templars path. I prepared to fade step away and felt the strong steel grip of the warrior I had just tripped grab my ankle.

Stabbing him with the blade of my staff into the eye slit of his helmet, he screamed in pain and let me go instantly. Moving quickly from him, I watched as Fenris separated the Templars head from his body.

Taking a deep breath, I glance around and saw that the fighting was over for now, and wiping my blade off on the nearest dead Templar I took inventory on everyone.

Solas walked towards Fenris noticing the blood coming from his shoulder.

“Will you allow me to heal you, Fenris?” his tone calmly questioned him.

Solas and I knew that Fenris was not much for mages, even if Hawke was a mage. I watched as Hawke walked up and looked at the wound and slapped his arm.
“Let him fix it Fen it is beyond my skill,” she told him with a tone that obviously brooked no argument.

Fenris nodded his head quickly and watched Solas as he held his hands over the area. Looking at the area when Solas was finished, he saw that it was healed and that Solas was obviously tired from the fighting and then healing him.

I handed Solas my canteen of water and placed my hand on his shoulder channeling some of my own magical aura into him reviving his energy while he drank the water. Placing a small kiss on the top of his head he smiled at me as he handed my canteen back.

“Ma serannas ma vhenan,” he said gently.

“Anytime handsome,” I replied.

“Why didn’t you use my markings to supply the lyrium you needed for the healing?” he questioned him with curiosity.

Solas glanced at him oddly before he finally answered him.

“Those marks were placed on you to fill a mages gluttonous need for power. I have no such needs.”

I saw the surprise register on Fenris’ face before I rose and began moving through the camp looking for any information that would help Cullen track down Sampson.

*****

After closing the last rift for the day, we backtracked to a cave that I saw while we trekked through the dense forest. Laying my pack on the ground, I motioned for Cole to come with me to scout it out. To my complete joy, I found a decent sized hot spring in the back and smiled with glee.

The cave was actually quite large on the inside but from the outside, it did not look all that big. It still wouldn’t be high enough for any of the men to stand fully upright unless they were in the spring but I was sure I could overcome their objections with the hot water in the back. Moving back to the front of the cave, I came out following Cole.

“Okay, bad news first is that none of you will be able to stand completely upright except me,” listening to annoyed sighs I smiled impishly at them and finished what I was saying. “However, there is a very large hot spring at the far back of the cave.” Disgruntled sighs turned into large smiles on all their faces.

“I thought so,” I said my tone laced with humor as I led them inside.

I started by digging a small pit for our fire while Cole went with Fenris and Solas to hunt dinner. Hawke and Sera returned with an armload of wood and set it down next to the fire.

“Where’s Dorian and Bull?” Hawke questioned looking around as she plopped down next to me while Sera went about preparing the fire.

I pointed towards the back.

“They are bathing,” I inform her leaning against the wall of the cave enjoying the silence.

That silence did not last long when it was suddenly broken by Fenris’s angry tone. Moving towards
the opening Sera, Hawke, and I watched Cole look pleadingly at him holding something squirming.

*Oh for the love of God, what the void has he brought back this time?*

I thought of his pet nug, Snuggles with a small smile. Cole had a way of finding animals – everywhere we went. Skyhold was full of strays he found and I tried not to laugh at Hawke’s curious expression knowing she and Fenris were unused to Cole’s antics. Sera just groaned and turned away.

“No,” Fenris said quickly as he and Solas dropped the ram on the ground.

“But they killed its mother, it will die without her,” he pointed out to him.

Solas injected with a calm voice of reason, “that is the way of things Cole.”

Shaking his head vehemently at them, he walked towards me and placed the squirming object of their argument in my lap. Both men groaned knowingly when they caught my expression of instant joy.

*A fucking wolf puppy, sweet baby Jesus’ dimples!*

I laughed while sliding my fingers over the small furry black head. The small pup snuggled deeper into my lap and opened one clear light blue-green eye to look at me then close it lazily with a tired yawn.

*Well shit*

I continued to pet the baby while looking at them and noticed Cole’s slightly smug smile before he turned away from the two elves. Watching him retreat they both looked at me and understood why he had left. Solas spoke first trying to reason with me.

“Vhenan, it is a wild creature. You cannot possibly hope to tame it? We must allow nature to run its course.”

Raising my eyebrow at him I waited for Fenris’ observation and watched him shake his head.

“We have another week if not more of trekking over this place, you can’t be seriously considering keeping the creature?”

Smiling at them, I ruffled the baby’s fur before I explained with a soft sigh.

“Solas, I understand it is a wild creature and we shouldn’t interfere with nature. But it is still a living creature, as am I and if I can help it now that it is without a parent then I should. Fenris, I am not considering, I am keeping him – her, whatever sex it is.”

Turning my gaze back to Solas I gave him a tender smile.

“Ma’lath, please cut enough meat up for this little guy to eat.”

Solas shook his head while Fenris must have realized this was a losing battle and moved to start preparing the ram for dinner.

“Does she always get her way?” Fenris asked Solas picking up the back end of the Ram.

“Usually,” Solas replied picking up the front end.

Smiling at their backs, I picked up the pup and moved back into the cave with Hawke’s soft laughter
next to me.

“Men will never learn,” she offered humorously.

“No they really don’t, do they?” I replied pulling the pup closer to me.

Bull turned the meat on the spit while Cole played with the wolf pup. Hawke and Fenris were making their way back from the spring in the back.

“That spring is the best part of this whole trip,” Hawke joked dropping her pack.

“Amen sister,” I replied moving towards my own pack.

Grabbing my pack, I pulled out a change of clothes, a soft drying towel, and my soap. Glancing at Solas, I pointed at the items and watched him gather his own things and follow after me.

Moving towards the back where the hot spring was, I was looking forward to the hot water soothing some of my tired muscles. Toeing off my boots and peeling off my leathers, I slipped my tunic over my head before slipping into the water with a soft pleasurable moan.

“This feels fabulous,” I tell him before glancing over my shoulder enjoying his naked form sliding into the water with me.

Untying the tight braid I dunked under the water enjoying the way the heat soothed my sore scalp. Massaging soap into my scalp I slipped back under to rinse.

“Vhenan, we should talk about the pup. It would not be fair to keep it,” he said as he began washing my back.

“Solas, I’m not going to leave a defenseless animal alone in the wilderness to just…” gesturing with my hand and flinging water about, “figure it out.”

I glance at him over my shoulder seeing his unconvinced look and smile.

“I know how to take care of a wolf, Solas. I haven’t killed you yet,” I mutter with a cheeky grin.

His laugh echoed in the chamber and he kissed the top of my head.

“Point taken,” he said his voice laced with humor.

We left the spring finding everyone around the fire, including Cole and the small wolf pup. At the sight of me, the pup bounded towards me and began rubbing its head into my shin affectionately.

Dropping my pack, I went to my knees letting the small bundle jump into my arms. Giggling as it licked my face, I rubbed my forehead against the small animals enjoying the affection that I felt instantly for it.

“It is quite obviously a little boy, vhenan, and it would seem he has chosen you to bond with.”

I glanced up at him in surprise and returned to rubbing the small animal’s face with my hands. Bull glanced at Solas curiously.
“You mean like a Mabari does?”

Solas glanced at him and nodded his head ‘yes’.

“I didn’t know a wolf would do that,” he said mystified.

“It doesn’t happen very often usually do to a lack of interaction between wolves and people.”

I gave him a loving look before focusing on the pup licking everywhere on my face. I stared into the pups blue-green eyes and wondered what the hunters had done with the mother’s body. Cole suddenly glanced at me and nodded his understanding.

“It is in a small wooded grove not far from where I found him,” he answered.

“What is?” Dorian asked curiously.

“His mom,” Cole answered sadly.

“Well, that is shite,” Sera commented looking at the puppy.

“We should take care of her then,” Solas said quietly while absently petting the small pup in my lap.

Cole looked at him pleased.

“I can show you after you eat,” he said eagerly.

Solas nodded his head in agreement and went to grab us our dinner.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Ma nuvenin - as you wish
Ma serannas ma vhenan - My thanks, my heart
Ma’lath - my love
I walked with Raj sitting happily in my pack strapped to my back and every once in a while he would either nuzzle my ear or lick it making me giggle and give him a quick ruffle of his fur between his ears.

I had finally given him a name after having him week. The large alpha male that had come into the thicket and triggered the name for my new friend had been scary as hell. The puppy had laid his ears back growling and tried his puppy bark of warning towards the large grown male, and it had completely melted my heart. I was more worried about the little guy than myself.

Of course, the Alpha hadn’t paid him much concern, his dark amber eyes were focused on me. I don’t know why I didn’t feel worried or concerned as he approached but it was not frightening. I took in the size of the animal and he was larger than the wolves of the Hinterlands, but he was not as large as Solas who resembled more of a Dire Wolf of legends like Fenrir.

The male wolf moved closer and my eyes just followed him while I sat unmovingly. The slight tilt of his head as he studied me, reminding me so much of Solas when he was curious, that I began to think this animal had only come close out of curiosity – maybe judging my intentions in his forest.

“I’m only here to remove the threat to you and your kind, not move in. You need not fear me,” I said soothingly and the large ears of the wolf moved and twitched as he listened. He came close enough for me to touch, but I held still, I was not a fool and he sniffed the air around me. Once he was finished, he chuffed a low sound in his throat and trotted off, disappearing back into the woods. I had looked at my little puppy and smiled at him ruffling the fur on his head.

“Well, aren’t you going to be quite the little leader…hey, that’s what I’ll call you – Raj. You like that name, Raj?”

The puppy bounded into my lap, licking my face making me giggle.

“Silly boy – okay, Raj it is.”

My focused pulled back to the dense forest we now walked through as silently as we could towards the last Templar encampment. Once this was finished we could leave the area, and that thought alone made me happy. We had run around, closed almost eight rifts in the region and killed more damn Freeman of the Dales than I cared to count and acquired Fairbanks as an agent for Leliana. All in all, the trip had been productive if not a bit long – at least the scenery was beautiful and I had drawn much of it.

I heard one of Raj’s, soft little puppy yawns and smiled. He had proven to be quite well behaved knowing that when I hung my pack on a branch that meant he needed to stay put until he was retrieved. I was always pleasantly surprised to find him sleeping when I returned to gather him. He had taken up sleeping against my stomach every night for the past week right under Solas’ hand that was usually draped over my waist.

Once we got back to Skyhold, I was going to have to build this guy a bed. In the three weeks, we had been here, my little friend was growing larger and there was no way I was going to share my bed with him when he was done growing.
Bull spotted the small tendril of smoke indicating the Templar’s campfire and touched my arm then pointing at the area. I pushed all my other meandering thoughts aside as I pulled my pack off. Kissing Raj’s muzzle and taking a couple of licks from him to my chin, I handed the pack to Bull to place on a branch. I smiled watching the big Qunari ruffle the fur between his ears affectionately before placing him high up in the tree. This had become a habit for Bull and it always brought a happy smile to my face.

I watched as Sera and Cole moved through the camp to gather information on how many were really in there. On their return, I heard a soft whistle and then a rapid blossom of pain in my shoulder as an arrow suddenly pierced me.

“Son of a bitch,” I bit out grabbing the shaft and breaking it while I felt Solas’ instant barrier surround me.

“Vhenan” he called out worriedly.

“It will be fine,” I call back and place a barrier over Bull and Fenris.

Bull growled and charged with Fenris into the group knocking over the warriors while Hawke set lightning loose electrocuting the bastards.

I was fucking mad as a wet hornet as I suddenly dodged arcane fire from a hidden Venatori mage.

*Come out, come out, where ever you are you son of a bitch.*

Uttering the words of the ancient spell, I blended into the shadows of the forest. I was hunting for the mage that was hiding. Finally, I found the Venatori asshole hiding behind a large wagon and fade stepped to his side.

Removing the spell, I smiled angrily at him as I slammed the blade end of my staff into his throat stopping the spell he had been trying to cast.

“Choke on that you slimy shit,” I growled.

Using his robes to clean the blood off my staff, I glance around the small clearing noticing that everyone was well and that the camp was completely cleared.

“Keep a look out for Cullen’s information,” I told them.

Rubbing my head with the dull ache that quickly moved up to pounding, and I saw Solas look at me worriedly.

“Vhenan, let me look at your shoulder,” Solas said walking towards me with obvious concern.

I felt suddenly very dizzy as the pounding in my head became deafening and I looked at him confused before everything went dark and I fell forward passing out.

Solas ran towards her as did everyone else surprised that Fenlin had just collapsed to the ground.
Examining the wound in her shoulder Solas’ eyes narrowed in anger.

“Fen’edhis, it is laced with red lyrium,” he said quickly.

Pulling out the small dagger he kept in his belt, he started to cut the leather material exposing the wound. With a hiss of anger, he saw that her adrenaline had expedited the spread of the corruption by the black veins that scattered from the wound towards her throat and chest.

“Maker’s breath,” Dorian muttered under his breath at the sight of the black map.

Sending fire magic into the blade heating it to sterilize it, then using cold to cool it he cut into her flesh to pull the remaining part of the arrow out. He noticed that she did not awake with the action and cursed angrily in elven under his breath. Once he was able to remove it he threw it away from him angrily as Dorian lit it up in flames before it even hit the ground.

Solas began healing her by drawing the tainted lyrium back to the opening. Dorian had moved to cradle Fenlin’s head in his lap and heard him when he spoke slightly out of breath.

“There is going to be a lot of blood, I have to make sure I remove all of it from her.”

Dorian knew what spell Solas spoke of – it was a form of blood magic, and nodded his head in silent agreement with him knowing he would need his help.

Solas felt his sudden relief at Dorian’s acceptance. Unknowingly, the Tevinter had somehow become a friend and he would also need his magical energy to help him if he was going to get all the taint out of Fenlin’s blood.

Fenris could see that Solas was pale with exhaustion after watching him heal for a few minutes and reached for his arm so he had a solid connection.

“If it will save her, then use me.”

Solas looked at him gratefully and continued to work on Fenlin with Dorian’s assistance. He spoke in elven under his breath as he healed and the soft glow of green turned darker as he wove the spell to pull the poison from her blood. From the last time, he had healed her when she was dying, his spirit instantly locked on to hers holding it tightly to him. The pain he felt from the connection made sweat break out over his brow.

Fenris’ marks hummed and glowed brightly as Solas used the ample supply of lyrium embedded in his flesh.

Solas felt the sudden rush of the lyrium markings adding to his magic and worked on Fenlin quickly praying silently to the spirits that none of the poison had reached her heart.

Those watching saw blackened blood pour from the wound thick like mud. When her blood finally ran a clean red, Solas stopped and focused on healing the wound. The medium sized, jagged scar on her soft shoulder would be a glaring reminder not unlike the one in her chest or on her side that he had failed at protecting her – again.

“Thank you for your aid Fenris, and your's Dorian,” he grated out thickly before pulling Fenlin into his lap and began slightly rocking her not letting his spiritual connection with her go. Monitoring magically the soft beat of her heart, he buried his face in her neck.

“She is everything to me.”
Solas carried her back to their small camp and with Hawke’s help they removed the remaining parts of her gear and cleaned her up. Bull had retrieved Fenlin’s pack from the tree and the small wolf pup watched their every move. When she was cleaned and dressed in a fresh tunic, Solas slid the blanket over her and the puppy padded over to lie alongside her placing his muzzle on her stomach. Solas watched the even movements of her chest as she breathed, brushing her hair from her face. He had come close to losing her again and that thought caused his heart to ache and his stomach to clench.

Those moments brought him to a very dark place that he would never return from again. The Dalish had some of the story correct; he had been able to walk between both the Evanuris and the Forgotten. If he were to lose her – again, he would not survive the loss and he knew it. He would become terror, dread, bringer of nightmares and his humanity would be lost, and no people, including his own, would be safe.

“Thank you again Fenris,” he said his voice still laced with fear for her.

Fenris placed his hand on his shoulder and smiled at him understanding his emotion.

Bull stirred the stew currently cooking on the fire and watched while Solas fussed over Fenlin. The elf’s magic was uncommon, and he was quite sure that what he had done out there had been blood magic, but not anything he had ever heard about before. Glancing at Dorian he had seen their silent exchange and suspected that his lover knew what he was going to do and had helped in some way.

He shook his head slightly and glanced at the wolf lying next to her. He would not dwell on it. Solas was a decent guy, a pain in the ass at times, but a decent guy. Knowing he would do anything to save someone he cared about was slightly comforting. Wanting to break the intense mood that had taken over the small group, he pointed at the puppy as he spoke making the animal's ears perk in understanding.

“I wish she had named him, so we could use it.”

Those around the fire now focused on the small creature while Solas gently touched Fenlin’s cheek before moving to sit next to the fire.

“It would be nice not to have to say 'come here boy','” Dorian said with a chuckle.


Everyone looked at him curiously and Solas glanced at the pup behind him as he asked the question that was on everyone’s tongue.

“When did she name him, Cole?”

Cole glanced at him with a small smile. It was unusual to see such emotion in the spirit yet Fenlin had a way of pulling Cole towards more human aspects.

“Yesterday, when she was playing with him in the thicket; you and Bull were hunting. A large male wolf came into the clearing towards them. She was mostly worried that it would attack the puppy but he was more curious about her. He meant her no harm he just wanted to meet her,” he said.

Bull looked at him with surprise then rubbed his face.
“I wonder if Raj means anything.”

Solas glanced at the small pup and then looked at Bull.

“It means leader.”

At hearing his name, Solas felt the small headbutt against his back making him turn around to look at him and in doing so he noticed that Fenlin’s eyes were open. Picking him up in his rush he moved to her placing him back at her side.

“Vhenan,” he said jaggedly.

Fenlin weakly smiled at him and reached up to touch his face. Placing a small kiss on her lips he grabbed her hand and held it tightly.

“Please stop trying to die on me?” He teased her, his voice thick with unshed tears.

“Agreed,” she replied with a tired smile.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Fen'edhis - wolf dick (universal cuss word)
We were riding over the bridge when the horn sounded our arrival. I glanced over my shoulder to my small passenger and reached back ruffling his fur.

Cullen is going to shit.

The sudden thought brought a smile to my face. Raj poked his head towards mine and licked my cheek so I scratched between his ears again. From beside me, I caught Solas watching me with a small smile on his beautiful lips that sent the butterflies fluttering. Reaching up again, I scratched Raj’s chin before noticing my advisers at the end of the bridge.

They’ve come to make sure I am okay.

Sliding from the saddle I removed my pack and let Raj jump out onto the ground. He almost resembled a cat with the way he was stretching his legs. Sniffing the ground around him, I glanced at Cullen watching him stare at the pup while Solas moved to my side taking Etta’s reigns from my hands and brushing his fingers across mine. Sending instant flares of heat to race up my arm.

“I’ll take care of her.”

Smiling my thanks, I watched him take the horses towards the barn and let out a small sigh of delight at the site. Damn, he is distracting, and with another sigh, Cullen’s voice pulled me back to reality.

“Where in the void did you find this?” he questioned me sounding curious.

“I didn’t, Cole found him. Freemen killed his mother, so here he is, and his name is Raj.”

Cullen glanced at me with a slight shake of his head before looking at the puppy again. He knelt down and waited for the animal to come to him. Raj with his insatiable curiosity moved to sniff at Cullen’s large knee. Holding his hand out for him to sniff as well, I could tell he didn’t mind this human and butted his head into his hand for attention.

I realized suddenly that I had never really seen Cullen smile much but watching him smile now while he enjoyed Raj’s antics made me feel better. Josie cleared her throat and I looked at the stack of correspondence in her arms and sighed.

I’m going to be at my desk forever.

I held my hands out to them as she smiled at me.

“There were a few in here of a personal nature, and I put those at the top for you to review. Those that I could field for you, I have. I am sure you didn’t want to answer every request for tea.”
“No, not really, thank you, Josephine, I really do not know what I would do without you.”

Pulling from my pack the information we had gone to the Graves to find, I handed the letters over to Cullen.

“I believe this is what you were hoping we would find, Cullen.”

“Thank you,” he said taking the information and looking at me carefully.

“The reports said you were injured by an arrow tainted with red lyrium?”

I nod at him as Raj bounced towards Josephine and bumped her leg, making the woman giggle. Reaching down she ruffled his fur between his ears, “aren’t you an adorable bundle.” He puppy barked in answer making her laugh again and scratch under his chin.

“Solas is watching the wound carefully, but it appears to be healing quite nicely with no side effects.”

“Thank the Maker,” he said with a pleased smile.

Grabbing my pack from the ground, I let out a soft whistle, signaling for Raj to follow. The pup’s ears twitched and scrambled after me as I walked towards the keep. He followed closely behind me as I took the steps to my room and I saw that he didn’t struggle to jump up the steps. Placing the paperwork on my desk, I started removing my heavier leathers and sat down on the edge of the bed.

“I think I am going to start a bath little man,” I tell the pup scratching his head before I moved towards the bathroom.

Raj lay in the bathroom doorway while I slipped out of my remaining clothes and threw them in the hamper before sliding into the tub. I felt Solas’ aura slide over mine as he opened the door and then the subtle magic he used when he warded it. Leaning back in the tub, I closed my eyes waiting for him to join me.

The rustle of cloth met my ears and I opened my eyes to glance at him removing his clothing. His naked form never ceased to not steal my breath and make my heart race – he was beautiful. My eyes followed him as he got into the bath with me while I smiled.

Running my wet foot up his side enjoying the sudden flinch at hitting his ticklish spots, he grabbed my ankle stopping its path up over his ribs. His eyes held mine, they were full of mischief as he gave me a smirking smile while running his hand up my leg teasingly.

I laugh huskily, “I’ll wash your front if you wash mine,” I tease him my voice thick with desire.

“This appears to be a fair trade,” he replied picking up the bar of soap and began lathering his hands.

Chuckling, I sat up and moved to straddle his lap liking the way his eyes darkened with desire at the slow movement. I ran my fingers over his head before wrapping lightly around his neck relishing the softness of his skin beneath my fingertips.

His soapy hands slowly washed my shoulders before moving onto my chest taking his time washing my breasts before moving down my stomach sending fire rushing where his hands touched.

Biting my lower lip at the overabundance of sensations his fingers caused, I grabbed the bar of soap and lathered my own hands. Washing his neck and then moving to his shoulders and chest enjoying the way his eyes watched me. I bent and placed a gentle kiss on his lips enjoying his soft moan.
“I do believe vhenan, this is not actually bathing,” he softly panted against my lips and I smiled.

“But I have soap on me, you have soap on you and we are in a bathtub,” I point out logically.

His deep chuckle as his hands slid around the cheeks of my ass to position me closer to his arousal set my blood boiling with the subtle action. He grabbed me by the back of my neck as he leaned up and bit my lower lip slightly teasing my sex with his arousal, pulling a low soft moan from me with the action.

“Perhaps we should finish bathing the soap from ourselves before I forget myself,” he said with a soft growl of promise.

“Well if you insist,” I mouthed against his lips and surprised him by slipping off his lap swiftly.

His look of complete confusion at the move made me giggle and I covered my mouth trying to stifle it. His eyes held desire and retribution for the move and it made me laugh even more.

He threw a washcloth at me hitting me in the chest and I giggled some more adoring the way his lips would slightly quirk at the corners with his private enjoyment.

Lathering the soap in the washcloth, I finished bathing my arms and legs. Gathering up the pitchers of water next to my tub I washed my hair and rinsed it. Goosebumps formed on my skin knowing his eyes followed my movements. Wiping the water from my eyes, I set the pitcher down and moved to leave the tub.

His hands snaked out around my waist and pulled me onto his lap with my back against his chest while water sloshed over the side. His thick voice whispering next to my ear sent heat directly to my core and I bit my lip.

“Your retreat was most unexpected, vhenan, yet you are not finished bathing.”

“Oh?” I replied breathlessly as his hands slid up to tease my nipples to harden peaks.

“No,” he mouthed against the skin on my shoulder.

His quick, possessive bite on my shoulder with his other hand deftly sliding between my legs threw out all possible thoughts of speech and my head fell back. His thick laughter only heightened my senses and I rotated my hips slightly forward to rub against him. His deep groan of pleasure at the move pleased me.

His fingers slid over my sensitive pearl and I whimpered at his teasing strokes. He was building a fire that only he would be able to contain and I moaned as my body climbed towards that place of sheer pleasure. My hips rocked against his fingers and in so doing, sliding myself against his arousal teasingly.

The sudden loss of his magical fingers on me made me cry out in frustration and I turned my head to look at him.

“Am I to be punished for my unexpected retreat?” I question him panting with need.

His wicked smile made me groan knowing what he was about and it wasn’t so much as punishment as it was anticipation. With his hands on my hips, he lifted me from the bath and stood in a fluid motion, stepping out beside me.

Grabbing a towel I dry myself and his lips dance over the tendon in my shoulder keeping the fires in
my belly burning hotly. Dropping my towel, I picked up another and started to dry him. The motion slightly startled him as it was not something I usually did and I gave him my own wicked smile before placing an open-mouthed kiss in the center of his chest.

“Vhenan,” he growled warningly as my hand slipped to encase his arousal while my tongue flickered over his nipple.

“When will you learn wolf, the path you walk can be taken in both directions.”

His arms instantly encased me like steel bands as he ravaged my mouth on an edge of uncontrolled and it excited me. With one hand he shackled my wrists behind my back exciting a low moan from my throat as he slid down my body. Kissing, licking and biting as he traveled and it was absolutely exquisite torture. Each action with his mouth set my body aflame even hotter and my magic began to leak out in small arcs of lightning along my skin.

His pleased throaty laugh against my hip made my body start to slightly shake with the vibrations rushing over the skin.

“Always so responsive,” he mouthed against my stomach before nipping at the skin.

My head fell back as his hands around my wrist were keeping me standing while his tongue slid slowly through the folds of my wet sex and he groaned as he tasted me.

“And mine,” he growled against the sensitive flesh he teased mercilessly.

“Solas,” I cried out unevenly as the pleasure of my orgasm ripped through me almost violently as the flat of his tongue slowly licked me.

My knees shook precariously as the waves of euphoria rushed through me and he swiftly picked me up and carried me to our bed. My eyes slowly open to watch him as he positioned himself above me with a small smug smile at how easy it was for him to render me a puddling mass of wants and desires.

His fingers lightly trailed over my stomach, and my muscles tightened in anticipation of what would come next. His eyes moved from his actions to hold mine. Cupping my hand around his chin gently as the slow arcs of magical energy swirled around us.

“Love me, wolf. I need to feel you against my skin,” I whisper thickly.

Solas’ eyes soften with the request and he slid into my waiting warmth with a low moan of pleasure. His lips pressed to mine as he moved with steady thrusts and my body began vibrating like a tuning fork with the deep strokes of pleasure rushing through me.

My sex clenched as it raced for that edge of completion again and the action elicited a low growl of pleasure from him as I tightened around him. Moaning his name, I bit at his neck and moved to his shoulder as the action increased his deep movements. I felt the warmth flush over my skin as my orgasm slowly pulled out from my center to flow through my body in waves.

Biting the tendon on his shoulder, marking him possessively, he groaned as the action triggered his own release and he moaned my name as his aura dove into me, filling me, and my back arched with the sensation as he emptied deep within my warmth. His forehead lay against mine as our panting breaths mingled and my fingers caressed his head and neck.

He slipped off of me and lay down beside me pulling me closer to him. Nuzzling his mouth against my neck he whispered drowsily.
“Ar lath ma vhenan.”

“I love you too, ma’lath,” I whispered back.

His hand slightly tightened around my waist and I smiled at the sensation before following him into the Fade.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
ma’lath - my love
Chapter Notes

What a wonderful Monday!

Thank you, everyone, for your comments, kudos and continued reading. It is really humbling to see so many enjoying the story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“The unplanned avalanche has completely covered our main route through the mountain pass and all of the surrounding paths that we had established for agents and military forces.”

I stare at Cullen in surprise with his information. I sometimes tended to forget that Skyhold lay in a pleasantly secure little bubble of seventy degrees, while outside its walls it was colder than a witch’s tit in a brass bra.

“So, what…we are stuck here until the snow stops long enough for us to dig our way out?”

“It would appear so, Fenlin.”

I laughed at the absurdity of the whole thing. Over two-hundred mages that could clear a mountain pass, and I was snowed in.

“Even the God’s work against me,” I mumble realizing that Emprise Du Lion would have to wait until we could actually get out of here.

Josephine clapped her hands and drew my attention from staring at the map.

“On the bright side, Inquisitor, it is Satinalia. We could take this time to decorate for the festivities, plan a nice gathering, exchange gifts.”

Christmas…Thedas’ version of Christmas, I guess it’s that time of year again. We never got a chance to celebrate it last year with our escape from Haven.

Nodding my head in agreement with her I smiled.

“Okay Josephine, plan your party for this holiday. I am sure everyone could use a little holiday cheer.”

Her bright smile made me internally groan realizing I might have just unleashed a demon and Cullen voiced my thoughts.

“Do you realize what you have just done,” he muttered and I started laughing.

“Unleashed the professional party demon to torture us into the festive spirit?” I replied teasingly.

“You have doomed us all,” he joked and Josephine placed her hands on her hips looking very much annoyed at both of us.

“You two are worse than Sera sometimes,” she said with a huff before grabbing her writing board
and leaving the war room.

I looked at Cullen and shook my head.

“Look what you did Commander.”

His hand flew to his chest twanging the thick breastplate he always wore.

“Me, you’re the one who called her a demon,” he pointed out with a large smile.

Leliana glanced from me to Cullen and shook her head.

“If you two are quite finished enjoying yourselves, I have better things to do.”

We watched her leave and then burst out laughing. Motioning Raj to follow, I opened the door and glanced back at Cullen with a cheeky grin.

“We should do that more often; we might cut back on the lengthy meeting times.”

His deep laugh as he followed me out the door was good to hear, he had not been doing that much lately. He looked exhausted most days, and when asked if he was feeling well he always replied with 'fine'.

“I believe we will be apologizing to Josephine before the day is through.”

Chuckling I glance up at him, “Agreed.”

We separated in the main hall and I went to let everyone know that we weren’t leaving anytime soon due to the suddenly shitty weather.

Solas’ head came up from his study of the keystone artifact found in the Western Approach by the loud stomping coming from the battlements. He watched as the door was suddenly thrown open and shook his head when he saw it was just Sera with a large grin on her face. Sera skidded to a halt just inside the door once seeing him and motioned at him hurriedly.

“Droopy ears come quick – ya gotta see this, she is totally bashed,” she yelled at him and then ran back the way she had come.

He slowly pushed away from his desk not surprised that Sera did not wait for him and walked out the door leading to the battlements after her. Once outside he saw that she was already down the stairs jogging across the courtyard towards the tavern.

What could be so important for him to see?

He took the stairs and crossed the courtyard towards the tavern. Opening the door he stopped in the doorway where Raj ran to greet him and he bent and ruffled the fur on his head letting his eyes follow the path the wolf had run. He suddenly understood now why Sera had been so excited when she came to get him.

“Why’z you need too tho…z’a wurld izn’t a puzzle to put backs togedder,” she slurried at Bull and
slammed the last of her drink.

Solas pinched the bridge of his nose at the large grins on everyone’s faces with Fenlin’s obviously drunken state. His eyes met Bull’s and then slid towards Varric’s, he knew it was them two that had helped her get this way. He watched her adorable face suddenly laugh and he smiled at the intense love for her that he felt. He slowly walked towards her chair and her head turned towards him quickly. She wobbled in her chair precariously and if not for Dorian’s quick arm she would have slid off.

“Solas,” she said with a large smile and he couldn’t stop the small chuckle at her glossy eyed and red-cheeked appearance. Sera was correct, she was bashed alright.

“Tellz ‘em order outs of chaos is bull…shit,” she requested with a slight hiccup at the end causing everyone to laugh.

“I believe you have stated that clearly already, vhenan.”

Spirits preserve him, she was completely drunk and even her drunken smile had sent his heart racing. He glanced at Bull with a raised eyebrow and watched the large Qunari raise his hands in defense.

“I swear Solas, she only had four drinks, all mead” Bull said quickly holding his hands up.

He stared at him and shook his head.

“She weighs roughly about seven stones Bull; four would be plenty for her.”

Cassandra chuckled as Fenlin’s face scrunched with the words.

“Stones? I’m not stoned…whhhhait, waz that?” She questioned looking around confused and then motioned for him to come closer.

“Solas, I’m drunk – I’z need sleep,” she slurred at him loudly then hiccupped.

He shook his head again and looked at all of them trying very hard to not laugh but unable to stop a chuckle from escaping. Picking her up from the chair, her face fell into the crook of his neck and she hummed pleased as her arms wrapped around his neck loosely.

“I will take you to our room so that you may lie down,” he told her feeling her arms tighten just slightly around his neck.

“Mmm…youz zo good to me,” she said drowsily and he felt her even breathing before he had taken three steps.

“Raj, come, let’s get her to bed,” he told the dog and saw him jog after him as Dorian held the door open for them.

Dorian slipped a purple vial into his pocket with a large smile.

“For her when she wakes up.”

Solas smiled at him knowingly.

“Most appreciated, please inform Varric I will settle up with him later.”

Dorian chuckled and pulled the door closed behind him.
I slowly woke to the steady pounding in my head and groaned at my stupidity as I pulled the blankets over my face. His soft chuckle from beside me was enough to remind me of yesterday’s stupidity.

How had I not noticed that Sera had kept refilling my mug while Varric just kept toasting for this that or the next fucking thing? By the time they were done toasting, I was already drunk and busy arguing with Bull about making order out of chaos…or some such nonsense.

Running my tongue over my teeth and the roof of my mouth, there is a thick nasty film over everything. I am now quite positive a herd of Druffalo and any of the other plains creatures have camped and shit in my mouth.

I felt the blanket over my face slowly being pulled away and opening my eyes to look around, I quickly closed them at the glaring sunlight filtering through my windows.

“Drink this,” he said softly.

I peak an eye open and see him holding a purple vial that I had seen Dorian drink a time or two before. Hesitantly taking it from him, I sniffed the iridescent liquid and found that it smelt of dirty feet and my nose wrinkled making him laugh.

Well, this should mix well with my current taste of shit in my mouth.

“It smells like dirty feet,” I commented with my hand over my mouth while my voice sounding like it was dragging over gravel.

“It will help,” he gently prodded me.

I gave him a disbelieving look and shot it back quickly hoping I wouldn't taste it. My whole body clenched in disgust with the flavor as it physically felt like my face was being sucked in on itself.

“It not only smells like dirty feet, but it tastes like I just licked dirty feet.”

Solas took the empty vial laughing and handed me a cup of water which I drank gratefully swishing it around my mouth trying to remove the flavor of dirty feet and latrine from my tongue. I took another drink and finally notice that Raj is sleeping at the end of our bed and raise my eyebrow at Solas.

“He was concerned for you,” he commented taking my empty cup and getting up to get me another.

Here I thought I was the one who spoiled the animal and gave him a knowing look. Raj must have known we were talking about him because his head came up and his blue-green eyes looked at me. I could almost hear the wolf calling me a fool…or maybe that was my own head that was starting to not pound so loudly. Taking the offered cup of water I drank it all and placed the cup on the side table.

“Have I told you how wonderful you are lately?”

He slipped under the covers and pulled me closer.

“No, but you did tell me how good I was to you. I am sure it is comparable,” he teased kissing the top of my shoulder.
I groan and bury my head in my pillow ignoring his laughter from behind me.

“Okay, I know...I am a babbling fool when drunk. The upside is this time I came home with both my shoes,” I mumbled from beneath the pillow.

He placed a kiss on the middle of my back still chuckling and then swatted me on the ass smartly.

“Get up, vihan, there will be no hiding for you today. As I understand it, you did nothing to be embarrassed about in the tavern.”

I glance at him from over my shoulder watching him slip his leggings on. Pushing my hair out of my face he looked at me smiling cheekily.

“In the tavern...” I look at him questioningly.

“I thought you were asleep to be quite honest. It was when we got almost to our chamber door that I was stopped by the Marquise De’Lion inquiring about your health.”

My eyes blew wide as I waited for him to continue and I saw the familiar glint of teasing in his eyes and threw a pillow at him which he caught with ease.

“And?” I said impatiently.

“And...you told him, I believe, ‘to piss off’, were your words, albeit a bit slurred but quite understandable.”

“Oh cheese and rice, Josephine is going to fucking kill me.”

Solas laughed and shook his head at me before grabbing a tunic from the wardrobe.

“I am sure it will be fine, now get up and we will go to breakfast.”

Walking through the keep towards the war room I notice that there were people standing on ladders, and chairs around the room decorating for the holiday celebration. Stopping for a second and taking a good look I slightly shook my head. Josephine was definitely not fucking around about the holiday.

I found the Marquise and apologized for my drunken behavior which he found quite amusing. Thank God he was a man with his own grown children as he excused the behavior as celebrating the holiday. Grateful that he was not offended, I left him to enjoy the main hall. Grabbing the door that led to Josephine’s office, I walked down the corridor and saw the party demon at her desk.

“Inquisitor, I am glad you are early. There are a few things that I wanted to discuss with you about Satinalia festivities.”

I moved to sit in the chair at the front of her desk as Josephine pulled out papers and organized her thoughts.

I wonder if she ever relaxes.

The woman was seriously OCD when it came to her paperwork.

“In Antiva, Satinalia was enjoyed with wild celebration, the wearing of masks, and naming the town fool as ruler for a day. Large feasts to celebrate the holiday and of course, on the last day we exchanged gifts.”
I sat back in the chair waiting for her to finish, praying silently she wasn’t suggesting we celebrate a whole damn week.

“As this is not Antiva, and we are already halfway through the holiday, I thought we would have one night of celebration with a large feast and exchanging of gifts.”

I smiled at her and slapped my knees as I stood.

“Sounds fabulous Josephine, do you need me to help with anything.”

Josephine shook her head quickly and grabbed her writing board as Cullen and Leliana came through the door.

“No Inquisitor, I have everything well in hand.”

I pat her shoulder and chuckle.

“Of that, I have no doubt, Josephine.”

*****

My eyes glanced at the carefully wrapped gifts that sat on the side table for everyone. Glancing back down at what I was doing, I carefully drew the Celtic knotwork around the edges of the cardstock smiling at my work. The subtle leaves and clovers intermixed with the knotting were visually pleasing. His aura gently slid against mine before I heard the door opening and I smiled at the sensation. Still smiling, I continued my work on the card as he came up the stairs.

I finished the final touches and blew on it carefully to make sure the ink wouldn’t smudge while Solas picked up one that was already finished and looked it over carefully before laying it back on my desk.

“Have you chosen a month yet?” He questioned me and I slightly shrugged.

“No, have you chosen a day?” I questioned him with a cheeky smile.

This was becoming a common conversation between the two of us. I was to choose the month and he would choose the day. So far, neither of us had figured anything out or if we had we weren’t sharing yet.

“Maybe you should choose the month and I will choose the day,” I try to switch with him again.

He shook his head and gave me a knowing smile.

“The month is of your choosing, as it has always been done.”

I groan, running my hand through my hair.

“We are hardly a traditional couple, so I don’t see how the following of some ancient tradition now is so important.”

He came around my desk and placed a soft kiss on my lips making me smile.

“Is it truly so difficult?”

“No…you’re right,” I answered with a soft sigh. Chewing on my lip nervously, I run my hands over his shoulders before finally looking at him. "I have been thinking the seventh month would be a
good time. It will be summertime.”

He gently cupped my face as his eyes carefully studied mine.

“The fourteenth,” he offered and my heart raced.

“It is settled then…we have finally chosen,” I said my voice a little wobbly.

His tender smile at me only increased the flutter of wings buzzing around in my stomach and the racing of my heart.

“It appears that we have,” he said caressing my jaw with his thumb.

I swallow past the nervous lump in my throat as the moment completely sets in. We have made an actual wedding date and my stomach clenches at the concept. I suddenly feel very anxious and I slightly chuckle.

“Am I the only one who is suddenly nervous?”

Solas laughed and let my face go as he shook his head just slightly.

“I have waited lifetimes to bond with you, vhenan. I am no longer nervous, just impatient.”

I begin laughing at his words and sit down to start the first actual invitation.

“Who would have ever thought that Fen’Harel was impatient,” I teased with a raised eyebrow.

He quickly stole another kiss, smiling wickedly at me before taking a book from the shelf and walking towards the couch.

“I disguise it well,” he replied sitting on the couch and stretching out.

I snort at his comment and my eyes met his from across the room.

“You are so full of it my love.”

His laughter was deep and rich as he held my gaze. It was beautiful to see his eyes dance with such merriment.

“Perhaps vhenan,” he replied still chuckling as he opened his book.

“Perhaps my ass,” I muttered and heard his thick chuckle at the comment as I picked up my quill and prepared to start on the first invitation.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart

Just an FYI on how much a stone weighs.
1 stone = 14lbs.
Solas and I entered the main hall and it was like entering a winter wonderland of colors and smells. Josephine had obviously elicited the help of some of the mages as there were hundreds of soft mage lights floating high in the air letting off a soft glow, not unlike twinkle lights. The air smelled of cinnamon, cedar, and pine setting a relaxing and festive air.

I’m sure my eyes were huge as I took in the large boughs of pine and cedar decorating the stone walls with large bows of gold, white, silver or red holding them together. Each table was set in preparation for the feast, and every table held a long, centerpiece of decorated wood with candles, bows, and ribbons that flowed down the center.

Everything was so breathtakingly magical that I turned and gave Solas a surprised smile about to tell him how beautiful it was. Cupping my chin, his head bent and he took my lips in a surprisingly passionate kiss that stole my breath and thoughts of what I was just about to say and made me want to turn right back around and take him upstairs.

“Look up vhenan,” he advised with a sexy smile. Looking up I found the small sprig of what resembled mistletoe with a silver bow tied around it and smiled.

I had never experienced the magic of mistletoe before but so far I was really digging the tradition, especially if it kept him kissing like that. Taking my hand he led me the rest of the way into the room where others were already drinking and laughter filled the air. Some were even dancing to the soft strains of music that were playing in the background. It was definitely nothing like any Christmas celebration I had ever been to in my thirty-four years.

The tables that held the food for everyone were on one side of the main hall and on the other side there were tables full of wrapped gifts. I had sent mine down earlier with the help of some of the Chargers. Today would be exciting to see everyone’s expressions when they found that their traditional Satinalia card was actually our bonding invitation.

The festivities were in full swing and most of us almost fell out of our chairs with laughter watching Varric and Cassandra. Varric pulled a reluctant Cassandra along with a chair beneath the mistletoe. I about died with laughter watching him suddenly stand on the chair so that he was of the same height as Cassandra before grabbing her face and kissing her soundly. The red on her cheeks and her obvious happiness was positively wonderful.

Not long after that, I got up to grab a couple of the delectable little pastries for Solas and me to share and Sera drug me beneath the mistletoe. Thanking whatever Gods were listening because she refrained from using her tongue and gave me a chaste kiss on the lips with a cheeky smile. This seemed to prompt something for everyone as now I am stuck under the damn stuff as others came forward to receive their own holiday smooch.

*Why am I suddenly a fucking kissing booth? This shit should be banned.*
I glance over to Solas pleadingly after I had kissed Bull who'd definitely took advantage of the stupid weed and saw that he was sitting back smirking at the whole scene and it was obvious he would offer no help. His smirk did however change quickly to a frown as Cullen moved to gather his own holiday kiss. I internally giggled not expecting anything other than the chaste kisses I had been given thus far with the exception of Bull's. It wasn’t until he spoke in his deep gentle voice that I realized I might be wrong.

“I will never have an opportunity like this again,” he said. His whiskey-colored eyes held mine for a brief moment before cupping my chin gently and kissing me soundly.

I was frozen in complete surprise. This was in no way a simple press of lips. His kiss was tender and heartfelt and definitely not going to be innocent. The simple way he coaxed my lips to part for him was also gentle and I didn’t even think about ending it but began to return the kiss.

He smelled of the oil he used on his sword and wood smoke from the fires, and he tasted of the mulberry wine that was flowing freely for the feast. When his lips left mine, my eyes slowly opened to look at him. I never knew how he had felt towards me until this very moment.

He smiled tenderly as he let go of my chin and walked back towards his table. I glanced over at Solas and saw his eyes held a jealous anger as they followed Cullen back to his chair and I sent my aura to him with a soft caress before walking out from under the mistletoe before I got into any more trouble.

It was finally time to pass out our gifts for one another and I was beside myself excited. I sat on Solas’ lap as we opened our gifts and that seemed to calm his irritation after the whole Cullen moment. I watched with barely restrained excitement as Leliana was the first of them to open one of my gifts. Everyone had received a drawing of some kind including Cole but it was the card I waited for. I watched as she was meticulous with how she unwrapped the drawing of her and Josephine having tea in the garden.

She smiled at the drawn picture and opened what she thought was her holiday card. Her eyes darted to mine as she suddenly broke into a large smile. She quickly stood and lifted her glass high; she slipped two fingers into her mouth and let out an ear-piercing whistle to gather everyone’s attention in the room. I was now starting to feel a bit embarrassed as everyone suddenly quieted looking at her expectantly.

“Fenlin & Solas
Humbly request your presence upon the day of the 14, Solis 9:42, and bear witness as we bond ourselves to each other for all time.”

She read aloud and soon I heard the sound of a dozen envelopes opening to look at their own invitation. His arm had slid around my waist and he placed a soft kiss on my shoulder as Leliana read and I smiled at him.

The room was a sudden clamor of voices conveying congratulations and excitement that approached from every direction around us. It was a bit overwhelming at first and thankfully everyone went about opening the rest of their gifts relatively quickly.
As our night reached its close, we all finally moved towards our rooms. I had received quite a bit of drawing materials from everyone, which was very nice and Solas had received a good amount of books which he seemed quite pleased with.

People really put thought into what they were giving and it showed. The small drawings I had made for everyone were received with excitement. Most were drawings of them with their friends, in some setting, I had witnessed. I wished we had cameras so that I could take photos of some of the things that I had seen, but my drawing would have to do. Something that I would never have thought they would like turned out to be the best thing I could have ever given them.

Cresting the top of the stairs I went about putting away the materials I had received while Solas placed his books on the shelves behind my desk. I noticed that he was occupied with putting the books away and I slipped over to the bed quickly pulling out his present from beneath. When I turned towards him, I saw that he too had the same idea and was holding one for me as well.

We both started laughing at each other over our trying to surprise the other and went to sit on the couch. Smiling at him I handed him his while he handed me mine.

I slowly unwrapped my gift and found that it was a small drawing of me leaning against his wolven form on the water’s edge in my Fade forest. On the bottom of the picture was a Veil Fire glyph of a memory. I smiled at him excitedly as I conjured Veil Fire to read the glyph.

I do not deserve this peaceful feeling she brings…nor is it appropriate, wolf. You cannot make her happy no matter how valid she makes you feel.

“Are you lonely?”
Why would she ask such a question? “Not at this moment.”
Why does her laughter have to affect me so? Every time she looks at me I feel myself drowning in her gaze.
“Good, I am glad.”
“Why do you ask?”
“I don’t like that you might feel lonely.”
Spirits preserve me, how do I fight against this?
“Why would you worry about such things?”
“Because I care about you.”
I don’t…I can’t fight this. She is mine and I am hers for however long she will have me.

Wiping at the corner of my eyes I grasp his face and drag his lips to mine to kiss him deeply.

It was the best memory ever.

“Until I take my last breath, that is how long” I replied softly against his lips.

Pulling away and holding his beautiful gaze I smiled brightly and pointed at the small present he held swiping at my leaking eyes again.

“Your turn,” I remind him excitedly.

I watched him slowly unwrap the paper while I chewed my lip in nervousness. His eyes darted to mine with surprised understanding after he removed the top to the small box and saw what was within.
Using a long lock of my hair, I knotted it into a thin bracelet. It was magically preserved against burn or breakage. It was a very personal offering to not just my intended bond mate but to an Evanuris. I had been surprised to find out that something so simple, was a sign of unconditional devotion without the need of a vallis’lin.

Thankfully, Hope had helped me find the information in the Vir Dirthara. There were so many ancient rituals, customs, and gifts; everything that Assan’s memories couldn’t give me that revolved around bonding. She was full of memories on fighting tactics but bonding she was seriously lacking.

When I read that our bonding ceremony was more than just a rope around our hands and wrists, it was also a soul bonding. Reading that was when I found the custom that a woman would give her bond mate a lock of her hair to keep with him to prove her devotion just beneath the text of the ritual. He pulled the thin bracelet out and looked slightly anxious. Biting my lip at his expression, now I am unsure if this was the right thing to give him.

Should I not have given him that? Now he is looking at it uncomfortably.

“You don’t have to wear it, Solas.”

He looked up from the bracelet at me and handed it to me.

“Will you help me put it on?”

Hesitantly I nod my head and take the bracelet from him. I look at him one last time silently asking him if he were sure before I tied it around his wrist. He gave me an annoyed look and I wrapped it around his wrist and held the ends together blowing on them gently.

“Bell’ana,” I whispered softly while I blew on the seam as the ends instantly sealed together.

Solas grabbed my face and crushed his lips to mine.

“Ar lath ma vhenan,” he murmured pressing me back into the couch.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Bell’ana - eternity
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
God, I hated the battlements.

I stared at the small distance that stretched from the Rotunda to Cullen’s office and took a breath. This was the fastest way to get to his office without going all the way down to the barn and taking the stairs down there just to come up.

Come on – stop being a wuss and just make a run for it…go…go…GO damn it!

With one last deep breath, I pushed off from the door and ran quickly across stone walkway towards Cullen’s office with Raj jogging behind me.

Hopefully, he will give me some ideas of what to expect in Emprise Du Lion. Almost slamming into his door in my haste, I grabbed the handle and pulled it open just in time to hear his sudden yell that instinctually made me flinch as a box came flying by my head to crash into the door.

“Maker’s breath, I didn’t hear you enter.” He came slowly around the side of his desk rubbing his neck. “Forgive me,” he said quietly.

Stepping over the broken shards of lyrium glass and some other odds and ends scattered on the floor, I calmed my now racing heart. Raj sniffed at the liquid on the ground and sneezed, slightly shaking his head before hopping over the mess and stayed close to my heel as I entered.

“I swear I didn’t know you were…” he started to say as he moved towards me and grabbed the edge of his desk as he almost fell.

“What the hell is wrong Cullen?” I question him quickly while moving towards him only to stop abruptly at his raised hand.

“I never meant for this to interfere,” he replied slightly out of breath.

“What the hell is wrong Cullen?” I question him quickly while moving towards him only to stop abruptly at his raised hand.

“I never meant for this to interfere,” he replied slightly out of breath.

“Cullen, I believe you; now tell me what the hell is going on.”

“Whatever good it does, promises mean nothing if I cannot keep them.”

I watch him walk slowly towards his single window in the room and stare out. It was the first time I had ever seen him so broken down and torn; it made my heart ache for him.

“You asked me what happened to Ferelden’s Circle. It was taken over by abominations. The Templars, my friends were slaughtered.”

I sat on the edge of his desk and waited quietly for him to continue my eyes observing his obvious physical pain but also his emotion strain.
“I was captured, tortured – they tried to break my mind. How can you be the same person after that...” he said with a humorless laugh. “But still, I wanted to serve. They sent me to Kirkwall. I trusted my Knight-Commander and for what? Her fear of mages ended in madness. Kirkwall’s Circle fell, innocent people died in the streets.”

He turned towards me and held my gaze angrily.

“Can’t you see that I want nothing to do with that life anymore?”

“Of course I can, I…” I try with a soothing tone of understanding before he cuts me off angrily.

“Don’t! You should be questioning what I’ve done,” he said slowly beginning to pace.

“I thought this would be better...that I would regain some control over my life. But these thoughts won’t leave me. How many lives depend on our success? I swore myself to this cause! I will not give less to the Inquisition than I did the Chantry.”

His agitation was high as he moved and spoke gesturing with his hands angrily.

“I should be taking it,” he growled before slamming his fist into the bookshelf.

Me and Raj both jolt at the violent sounds of breaking wood from the impact of his fist.

“I should be taking it,” he whispered his head hung in defeat.

I slid off the edge of his desk and moved towards him almost frightened for him. I had never seen him so out of sorts or in so much emotional pain. I grasped his arm and turned him towards me so that I could look at him.

“This isn’t about the Inquisition, Cullen. This is about you, and what you want. Is that what you want...to go back to being a Chantry controlled, lyrium addict?”

His eyes suddenly looked ashamed and I watched him shake his head slowly.

“No, but if I cannot endure if I cannot...”

“Stop self-doubting, you can,” I said quickly cutting him off.

He sighed heavily and nodded at me.

“Alright,” he replied and I let go of his arm.

“Do us both a favor Cullen and take the rest of the day off. Go for a walk, get Dorian and play some chess in the garden, anything, but get the hell out of this damn office.”

He shook his head.

“Not necessary...”

“Then it’s an order, Commander. No work today,” I interrupted him and saw his look of surprise before he slightly snapped to attention.

“On your order, Inquisitor” he replied.

Giving him a sharp nod, I softly whistle for Raj and left his office to find Cassandra. Cullen’s sudden outburst worried me, and if anyone knew anything it would be her. Taking the steps that led to the
lower courtyard, and then running up the next flight beside the tavern I saw Cole following Solas closely looking very agitated. As I took the last step Raj ran towards Solas in greeting and I heard Cole arguing with him.

“But you like demons,” he replied almost pleadingly.

Solas kept walking away from Cole and when he saw me he gave me a strained frustrated look.

Well, this can’t be good.

I watched as Solas shook his head in agitation, refusing to look at Cole.

“I enjoy the company of spirits, yes; part of why I do not abuse them with bindings.”

Cole hovered over his shoulder looking scared.

“It isn’t abuse if I ask,” he replied.

I could almost see that Solas was counting to ten mentally trying to stop himself from losing his temper. I, however, was confused about what the hell was going on since this type of behavior from Cole was extremely odd.

“Not always true, also I do not practice blood magic, which renders this entire conversation academic.”

Cole moved quickly towards me, his watery blue eyes scared and pleading.

“He won’t bind me, he’s a mage and he likes demons but he won’t help.”

I stare at him still not sure what the hell was going on and I slightly shook my head.

“Wait for a second Cole; you’re not a demon, so why would you want Solas to bind you?”

“So I’m safe,” he replied anxiously before taking a step away from me. “If Solas won’t do the ritual to bind me, someone else could…will!”

Shaking his head in agitation making the brim of his hat flop around his narrow face he continued.

“Like the Warden Mages, and then…”, knotting his fingers together he stared at the ground. “I’m not me anymore. Walls around what I want, blocking, bleeding, making me a monster.”

Adamant, now I finally understand where this is coming from.

I grab his fingers and pull them apart making him look at me.

“Cole,” I start gently feeling him slightly calm. “Isn’t it a little extreme for you to ask Solas to bind you? What if by doing so it takes away the part of you that makes you, you?”

“Helping makes me who I am. I help the hurting, that is what I do, all I do, am, ME!”

“And if binding you erases your mind? Your consciousness?” Solas questioned him his tone frustrated.

Cole held my gaze.

“You wouldn’t make me hurt innocent people. I don’t want to hurt innocent people again.”
I pull Cole to me offering him comfort and safety and feel his strong arms wrap tightly around me, his fear almost palatable as I look at Solas over his shoulder.

“There has to be some middle ground between do nothing, and bind Cole with blood magic.”

Solas let out a sigh and nodded his head in agreement as Cole lifted his head and looked at him with a hopeful expression.

“Indeed, I recall stories of amulets used by Revaine seers to protect spirits they summoned from rival mages. A spirit wearing an amulet of the unbound was immune to blood magic and binding; it should protect Cole as well. The resources of the Inquisition could be used to find such a talisman.”

Cole looked at Solas and then me and nodded his head before turning.

“Good, they will not take me,” he said leaving us to watch him walk away.

“Mythal’s mercy, has everyone lost their fucking shit today?” I muttered.

Solas took my hand and kissed my knuckles looking at me questioningly. I gave him a tired smile and shook my head.

“Perhaps we could talk about it later; I need to speak with Cassandra about something.”

He nodded his head in agreement and kissed my knuckles again before letting my hand go.

“Would you prefer a quiet dinner in our quarters tonight?”

I nodded my head grateful for the option.

“Yes, I would really, really like that.”

I watched him turn towards the keep and let out a little happy sigh at watching him walk. Damned if that man didn’t turn me into some horny crazed teenager by increasing my heart rate just by walking away. Mentally slapping myself, I went back to my original goal of finding Cassandra.

Taking the stairs to Cassandra’s quarters I knocked and heard her tell me the door was open. Opening the door, I see she is at her table writing and now I am a bit confused. Cassandra was not a writer; a reader yes, but definitely not a writer.

“Writing does not come naturally to me, as I’m certain you can imagine,” she said glancing up at me with a slight smirk.

“Are you alright? You seem very intent,” I reply taking a seat at the chair across from her.

“I am, this needs to be done before I forget.”

She continued writing for a moment and I could see the frustration and frown on her brow as she stared at her writing.

“As if written by a dimwitted child,” she spat annoyed and sighed heavily.

She threw her quill down and leaned back in her chair.

“Historians will one day ask what happened at Adamant Fortress in the Fade. I was there, I saw it
with my own eyes…it must be recorded.”

I watched as she picked up her quill and began writing again. Here I had come to talk to her about Cullen and she was having an upside-down day too.

“There is no doubt about that, Cassandra.”

“I certainly thought so, until I started writing.” she replied with a smirk. Dropping her quill again she stood and moved to her window to glance outside.

“I still don’t know what to say about the spirit of the Divine. I saw her there, heard her voice, yet I cannot claim with certainty it was really her. The Chantry teaches us that the souls of the dead pass through the Fade, so it could have been her, yet even so.”

She rubbed her face and looked at me over her shoulder, her expression a mire of confusion.

“Everything you have shared with me about Divine Justinia, one thing you said time and time again is she was devout in her faith. Her selfless act is what kept me alive, so it is easy for me to believe that of her. Would it be so difficult to see that a spirit of Faith would want to embody something so pure without the possibility of corruption?”

Turning towards me now her head was slightly cocked to the side as she mulled over my words.

“You believe her a spirit then? One that would assume her form to…help us?” Her tone sounded skeptical and I gave her a gentle smile.

“I know you do not see differences between spirits and demons, Cassandra. I, myself, can’t claim to say I have ever met a spirit of Faith before. But I have met others that embodied the same types of virtues like the Divine, spirits of Hope, Wisdom, Harmony, and Creativity just for starters. Each bestows a precious gift of knowledge not possession; they have no wish to be here among the living. They only wish to share knowledge and experiences through conversation, not possession.”

She looked at me for a moment and then gave me a small smile.

“I do like the idea that a spirit of Faith found her worthy much more than the idea that her spirit was stuck in the Fade for so long instead of moving on to the Maker’s side.”

Leaving Cassandra to finish writing her thoughts down, I headed for the keep. Cullen’s whole moment was still on my mind worrying me.

Maybe leaving Raj with him would be a good idea.

Mulling the thought over the more I thought about it the better the idea sounded. It would give him companionship, and Raj would definitely get him out of behind that desk and into some fresh air. Tapping my chin, I pulled open the door and walked across the main hall with Raj towards my quarters.

_Paperwork first – then I will worry about Cullen’s moment of complete sideways._

****

For days I had thought about how best to help Cullen without appearing to help him. Preparing for bed, I decided that I was just going to ask Cullen to watch Raj. I viewed Solas folding his leggings and placing them on the chair in preparation for bed enjoying the subtle play of muscles in his back as he moved so gracefully.
“I’m going to ask Cullen if he will watch Raj while we are gone, I think.”

I look at Solas to get his thoughts on the idea and see the slight frown on his face and laugh at the look causing him to now look at me annoyed.

“You can’t possibly still be upset over what happened during Satinalia? Hell, Bull’s kiss was a lot more invasive.”

His eyebrow rose at me and I shook my head.

“You are still upset about that…well, you shouldn’t be. But I cannot change your mind only you can do that.”

Pulling my shirt off and throwing it at him, I slipped into our bed and stretched loving how comfy the bed felt against my back especially knowing that at some point I would be back to sleeping on the ground. Solas placed my shirt over the back of the chair and slipped in next to me, pulling me into him, and wrapping his arms around me tightly.

“Mine,” he whispered against my neck while gliding his nose over the skin and I let out a sigh of frustration even if the action made every one of my nerves tingle in response.

“I love you, but I am not property to be owned, wolf. Do not deprecate me in such a way. It is actually offensive that you would think my affections could be swayed so easily. You do not see me getting angry about the kitchen maid, Ariana, who flirts with you endlessly.”

I felt him stiffen behind me and then a low chuckle began before it turned into a full-on laugh. I look at him over my shoulder and see his eyes are closed and he is gripping his sides locked in what he thought was funny. Now it was my turn to look at him annoyed.

“I have never noticed her trifling, vhenan,” he finally commented as his laughter slowed.

“My point exactly,” I replied quickly turning towards him and laying my hand on his chest. “If Cullen has flirted with me it has been stealthy because I never noticed.”

His expression held a look of surprise as it held mine. I slowly walked my fingers up the middle of his chest giving him a cheeky smile.

“Besides…how could he possibly pull my eyes away from you when I am so obviously completely lost in love with you?”

He grabbed my fingers and kissed the tips one at a time.

“Have I ever told you, vhenan, that you have a way of making me feel completely loved and completely foolish at the same time?”

I laughed and placed a soft kiss on the middle of his chest.

“I hope it is more loved than the fool,” I tell him and feel the rumble of his laughter beneath my lips.

“Tonight, it is equal measures I think, and you are correct in doing so,” he said before kissing my forehead.

Sitting up now, I straddle his hips and his eyes got all smoky with the action completely turning me on.

“Did you just admit that I was right?”
I could tell he was having a difficult time trying to focus with him pressed so intimately against me…and the little rocking of my hips was probably not helping him.

“I should not have…”

I leaned forward quickly and kissed him passionately shutting him up.

“Nope, there is no taking it back now, wolf,” I tease and his loud groan made me giggle.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Preparing to Leave for Emprise Du Lion

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone had a wonderful weekend.
Thank you for your continued support - you guys make writing this so much fun.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cullen handed Raj a bone and smiled as the animal took the offering before he went to lay down in the makeshift bed he had put down for him. It was interesting to see it there, and I had never noticed it before. Perhaps, Raj was visiting more than just Solas in the Rotunda.

“I wanted to thank you…when you came to see me…if there’s anything…” he sighs and rubs his face.

“This sounded much better in my head,” he muttered.

I softly laugh.

“Most conversations do, I trust you’re feeling better?”

“Yes,” he replied watching Raj chew on his gift.

“Is it always that bad?”

His eyes dart to mine and then he rubs his neck uncomfortably.

“The pain comes and goes. Sometimes I feel like I am back there…I should not have pushed myself so far that day.”

“Skyhold isn’t going to fall apart if you take an hour for yourself now and then, Cullen.”

He slightly smiled; the edges around his eyes slightly crinkle with the action.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he replied before sitting on the edge of his desk.

“I’ve never told anyone what truly happened to me at Ferelden’s Circle. I was…not myself after that. I was angry, that anger blinded me, and I’m not proud of the man that made me. The way I saw mages…I’m not sure I…” he stopped and rubbed his face. “Now I can put some distance between myself and everything that happened. It’s a start.”

“For what it’s worth, I respect the man you’ve become.”

He looks at me with surprise and slightly shakes his head.

“Even after…?”

“Cullen, you are my friend and I care about you. You’ve done nothing to change that.”

He held my gaze for a long moment and shook his head.
“What about you? You have troubles of your own, how are you holding up?”

I laugh and lean back in my chair.

“Honestly? I’m scared shitless. So many people depend on us, on me. Corypheus is still out there and I feel as if I am no closer to killing the sadistic son of a bitch than I was when Haven fell.”

He moved from his perch on his desk and knelt in front of me and taking my hands.

“We’ve made great strides; do not doubt yourself – or the Inquisition, just yet. If there’s anything I can do, you have only to ask.”

I smiled at him gratefully knowing he truly meant it and cleared my throat.

“Well, you’ve had time to go over all the information we gathered in the Emerald Graves, was there anything useful in there?”

Cullen released my hands and stood moving back towards his desk.

“Everything you and your team gathered points to a mine in Sarnia,” he said while pointing to a place on a map.

Moving towards the desk myself, I reviewed the area in Emprise Du Lion he pointed to and nodded my head in agreement with his assessment.

*Josephine wanted you to go here anyway and now you have a good enough reason to justify the going.*

“Then we need to shut this mine down to pull Sampson out of hiding,” I replied with a wicked smile on my face.

Cullen nodded sharing that smirk.

“I couldn’t agree more. The pass has been cleared for travel, and you should be able to leave when you are ready. I have all the information on the area that you will need.”

“Good,” I replied smiling at him as I move to leave.

“Fenlin, would you be willing to leave Raj with me when you leave for Emprise Du Lion?”

Glancing at him, I smile pleased that I wouldn’t have to coerce him to watch him. He was still too young for missions, but one day my little warrior would go with me.

“I was hoping you would offer to watch him, plus I think he would like that since you spoil him rotten.”

Cullen chuckled and rubbed his neck watching Raj chew vigorously on the bone he had given him earlier.

“It’s purely for selfish reasons, I must admit. But his presence will make me want to leave the desk once and a while as well. Who knows, he might enjoy playing with some of the Mabari puppies we have in the kennels.”

With a smile of understanding, I took my papers from his desk and whistled for Raj.

“Well Commander, it would seem I have my marching orders. I will gather everyone and inform
them of our next exotic adventure.”

His laughter followed me out his door as I took the stairs to head for the tavern.

*My people are going to fucking hate me.*

Everyone was seated around the large dining table while I told them about what to expect in Sarnia.

“First of all let me just warn you to pack warm, it’s a frozen wasteland. The curious part is that somehow and for whatever reason, the Red Templars have taken over the mine. I am going to safely assume that we will run into red lyrium throughout the area. The reports that have come in thus far have not been great, so we can expect heavy resistance.”

Quietly mulling over the little information that I had given everyone, I took a drink of my wine before continuing.

“I do have presents for each of you, however, I requested from Harritt special gear be made for each of you for this trip. With Dagna’s expertise and her flair for the unusual, she has added that little something extra for each of you that is built into the gear. After we are done here, I urge you all to go and grab your new gear and prepare to leave at dawn.”

“Are they at least stylish?” Dorian joked making me laugh.

“Dorian, only you would care about whether or not you looked good in the middle of a Templar infested ice block,” I said chuckling. “Honestly, I was more concerned about you freezing to death than whether or not you looked good kicking ass.”

Dorian gave me his most charming smile.

“That you care about my freezing to death my dear is just going to have to placate me for now.”

Everyone finished up their meals and left for the undercroft leaving Solas and me at the table to finish our own meal.

“Did you request gear for yourself as well, vhenan?”

I smiled at him and nodded as I finished chewing.

“Hell yes, I’m not freezing my ass off. I bartered a pattern with the Dalish clan in the Plains when I was there and Dagna modified it for me so we shall see what it looks like. I…” slightly I began blushing at the gear I had made for him specifically. “I believe you will be pleased with yours as well.”

His eyebrow rose at the comment. Wiping his mouth with his napkin he placed it on the table before standing.

“Then we should go see what kinds of treasures have been made for us,” he said holding his hand out.

Smiling, I took it and followed after him to the undercroft.

*Oh, I sure hope he likes it.*
vhenan - my heart
Entering the undercroft, I glanced around at all the armor stands as everyone was looking at their new gear. I bit my lip waiting for the moment that he would recognize his and when I saw his eyes slightly widen, I knew he had found it. His eyes darted to mine immediately full of surprise.

“How did you…” he started and then stopped as if he couldn’t find the words.

“The Vir Dirthara is a treasure trove of information, including how to replicate ancient armor” I replied softly as we walked towards the gear stand.

My drawing and with Harritt and Dagna’s help, they recreated his wolven armor. Every piece of Onyx armor was enchanted and lined with dark wool and fennec fur that could be replaced with a lighter material in warmer weather.

The dark color of the metal’s pauldrons for his wide shoulders, chest piece, vambraces for his forearms and gauntlets for his hands all lay over a fine layer of leather-lined chainmail. The cuisse or thigh pieces attached to the chainmail with easy buckles. The greaves and sabatons all fit together into one nice piece that lay over knee-high soft Halla skinned boots.

I almost started drooling at the idea of his powerful thighs encased in all that metal.

He walked around the armor and his hands touched the metal with hesitant fingers. I couldn’t tell if he liked it or not as he walked around the gear stand, I just knew if Assan’s memory served me correctly, he was going to look delicious in the armor.

“Well?” I questioned him finally unable to take his silence any longer since his aura was a jumble of emotional changes.

“It appears to be made quite well, and looks to be warm.”

“Oh, well…good then,” I said sounding slightly dejected at his lack of enthusiasm. “If you don’t like it Solas, you are not required to wear it. I just thought that…”

His blue eyes glided to mine and held, stealing my breath and making the butterflies zoom around in my stomach. The soft way his eyes crinkled at the sides when he smiles at me finally lets me know he was indeed pleased with the armor and my thoughtfulness in finding the pattern for him.

“It will serve me quite well, it also appears that you have remembered a few other things as well when designing the armor,” he said calmly.

I nodded my head knowing what he was inferring. Being immortal was all well and good, but we could be killed, albeit it was difficult but there were a few things that would do it quickly. A weapon
made of red lyrium or a spirit blade; either one would do it quickly if hit in the right spot. I had made sure that everyone’s gear would repel red lyrium arrows and blades and displace spirit blades so that they could not penetrate the armor.

“I would like to inspect your gear for the same modifications,” he replied walking towards my gear rack.

Not surprised with his need to ‘mother hen’, I followed after him as he walked around my own armor that was a modification of the Dalish pattern for their rogues. I saw his eyebrow rise at the obvious difference between this armor and the armor that Assan would have worn that would have been very similar to his.

I was not one of those girlfriends who wanted to make sure my man and I wore the same thing, which was something I always thought was just ridiculous. Besides, I liked the cut of the rogue armor and it looked damn good on me too. The leather-lined chainmail that encased the body added a little extra padding to my narrow frame. The triple-lined chest piece gave me breasts and broader shoulders.

“This is definitely a Dalish pattern,” he said with a touch of disdain lacing his voice making me sigh in annoyance.

“Yes, it is,” I replied keeping my tone even.

“Hmm,” he said walking around the gear checking the runes inscribed into the leather breastplate.

I rolled my eyes at him and his sometimes glaring snootiness for anything Dalish. I wasn’t overly fond of the clans myself, but at least I didn’t think everything they did to be a complete and utter fuck up.

“Hey boss, is this really dragon scales?” Bull called out sounding like a big excited kid.

I turned towards him smiling glad for the diversion.

“Yes sir and it is lined with Gurn leather to keep it from chaffing.”

Bull smiled brightly at me as he ran his hands over the large full body armor for a Qunari warrior. I vaguely recall him telling me that if you ever found a Qunari in full armor – run, that meant they were at war. I definitely wouldn’t want a group of eight foot tall, built like a brick house bunch of men charging at me.

“There is no Inquisition emblem on them,” Cassandra stated sounding slightly surprised.

I nodded my head and walked away from Solas who was still busy making sure my gear was complete and that there would be no weaknesses in my enchants.

“No, there are none on anyone’s armor. I was working towards function and protection here, not a parade. Besides, the people of Sarnia will know exactly who we are without the large emblem embedded in our gear.”

Cassandra nodded her head in silent agreement and ran her fingers over the full body armor that came with a long leather duster lined in fur. Her chest plate was no frills like the warrior herself. The stuff you didn’t see was that it was double lined with soft leather and fur and a built-in type of bra for her ample breasts. I already knew from sharing a tent with her that she double wrapped them to keep them in place. I glanced over to where Cole stood, and he was looking at his all leather armor lined with fur and wool for warmth and I moved towards him.
“Do you like it?”

His watery blue eyes looked at me and he smiled.

“Weave the woven, warm and light...no metal to make a sound, it’s perfect.”

I smile brightly at him and pat his shoulder before turning to glance around the large room at everyone. Sera was busy removing her new gear as was Varric so I spoke quickly.

“I hope everyone has found their gear to meet their expectations and it is pleasing.”

Dorian turned towards me smiling with a slight wave.

“My dear, you have gone above and beyond. I have found that this is not only functional but fashionable,” he offered obviously quite pleased.

His armor was Tevene in origin and that meant it was made with dark leathers and bright red silks with thick leather shoulders and high collar. There were thick layers of Faustian silk over dark leather; thick leather gauntlets and greaves that covered soft, fur-lined gloves and boots all tied together into a very fashionable armor if not geared more towards the functional against the cold.

“Good, see everyone at dawn then, and no stragglers...Dorian. Those who arrive late are on cooking duty the entire trip.”

I hear some chuckles and earn a dirty look from Dorian for calling him out on always being late. Walking towards my own gear, I started removing it from the rack while Solas moved to gather his own and follow me out. Once we reached our room and he had warded the door was when he spoke freely.

“You enchanted the gear yourself,” he said more as a statement than a question.

I nodded my head and moved to hang my new gear on its stand hiding my little smile.

“Yes, with ancient enchantments,” I replied and turned smiling at him. “I couldn’t just show another mage without them asking me where I learned them or explain why they didn’t need lyrium to make them work. As it was, it was difficult enough just keeping Dagna from trying to dissect my brain for the information.”

His deep laughter as he hung his own gear was always a nice sound that made my heart flutter.

“I can imagine,” he replied before turning towards me.

“May I ask why you choose to use a Dalish pattern and not make your own Sentinel armor?”

Sighing heavily, I glanced at him and I am sure my eyes held a glint of the anger I felt.

“I am no longer a Sentinel, nor am I bound to that armor any longer and I refuse to relive that memory.”

My tone held an edge of anger and I could see it surprised him, it did me too. Rubbing my face, I shook my head.

“That was rude, I am sorry. I did not mean to take out my anger on you over her memories that sometimes catch me off guard.”

Solas moved towards me and wrapped me in his arms.
“You do not need to apologize, vhenan. I have not forgotten what it was like to have no choice but to obey orders.”

I held him close enjoying the comfort he offered and breathed deeply of his scent as he kissed my temple. He tilted my chin up and kissed me gently and I sighed softly just melting into him as his lips nuzzled mine. He lifted his head and held my gaze tenderly and my heart thumped heavily in my chest. Running his fingers over my vallis’lin, his eyes traced the patterns just as his fingertips had a second before. I could see in his gaze that they held haunted memories and I internally flinched at the sight.

Dropping my gaze from his, I stepped back, touching my face now with a sense of my own anxiety at how it must look to him. That constant reminder of who I used to be…not who I was now. It should have disappeared when Mythal ascended me and released me or Assan, from her sworn duty to protect her. His hand clasped my shoulder and turned me back around gently.

“Don’t turn from me, you have nothing to be ashamed of by choosing to still wear the vallis’lin.”

I shook my head and held his gaze.

“I did not choose to continue wearing it, Solas. When Mythal returned my memories, and released me or Assan from her sworn duty and then ascended me, it did not remove the vallis’lin like it should have.”

His expression was one of surprise.

“You are sure she released you?”

I heard the edginess of his tone and I gave him a gentle smile.

“She released me, ma’lath it just didn’t leave when she said the words. I do not know why.”

His eyes searched mine questioningly and I suddenly knew what he was going to ask and my stomach slightly clenched with excitement.

*Maybe it would work…if Assan’s memories are accurate; it wouldn’t be the first time he had removed a vallis’lin not counting his own. He had removed many from those enslaved by the Evanuris.*

“May I try?” He asked and I could hear the hesitancy in his voice.

I nodded my head and give him an anxious smile.

“Please,” I reply quickly moving to sit on the desk.

His hands began to softly glow a seafoam green as they slowly moved over my face and I closed my eyes sending silent prayers that the vallis’lin would be gone when I opened them. I wanted the reminder that once I was owned like property gone from my face.

“Ar las mala revas,” he said softly at the end of his spell. I opened my eyes to look at him while I ran my fingers over where the vallis’lin would normally be and found the skin smooth.

Smiling brightly I jumped into him throwing my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist throwing him a bit off balance.

“I love you,” I said between kisses over his face making him laugh.
The soft nibbles of his lips woke me long before we needed to wake and I let out a pleased sigh.

“You are insatiable,” I tell him with a gravelly voice still full of sleep and slightly stretch back into him.

His lips kiss my neck and I can feel his smile against my skin setting little fires to burn even hotter.

“It is you that has made me this way,” he remarked before biting my shoulder softly.

“Little ole me?” I comment slightly breathless and feel him grasp my hips and pull me back into him sliding into me slowly from behind.

“Solas,” I breathe heavily and moan as his teeth grasp my shoulder possessively again.

His slow thrusts were building an inferno and my mind went blank with his steady pleasurable movements. Grasping the sheets with my hands, I clenched tightly as each thrust brought me closer to oblivion. On hand slipped over my breasts to tease my nipple pulling me even closer to him and I moaned loudly with the touch.

“Fenlin,” he softly moaned against my neck as his thrusts grew quicker and my own impending release closed around me.

“Oh…Oh…” I moaned and chanted wrapping my free arm around his neck at the same time as my body went over the edge and lightning danced behind my clenched eyes.

His loud groan as he reached his release echoed to mingle in the room with my own while his arms tightened around me.

“Ar lath ma vhenan,” he panted against my ear before his lips kissed my shoulder.

“Have I ever told you how much I really like how you wake me,” I panted enjoying his soft laughter from behind me.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
ma'lath - my love
Ar las mala revas - you are free
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
Emprise Du Lion

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading and support. AO3 readers are the best!

We walked towards the barn without hurry, our fingers laced together and I was still slightly cocooned in my happy morning. First and foremost, there is something beautiful about morning sex. Secondly, it was good that he woke me early as I found myself jumping him again when he began putting his armor on. No matter how many times I told myself that they were ‘just thighs’ didn’t seem to matter, my hormones had other ideas.

Raj ran slowly behind us then darted and started weaving between our legs playfully. I noticed Cullen stood in the barn making sure everything was prepared for our departure. I walked to Inansha’s stable and noticed when Solas raised an eyebrow at me as I unlatched the gate.

“I bet you are ready to get out of here for a while aren’t you handsome?” I question the animal softly and feel his head but into my chest with his answer making me laugh. I glance at Solas and see he is still watching me with a slightly lopsided smile and my stomach flutters in response.

“You taught me well, and I can do this. Besides he needs to get out of here and Etta deserves a good vacation.”

Not to mention riding bareback was warmer, but I wasn’t going to admit that and I could tell he had an idea of my motives. Solas laughed and moved towards the other Hart that was sent from the clan in the Dales. She was white with soft black stripes on her back end and a long black arrow mark on her forehead. Her large, four foot spanned antlers were so majestic in size it was beautiful and it was helpful that Inansha liked her.

“Come Siugen, we have a job to do,” he said gently to the creature and I watch it act like Inansha with all her rubbing against him while his hand scratched her jaw.

I could totally relate to the creature knowing what his hands felt like and suppressed a soft shiver from rushing over my spine. Bull moved forward with his Druffalo, Colossuses, along with a very tired and cranky looking Dorian and I smiled at him as I slipped a brush for the mounts into the side of my pack.

“Wait… what happened to your face dealies,” he said motioning towards my face.

Dorian stopped and rubbed his face regarding my now bare face while I glanced up at Bull from my pack.

“We found a spell to remove them,” I replied and saw his slightly surprised look before he shook his large head.

“I thought that was something the Dalish took honor in getting and you didn’t like them?” he asked me securing his pack on the back of his mount while it appeared Dorian would be content in quietly listening.
I barely stopped the grimace that formed on my lips when he referred to me as ‘Dalish’, and glanced at Bull for a long moment with an ironic smile and shook my head at him.

“The Dalish wouldn’t think them so fabulous if they understood they were actually slave markings,” I finally tell him honestly and see his look of surprise.

“Well, shit boss…yeah, totally understand” he said calmly before mounting.

I knew this would not be the last I heard of my missing valis’lin and let out a knowing sigh. Kneeling down Raj jumps into my arms and I giggle at the silly creature. Running my hands through his fur, it amazes me how much he had grown since returning from the Emerald Graves.

“You’re going to have to stay behind this time Raj. I need you to keep Cullen company until we get back,” I tell him rubbing my forehead with his.

Glancing around at the others, Solas rubbed the wolf between his ears in his own form of farewell before helping me get on Inansha with my pack and bedroll strapped on my back. I looked to make sure there were no stragglers and saw my two biggest offenders sitting on their mounts half asleep.

Cullen whistled softly for Raj and I saw him run over and sit next to him watching everything that was going on with intelligent blue-green eyes. I smiled at his instant obedience and thankful that he was not only smart but somehow understood what was going on and I glanced around at everyone.

“Come on guys, let’s get going.”

Solas slip onto Siugen gracefully and I held back a sigh of frustration with his easy coordination.

Damn, it would be nice to be able to do that and not trip over myself with the thought of just tripping.

Motioning the others to head out, I lightly squeeze my knees and start off Inansha who seemed quite eager to get on his way. Turning towards Cullen who stood with Raj, I waved at them while Raj watched us carefully and looked at Cullen in confusion.

“It’s okay boy, you can go when you’re grown for now let’s get you something to eat,” he offered after waving at us and leaving the barn with Raj following him.

*****

The trek through the Frostbacks was hell, and I was really glad I had not only gotten new gear but chose to ride bareback for the added heat. Fucking winter storms were slamming the mountains and I was grateful for the large cave we found on day two that got us out of the never-ending blizzard.

The guys and I moved through the cave adding heating runes to the rock surface while the others gathered material for a fire and set up the animals for the night. Rubbing my hands up and down my arms glad for the built-in heating runes in my armor I threw a ball of fire at the prepared campfire and grabbed the stew pot to get dinner going.

“Thank you for this gear made, Fenlin or we would all be freezing our bits off,” Dorian remarked later as we all huddled around the fire warming our hands while dinner cooked.

I smiled at him as even Bull nodded his head in agreement.
“No shit…and I like those bits,” he teased making Dorian blush while we all laughed.

“Well, I would like to say that it will be warmer where we are going but it would be a lie. The reports that Harding sent, spoke of harsh cold and starving townsfolk. Hopefully, the caravan of supplies will arrive around the same time we do.”

Cassandra glanced at me with a sharp nod.

“Cullen sent a strong group of fifteen soldiers to escort the wagon, it will arrive” she reassured me.

Lulled into the comradery of the evening, I pulled out my sketchbook to relax and take in the moment. I drew the faces around the fire taking in the smallest details wanting to capture this memory for myself. The way Bull’s one eye lifted in the corner when he laughed and tilted his head back to release the deep sound. Dorian’s hand lying comfortably on the large man’s knee and the way his lips lifted at the corner with a tender smile.

My eyes moved on to where Cassandra sat on the ground sharpening her sword. She had an ale sitting beside her and was propped back between Varric’s legs listening to the conversation. The easy way Varric placed his hand on her shoulder when he asked her if she wanted a refill on her ale; it was intimate and conveyed a familiarity between the two.

My eyes glided over to where Cole sat sharpening his daggers, eyes quiet and accepting while Sera sat next to him on the ground drinking her ale telling a dirty story to the others. My fingers ran over the page as I caught the moment she actually looked at him and smiled. Eyes twinkling, joyous radiance shone from her features and Cole returned the exuberant smile. She was finally accepting him for who and what he was and it made me smile.

“There is something missing in your picture,” his voice informed me softly from beside my head and I glanced at him smiling.

“Oh?” I inquire enjoying the way his eyes held mine.

“Where are we?” He pointed out with a smug grin.

Looking down at my drawing I softly laugh and shake my head.

“Hmm…good point,” I admit and I start drawing us into the picture.

I add the little details like me drawing in my sketchbook and he is beside me reading. I make sure to add the thick, checkered quilt that is wrapped around us. His soft laughter vibrated against my side and I glance at him while he looks at the picture.

“You forgot to add that little part where you stick your tongue out slightly when you draw,” he pointed out and I laughed.

“I do not stick my tongue out when I draw,” I inform him faintly shaking my head trying to think if I actually did that or not.

“Just the tip usually out of the corner, it is quite adorable” he replies calmly his eyes dancing with mischief.

“You tease,” I laugh and slap his leg playfully.

“No Boss, you do” Bull replied absently and I glance at him surprised as others began to agree.
“Her ears twitch when she is really focused to,” Varric commented and my eyes dart to him.

“Don’t forget that she taps her forehead with her pencil with her eyes closed like she is trying to knock something loose,” Cassandra said with a cheeky grin.

Shaking my head, I close my sketchbook and tap my fingers on the front.

“Oh hardy-har-har…get it in while you can guys, but I will warn you. I was approached to sell my illustrations of our time on the road by Varric’s publisher. Imagine it,” I say with enthusiasm as I splay my hands in the air.

“The Inquisitor and her team on the road – how did they survive? What was there day to day like? Put together in a nice and tidy book all in picture form, maybe I will add a couple of lines explaining the picture.” I tapped my chin thinking about it and glanced around the fire with a large smile.

“I know – I could make it into a comic, a laugh. Perhaps make enough of them to pass out every week like a newspaper. Call it ‘Skyhold’s Comics’.”

Everyone was staring at me with smug grins and I chuckled.

“I could draw that time Varric ran from a fire drake setting his ass on fire…or the other time Cassandra punched that bear in the face when it stood up scaring her in the bushes she was trying to pee in…” Everyone began chuckling at the memories while the two I talked about, slightly grimaced with embarrassment.

“I know how about that time Bull charged into that group of undead and had that undead guy stuck to his horns still moaning and moving.” I saw Bull slightly grimace with the memory and I laughed.

“Oh, wait…how about that day a fish swam against Sera’s leg when she was bathing. Does everyone remember how loud she screamed as she ran through the camp naked?” I saw Sera slightly shiver with the memory and a small smile at the corner of her lips.

“But the best one was the day Dorian accidentally singed his mustache with his own magic all because of a sneeze at the wrong time…priceless.”

Everyone groaned and I started laughing at their combined looks of horror. Solas leaned over and kissed my cheek with a large smile.

“That’s right…mess with me and I will sell my pictures depicting every one of you with bedhead and wrinkles.”

Dorian gasped with fake outrage slapping his chest with his typical drama queen style while Varric chuckled and shook his head.

“Don’t worry Sparkles, she’s just kidding,” he said taking a drink of his ale.

“Or am I,” I said wiggling my eyebrows teasingly.

*****

We arrived in Sahmia and it was as Lace warned – a frozen shithole. I slid off Inansha and the frozen snow crunched under my boots. I patted the animal on the neck and took the gentle head-butt he gave in return before turning towards the sounds of snow crunching beneath a booted heel.
“There’s the beautiful woman I was looking for,” I commented when I saw Lace striding towards me.

“Fenlin, I hope your trip was uneventful,” she replied with a large smile.

“Oh, you know, Frostback blizzards, cave-dwelling, Sera’s constant chatter and Dorian’s constant bitching…the usual,” I joke walking towards her taking her offered arm in greeting.

Lace shook her head and gestured towards the fire in the middle of our small camp.

“How did an entire river freeze so quickly?” I questioned curiously.

Lace slightly shrugged.

“Damned if I know. It got really cold, really quickly. Sahrnia relies on its river for everything – trade, food…they weren’t expecting this.”

Tightening my fur-lined cloak around me against the sudden biting wind, I let out a sigh and saw my breath puff out in front of me.

“Have you been able to gather any information as to why the red Templars have come here?”

“I can’t tell you much. The Templars have outposts all through the hills. Our scouts haven’t been able to get through. I have a suspicion it might have something to do with the local stone quarry. A lot of the workers went missing after the red Templars moved in.”

My face scrunched up at the information wondering why the Templars would take the townspeople let alone want a damn quarry.

“Well, here I come to save the day…again,” I joke and Lace laughs.

“That’s why we love you,” she teased. “Be warned though, the red Templars have been mounting frequent attacks. They want Emprise Du Lion, bad. Maybe there is something you could do about that,” she said with a cheeky smile.

Patting her shoulder I nod my head.

“Well we are sure as hell gonna try,” I tell her before turning to gather my team.
“Ah, the Inquisition,” a woman said as we entered into the frozen town. “I am Mistress Poulin,” she offered.

“My name is Fenlin, it is nice to meet you. Maybe you could shed some light on what is happening around here.”

She nodded her head and gestured for us to enter her home.

“I hope I can, I am partially to blame for all this,” she said.

“How so?” I inquire calmly as she added another log to her fire.

“The red Templars are here because, fool that I am, I sold them my family’s quarry. They’ve taken every worker, and we haven’t seen them in weeks. But it is not enough for them. They keep coming, taking more people, and there’s nothing I can do to stop them.”

I stare at her for a long moment and shake my head.

“How could you have sold your quarry to them?”

“I didn’t know! I swear by Andraste’s pyre, they looked like knights, Chevaliers. Such pretty speeches,” she said spitting on the ground angrily. “They said they would reopen the quarry, bring employment and trade back to Sahrnia. We’ve been struggling since the war began. How could I refuse?”

Mistress Poulin slowly paced in front of me, crossing her arms in frustration.

“It was good for a time. People went to work, they were paid…then they stopped coming home. After that – the red Templars stopped pretending.”

I rubbed my face understanding how the Templars got the quarry now.

But why take the people?

“What do you mean the red Templars take workers?”

“People just disappear. First, those who worked the quarry, and then they took people from their homes. I don’t know why I just prayed they’d leave me and my family alone.”

I nodded my head in understanding.

“Thank you for the information Mistress Poulin,” I tell her and walk through the door Bull held open.

“What a fucking nightmare,” I mutter and hear Bull’s grunt of agreement.
“What a waste,” Solas said softly glancing around at the broken buildings.

“Terrible what has been done to this place;” Cassandra said before walking towards the broken gates.

I followed after Cassandra and noticed a lone warrior guarding the broken door.

“Michel De Chevin at your service, Your Worship, I saw the Inquisitions banners from afar. I never expected to see the Herald of Andraste herself.”

Ugh…I really hate those titles.

“Ser Michel De Chevin? Empress Celine’s Champion?” Cassandra questioned him curiously.

“No longer a champion, no longer ‘Ser’, my disgrace was made quite public.” He tapped the hilt of his sword and gestured at the area. “None of that matters, I have a strong arm, a stout heart, and I still serve Orlais.”

“So what has brought you all the way out here?”

“I hunt a demon. This one calls itself Imshael and has settled in Suledin Keep, up in the hills. Imshael is free because I made a mistake. I will see him destroyed. Now that the Inquisition is here, perhaps the red Templars who guard the keep can be routed. All I need is one chance,” he said passionately.

“Well, you know where the demon is, why wait?”

He gave me a lopsided smile and crossed his arms.

“I am but one man, my lady, and Suledin Keep is guarded by red Templars. While I would happily give my life for this, I would not give it in vain.”

I softly chuckled, “Good point. What can you tell me about this ‘Imshael’?”

“A desire demon, more cunning than anything I have encountered…and I have played the game. Imshael has roamed the land for some time if anything; he will have grown in power. Why he is here in Emprise Du Lion, however, is anyone’s guess. Perhaps he has gained the cooperation of the red Templars or vice versa.”

“Do you know what’s in Suledin Keep that would attract such a demon?”

“Red Templars, so far as I can tell” he joked and I chuckled as he continued. “Suledin is an old Elven Fortress left to crumble. The locals always avoided it, believing it the haunt of ancient Elven spirits.”

Nodding my understanding I held my hand out to him and he grasped it.

“Thank you for the information Michel, when we are ready to attack the keep I will let you know.”

He bowed as I walked off and I looked towards the mountain that we would go through. It was a system of caves that led through it and if Lace was right, which she usually was, it would be full of red Templars.

This place was very unpleasant no matter how I looked at it. The red Templars were dug in deep into the mountain pass tunnels. I was so glad that I had enchanted the armor as I did because there were
the large, rock-like Templars that shot red lyrium shards. Of course, they also had archers that were shooting arrows laced with the nasty shit as well.

Just when I would think we were gaining ground, I would round a corner and there would be another group of the nasty bastards. Then there were the growths of red lyrium everywhere singing their horrible song. What a vacation destination this place was…not!

“Mountains…cold…Yes, let’s bring Dorian. Maker, this place is a frozen nightmare except for the red lyrium everywhere, which is the only warm thing here. I say if the Empress wants this place so bloody badly she can damn well have it,” Dorian remarked sarcastically.

I snorted at his comment as we made our way through the narrow mountain path and rounded the next corner. A sudden roar and barely a moment to prepare, I placed a barrier over me when a large, rock-like fist hit me square in the jaw and I few backward into Varric.

Bull’s roar with Cassandra’s sudden shield bash into another templar resulted in a chaos of the highest order, while Varric helped me back up.

“Nice guy,” Varric teased as he helped me up.

“Light that son of a bitch up,” I growled at Dorian who swiftly threw down multiple fire runes setting the area ablaze wherever the Templars tried to walk.

Laying frost runes around his pattern, it did not take long for us to take care of the red Templars. Glancing around to make sure everyone was okay, Solas moved to look at my jaw. It was sore, and I flinched a bit when he prodded at it gently. His eyes held mine and he slightly shook his head.

“You do not need to lead everyone up the damn path, let Bull and Cassandra take the point.”

I nodded my head in agreement.

“You’re right,” I replied and saw his sudden wicked grin and shook my head as I rubbed my jaw.

“Perhaps I didn’t hear you correctly,” he teased and I slapped his arm.

“Oh shut it you smug bastard,” I retorted and motioned for Bull and Cassandra to lead while he continued to laugh at me.

When we had finally fought through the last of the red Templars inside the mountain, we saw a large camp of red Templars in a flurry of activity. They knew we were coming and they were scrambling to prepare. Cole stood next to me quietly as my eyes took in the area full of red lyrium shards as big as boulders growing out of the ground. Rubbing my temples from the disjointed music that came from the tainted crap, he spoke quietly.

“It sings…sick music.”

I nodded my head in agreement and glanced at him.

“Can you get in there and find out how many there are?”

He nodded his head and disappeared while I continued to rub my temples. We stood huddled together in the mouth of the tunnels waiting.

“This place gives me a headache,” Dorian said tiredly.
“I wonder how far this corruption has spread,” Solas said quietly while Varric glanced at him.

“I am sick of this shit,” he muttered.

“Agreed,” Solas replied as Cole returned.

“Two behemoths, seven archers, five warriors, and three of the rogues.”

“And a partridge in a pear tree,” I mumble under my breath. Looking at Dorian, I smiled cheekily.

“How about starting a little fire with their tents my dear, just to get the blood pumping.”

He laughed and adjusted his gloves delicately.

“Have I ever told you how much I like how you think?”

I chuckle and look at Bull.

“I can only see three points of entry into the camp, take the right side and go with him and take Sera with you,” I tell him.

“On it Boss,” he replied and they moved out of the tunnel opening.

“Cassandra, you, Varric, and Solas take to the left where the other Behemoth is located. Cole and I will head up the middle as a distraction. Some Fade fire should get them really excited,” I joked and felt Solas’ hand on mine.

“Be careful,” he said quietly.

“I will if you will,” I replied before he kissed my lips quickly and followed after Cassandra and Varric.

I watched the sudden burst of fire in the middle of the camp and smiled as the tents immediately went up in flames. The sudden yelling and shouting of the red Templars as they scrambled to try and put the flames out was almost comical. The onset of hailing arrows amongst the burning confusion from Varric and Sera was a masterpiece as it wounded many before they could take cover.

Cassandra and Bull entered the camp from each side and as I came through the middle. Throwing my arms in the air as I pulled the fade to me, I conjured sickly green and yellow flames to rain down on them light everything else on fire. The Templars never stood a chance as we rapidly overwhelmed them.

With the Templars dead and burning on a pyre, I directed everyone to spread out and destroy the clusters of red lyrium growing from the ground.

“The sooner we get rid of that shit, the better,” I commented as everyone spread out.

Once the camp was cleared, Sera shot a message arrow that exploded into the sky signaling Harding so she would know that she could move some of the men through the tunnels and get to where we were. In a matter of moments, we had her responding flare and we sat down to wait for them.

“Anyone else vote we never come here again?” Varric said aloud making us chuckle.

“Stupid cold! You know what’s not cold?” Sera said looking at me pointedly. “Cities.”

I slightly shook my head at her as Dorian decided to add his two cents in when he patted Sera on the shoulder.
“At least the walk back will be easier than the walk up.”
The Mine

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for the comments and continued support.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Sahrnia’s mine was a maze of tunnels through the mountain. The red Templars were set in thick we found out as we came across a group of them. There were seven in total, and the large rock-guys that shot lyrium at us were obviously Generals directing the others.

“I’m going to make a crystal garden out of your skull,” he yelled at me shooting red lyrium, and I slightly grimaced at the imagery.

Hitting him with a Fade fist in the face I yelled back.

“That does not sound very pleasant.”

His sudden cry of pain made me smile. Bull charged in and took advantage of the hulking Templar on the ground and swung his ax down severing his head from his body. Glancing around at everyone to make sure they were okay we heard the yelling of people behind a stack of boards.

“Let us out…over here, please let us out before they turn us into those…things!”

Cole moved around the stack of boards and found a large wagon cage of eight Sahrnian’s inside, cold and starving.

“Have you released the others?”

One man questioned me as he leaped from the back of the cage Cole had just unlocked.

“There are more?” I asked him and saw him nod his head.

“There were seven cages,” he replied.

“Then we will find them,” I told him and glanced around for any information they might have kept. First, we found a letter about lyrium mining and I read it aloud.

“My Fellow Captains:
You know as well as I do that we cannot cut back on the red lyrium we’re feeding the soldiers. Considering, how many knights we have lost in our failures, we are lucky the Master still has a use for us.

The Venatori spies have spotted Inquisitor Lavellan herself, heading to the Dales. Commander Sampson wants us to show her we have not forgotten our brothers and sisters lying dead in Haven. – Captain Paxley”
Most of my team started laughing as I folded the letter and slipped it beneath my armor.

“It appears they didn’t appreciate us not just rolling over and dying,” I snorted before moving towards the next tunnel.

We tore through the mine’s tunnels killing red Templars as we went. This should be the last group… hopefully, I wished before knocking an archer off of the scaffolding he stood on. The archer fell right in front of Dorian and I saw him stab the blade end of his staff through the Templars neck.

“They’re like fucking roaches,” I muttered and heard his responding laugh.

When we were done releasing the last group of prisoners, I came across papers that said Mistress Poulin was helping the red Templars take the townspeople in exchange for food and supplies. Solas was reading over my shoulder and began rubbing my neck when he felt my aura flare in anger.

“Klimt,

Lieutenant Coutte isn’t feeling well, so I must rely on you to handle the lady from the village.

Set aside some basic supplies: flour, dried peas, blankets, any coin you can spare.
Either bring them or have them brought to the grove of trees at the fork of the Elfsblood, two nights from now.
Make sure no one sees you. Mistress Poulin should be there.
She’ll give you a list—people we can use—in exchange for the goods. Bring the list to me.

Oh, and lean on her a bit. Coutte’s got a soft heart and lets her get away with things. Her lists have been getting shorter, and she recommends folks who are old or have some hidden ailment. We take them, but they don’t survive the Seeding. Useless. Tell her she comes up with something good, or we take everyone.

Knight-Captain Fornier”

“What kind of sick, twisted person does something like this?” I said quietly unable to mask my disgust.

He did not have an answer to my question and I really didn’t expect one. Rubbing my face angrily, I moved on to the next piece of information that talked about Imshael.

It stated the demon was orchestrating the growth of red lyrium by using people that Sampson and Mistress Poulin were supplying for it. I shut my eyes and shook my head slowly.

“No end to the delightful horrors I am going to find today,” I muttered angrily.

Solas slightly squeezed my neck and I looked up at him.

“Come, we should make our way back towards the camp for the night. We are done here,” he said
calmly and I nodded my head in agreement.

Our walk back towards the camp was quiet. It appeared we all were lost in our own thoughts after I shared with them the information I found. At least some good came from this trip. I had closed the rifts I could reach, released prisoners before they could be cultivated into red lyrium for the Templars, and I found information that pointed to a possible place where Sampson was hiding.

Lace looked up as we entered the camp and she could tell that today had definitely been hell. I took the offered mug of warm wine with a half-smile.

“Thanks Lace,” I said sitting next to the fire and handing her the information I had found.

Staring at the dancing flames, I took another drink and finally looked at her.

“Send the information on to Cullen, and let him know we need supplies to rebuild the bridge the Templars blew up.”

Lace nodded her head still looking at the papers.

“Oh, and have Mistress Poulin detained, I don’t want her getting away.”

Lace finally glanced up from the papers her green eyes flashed with her anger at what she had read.

“Oh your order,” she replied standing and taking the papers with her.

Solas sat down beside me and held a bowl of stew towards me. Taking the bowl, I stared at the contents not very hungry as I finished off my warm wine. I pushed the food around with my spoon absently as I thought about what I had learned today. Everything was just so fucked up.

The idea of using people to grow red lyrium made my skin crawl.

“Vhenan,” he said gently pulling my attention from my twisted thoughts.

“Please, try to eat,” he said looking at me pleadingly.

I knew he worried and there was a comfort in knowing that no matter how crazy or fucked up things became, he was my constant. Taking a bite of the stew so he wouldn’t worry about me not eating, his gentle smile was just what I needed to help pull me from my depressing thoughts.

“Tomorrow, I want to take Suledin Keep,” I say to him before taking another bite of my stew.

He nodded his head as he chewed before answering.

“I am quite curious to what deal this ‘Imshael’ negotiated between it and the red Templars.”

“Me too,” I replied taking another bite of my stew.

Snuggled in next to Solas beneath a mound of furs, I listened to the steady thrum of his heartbeat. I watch my hand go up and down with his even breaths and wish I could close my eyes. The more I was around the red lyrium; the more it reminded me of the future I saw in Redcliffe.

This was pathetic…I am a grown woman, and yet I am afraid to go to sleep.

Lying there quietly, I pushed the thoughts away.
This is ridiculous…close your damn eyes and go to sleep.

Taking a calming breath, I closed my eyes and their dead bodies flashed behind my eyelids and I popped my eyes open again. The sleep-filled rumble of his voice vibrated against my cheek startling me.

“Vhenan, I can feel your fear. What has you so afraid?”

His hands ran soothingly up and down my back and I curled closer trying to melt into him.

“It’s silly, go back to sleep,” I mumble against the side of his chest.

His hand slid under my chin coaxing me to raise my face from where I hid it.

“If it were silly, it would not bother you so,” he pointed out gently.

I held his gaze for a quiet moment before closing my eyes and letting out a frustrated sigh.

“Being around all this red lyrium reminds me of the future I saw in Redcliffe. I know if I try to sleep, it will turn into a nightmare and…I can’t face reliving everyone dying again,” I finally admitted quietly.

I felt his lips press to my forehead with a tender kiss. I let out a soft sigh when his lips moved to place another kiss on my temple. He sat up and pulled me onto his lap where my face could nuzzle into his neck. Every time he does this, I fall a little more in love with the man. It was this type of gentleness that was within him that always found a way to calm me and make me feel safe.

“That did not sound silly to me,” he said softly pushing my hair behind my ear.

I breathed deep the scent of elfroot, parchment, and frozen ice; all the subtle smells that were him and felt myself relax against him. Yawning now, his hands rubbed my back in slow motions, massaging the tightness from the muscles with his magic fingers.

“Sleep,” he said quietly and I softly snorted.

“This won’t be very comfortable for you,” I reply and felt the vibration of his soft laughter through my cheek that was pressed into his shoulder.

“As long as I am holding you, I am very comfortable. Now sleep vhenan,” he gently pushed again.

Kissing the side of his neck, I yawned again and felt him pull the furs around us and prop his pack up for him to lean back on while continuing to hold me. My eyes grew heavier and I yawned again, nuzzling my face into his neck.

“Have I told you lately how wonderful you are?” I mumble tiredly just before finally falling asleep.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Suledin Keep's Horrors

Chapter Notes

Have a great Monday and thank you for your wonderful comments and your continued reading.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

My eyes slowly opened to the sounds of a soft snore and I glanced around my tent. At some point, we had gone from sitting up to lying down and I was lying completely on top of him. True to his word he was still holding me tightly and my heart just went to mush at the sight of him sleeping. This really can’t be comfortable for him.

Leaning up, I kissed the little indent on his chin before trying to move off of him. Solas’ arms tightened and his eyes slid open and I slightly frowned.

“This can’t be comfortable for you,” I softly voice my earlier thoughts before trying to move again.

His arms held me in place and I glance at him with a small lopsided smile.

“It is quite comfortable vhenan – even with all your wiggling,” he replied teasingly.

I quietly laugh and then kiss him.

“Well, I must say you are quite comfortable because I did sleep pretty damn well.”

He chuckled and stared up at the ceiling of the tent while I planted little kisses on his neck.

“And you taste good too…hmm,” I teased while softly biting him.

“Vhenan,” he said softly groaning with the teasing action and I smiled against his neck.

“You also make the most adorable sounds,” I said gently moving my lips to just behind his sensitive ear. “Especially when I kiss here,” I breathed against his skin and he let out a low moan of pleasure with the gentle touch.

His hand slid beneath my smalls and found me wet with need for him and I moaned against his neck with the seductive strokes of his fingers. He rolled me beneath him and I softly laughed before kissing him intensely and running my fingers down his sides before we broke apart breathless.

I grabbed the hem of my tunic and he had the edges of my smalls when Sera’s voice rudely interrupted us from behind the tent wall.

“Come on Fenni…you and Droopy get up. The quicker we get this done the quicker we leave. I hate this place, it gives me the creeps.”

Solas groaned in frustration with his forehead pressed against mine and I caressed his jaw tenderly before I replied.

“Out in a minute, Sera,” I replied.
Kissing him quickly I gave him a cheeky smile.

“To be continued,” I said teasingly.

Solas rolled off of me with another groan making me chuckle as I reached for my gear.

“It would appear you have angered the red Templars and Imshael, Inquisitor. They have started attacking the town of Sarnia,” Michel said as I finished my bowl of morning oats.

“Not surprising, Imshael knows we are coming for it.”

“I wanted to go with you to hear that demon scream its last dying breath, but the people of Sahinia need protection.”

This also did not surprise me that he would want to stay behind while we cleaned up his mess. Orlesian’s were if anything, not a culture that liked to clean up their own damn mistakes. Bull and I shared a knowing look between us, and I stood to clean out my bowl.

“Of course, you must do what your conscience tells you,” I reply calmly before setting the bowl inside of the pack for eating supplies.

I turned back towards him and he bowed quickly before leaving our camp while I watched him go. Lace moved to stand next to me and quietly folded her arms.

“I will make sure agents are posted around the town and advise the people to stay indoors.”

I glance at her with a friendly smile of appreciation and pat her shoulder.

“Thanks, Lace, you’re the best” I reply and watch her walk away before turning to everyone around the fire.

Well, let’s get our game faces on – we got a demon to kill,” I tell everyone before moving to grab my staff.

I could see the keep from where we walked up the snow-laced path. The structure was huge. Large stone walls and turrets that looked still quite intact, but I could also make out a lot of open areas with walls and no roofs. I don’t know if that was how the structure was originally designed or if this is what happened over time and neglect.

We found the doors to Suledin protected by one of the red Templar Generals, a couple of rogues and a couple of warriors. I glanced at Bull and Cassandra and they gave each other a knowing smile before they moved in. Slipping a barrier over them, Cole silently stealthed and moved to follow them. The small group guarding the door was overtaken quickly and we continued through.

“Everyone, just be careful, I have a feeling we are going to find more red Templars here than we did in the mine.”

We kept constant barriers up as Bull and Cassandra took point into the keep. I learned my lesson after the last time I got punched in the face - they could have it. We rounded the next corner and found archers and two shield warriors talking and we stopped wanting to hear what they were talking about.
“Commander Sampson expects us to take care of them,” one of the warriors said to the others sounding angry.

“Well, his bloody lordship can come and try to kill that knife-ear himself then. Has no one noticed that bitch doesn’t die easily,” an archer replied sarcastically.

I glanced at Solas and winked as he slightly shook his head at me. He was probably thinking it wasn’t from a lack of trying. I’ve almost died twice now…neither time was all that wonderful. The sound of a different man clearing his throat before he spoke brought my attention back from my wayward thoughts.

“She’s bringing her army here next – told you partnering with that fucking thing was going to get us killed.”

I gave Sera and Varric a cheeky grin.

“Let’s give them some arrows,” I tell them quietly and see their responding smiles.

The small group broke apart when the two archers fell dead with arrows sticking out of their bodies leaving only the two warriors who had deflected the arrows with all the metal plate they wore and took cover beneath their large shields.

“Bloody hell, they’re here Pete,” one yelled quickly.

“No shit you wanker,” he replied before Bull slammed into him knocking him across the small area.

The fight was over relatively quickly and we slowly moved up a small set of stairs and found rows of templar tents. I let out a low whistle as I stared at the long line of them.

“I believe we have found their residence,” I said quietly.

I peeked into every tent until I found the one that was a command tent and sifted through the papers on the makeshift desk made out of crates. I found more information on Imshael, and Sampson, and slipped it beneath my armor as I left the tent. I looked at Dorian and smiled.

“If you would be so kind as to burn them down,” I ask him.

Dorian smiled and began throwing fireballs casually at the large red tents setting the row ablaze.

We rounded the next corner and found more red Templars that were running towards the smoke from the fire we had just started. The warrior skidded to a halt at the sight of us and pulled his sword clumsily.

“Ladies, can we borrow a cup of sugar?” I joked as I hit the warrior with a Fade fist knocking him clear across the small courtyard.

Thankfully it was just three Templars in this small area and I took the five steps up to what resembled a prison area. As I approached the sound of the disjointed music that came from the red lyrium was almost deafening. I move toward the large cage where I could see the lyrium was growing and my stomach lurched at the sight.

“Is that…” I started quietly not believing what I was seeing.

“Look at this,” Cassandra said handing me a sheet of paper.

My eyes scanned the note as I read aloud what they titled ‘Test Notes’.
“We must carefully control exposure to red lyrium. The last one entered a savage frenzy from the lyrium; we had to put it down. Once the red lyrium takes hold, their strength increases, as we expected, but it makes them even more difficult to leash. Until we obtain the creatures in large enough numbers to test different techniques, we will never achieve a reliable method of corruption and control. I may have to recommend setting aside the entire experiment. Surely the Behemoth serves our purposes?”

My eyes instantly go back to the dead giant in the cage with large shards of red lyrium growing out of its body and everyone was silent. We found more test notes that stated they were looking for female giants for a possible breeding experiment as we looked around and I still couldn’t unsee the horror of what they were doing.

Bull moved towards the large shards and with a heavy swing of his ax, he shattered the shards of red lyrium and the disjointed music quieted. I rubbed my head grateful the ugly music had finally stopped. As soon as he stepped away, we lit the giant’s body on fire so it would not continue to grow the tainted poison from its remains.

“These Templars are no better than the fucking Wardens…insane,” I mumble moving away from the fire.

Sera nodded her head quietly in agreement and moved to follow Bull and Cassandra.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
We continued down the corridor of large cells and around the corner this was where parts of the
stone structure had been retaken by nature. There were bushes and tree growth with roots sticking
out of the ground everywhere making my steps cautious and the snow was deeper in this area it
seemed.

There was a small worn path that the Templars must have made and we entered the large courtyard
finding a large group of red Templars and a giant with shards of red lyrium growing from its
shoulders and arms.

“You got to be fucking kidding me,” I muttered at the sight of the large creature.

Bull chuckled and bounced his large ax in his hands waiting for my orders.

“Bull, you and Dorian keep that brainless thing occupied while the rest of us focus on the others.
Once they are taken care of, we will come back to finish it off.”

The red Templars scrambled quickly to attention as we engaged them.

“You can’t kill us all, Inquisitor,” a warrior yelled out and I smiled snidely.

“You wanna bet?” I yelled back quickly pulling Fade fire and flaming meteors to fall on the
unprepared group of red Templars.

With that group finally removed we focused on the raging giant that was swinging his mighty fists
wildly. Sera focused her shots on the giants head and soon with three arrows in the eye like an agile,
blonde pig-tailed, Robin Hood with her arrows grouping, and Bull’s well-placed slice with his ax on
the ankle tendon dropping the large creature to its knees, it finally died with the swift thrust of
Cassandra’s blade into its throat.

I moved towards Bull to look at the cut on his cheek as he waved his hand at me to stop fussing and
instantly frustrating me as I glanced at the dead giant with red lyrium shards on its hands.

“It’s fine Boss, I’ve hurt myself worse foolin around in bed,” he said glibly.

I stood on my tiptoes to grab the harness around his chest and pull him down so I may take a closer
look at the cut obviously surprising him as he actually bends quite easily towards me.

“I’m sure you have, you big ass, but you’re not out here foolin around and last time I checked,
Dorian isn’t using red lyrium to ‘play’ with you,” I said sarcastically as I studied the wound.

His one grey eye held mine for a second and he slightly chuckled as I looked at the small cut that
split over his high cheekbone. Releasing him I glance over at Solas and wave him over.

“Please heal that so we can be sure, everything here is tainted with that red crap and I don’t want to take any chances he gets poisoning.”

Solas nodded as I moved out of his way sliding his staff into the harness on his back. Watching his hands softly glow as he poured healing magic into Bull, and everyone heard Bull’s sigh of aggravation. When Solas finished he stepped away and pulled his staff from the harness on his back and looked at him with a slight smile.

“There will be a scar,” he told him.

Bull smiled at the news while Dorian and I shook our heads.

“I actually love that big ass,” Dorian mutters and I chuckle.

“Alright, let’s get going guys and keep our element of surprise. These fools obviously did not think we would come here.”

Finishing with the last bout of red Templars, I was sick of this place. I almost wanted to throw my hands in the air and just say ‘fuck it’. I had a dull, throbbing headache from the constant red lyrium song and it was not helping improve my mood.

Following the stairs leading further up and into the keep I expected to find more templars, instead there stood a man with brown-black hair in front of a large formation of red lyrium crystals and the disjointed music was almost deafening.

By all appearances, he appeared to be a man in his late twenties maybe early thirties – until I met his eyes. Cold, calculating black eyes stared out of his young appearance and I knew this must be Imshael, the Desire Demon. Gritting my teeth against the painful music, I stepped into the courtyard towards the demon.

“Ah, the hero arrives. But is it a hero or a murderer? It’s so hard to tell,” he declares with a condescending smile.

“You must be the demon calling itself Imshael,” I replied crossing my arms.

“Choice Spirit,” he contradicts clearly annoyed with being called a demon as he folds its arms.

“Talkie ones…I hate the talkie ones,” Bull mutters under his breath.

“Wait…wait…wait! These are your friends? They’re very violent, it’s worrying. True to my name, I will show you that you have a choice. It doesn’t always have to end in blood.”

My eyebrow rose and I am sure my look was complete disbelief at his words.

“Well this should be interesting,” I say with a slightly mocking laugh gesturing it to continue.

“It rarely hurts to listen, trust is another matter entirely,” Solas commented and I smiled at him as he moved to stand next to me, his aura linking with mine.

“Simple, we don’t fight, and I grant you power. Shower you with riches, or maybe virgins, your pick. Then we all live happily ever after…well, not all of us, but who’s counting?”

I started laughing.
Does this demon actually get people to fall for this? Is this what he offered Michel De Chevin, power?

“Let me get this straight,” I begin ticking off the offers on my fingertips. “Your offer to us to not kill you is power, money or virgins?”

Imshael’s eyes narrowed at my obviously mocking tone with his offered choices.

“I already have power,” I tell it holding up the marked hand noticing the demons slight flinch at the sight. “I don’t need money, the Inquisition pays pretty well.” I see the demon is glancing around at the others nervously recognizing that I would not be bargained with as I continued.

“As for virgins, who in the hell wants to experience that all over again. The awkwardness, the fumbling and for us girls the pain…no,” I say scrunching my face up in remembrance of what that was like. “If these are your choices, they aren’t very good,” I tell it enjoying the slight snarl on its lips at my response.

“Perhaps then I could offer…” it began and I held up my hand stopping it.

“The only thing you have that I want is your death, demon, you have done quite enough.”

“Oh, for…Choice Spirit! If you won’t be smart, be afraid.” It spat out changing from its human form into a fear demon prepared for our attack.

Thankfully this one was much smaller than the one we encountered in the Fade. Pulling the fade around me quickly, I pushed a wall of ice between us before it could attack making the demon laugh at the maneuver.

“Where’s that Michel, hmm? Afraid of another disastrous blunder?” It questions me snidely before fade stepping through the ice wall to land directly behind me.

Prepared for the move, I stabbed the blade of my staff into its chest, and the demon shrunk away from me, gripping the wound and changed its form again, this time for a rage demon. The large fire-like demon glowed brightly slithering slowly over the floor leaving a small trail of fire behind it.

“I’m not the enemy, all these people chose to be here,” it said sounding angry and confused before blowing fire at us in retaliation.

Solas pulled from the Fade a winter storm freezing the now fiery rage demon provoking a loud growl from it forcing the demon to change form again, this time to a pride demon.

“Xebenkeck! Gaxkang! Give me strength,” it cried out and both Solas and I spared a knowing look at each other.

This was not just any desire demon; it was a Forbidden One, a servant of the Forgotten Ones. Pulling Fade meteors laced in a fire, the sounds of the demons cries echoed through the chamber.

“Really? Really? Now you are just overreacting,” it said preparing to throw a ball of lightning at me.

Pulling a barrier to disperse the electricity around me the attack bounced off me. Slamming a Fade fist in the demons face it stunned it long enough for Bull to cut it to its knees. Cassandra, using the demon's knee, ran up and leaped, plunging her blade deeply into the chest of the demon.

Moving towards the fallen demon that lay panting on the ground, I pulled down the force of the Fade over it, holding it in place not wanting to give it a chance for escape as I spoke quietly smothering it
with the energy I pulled from the Fade to hold it.

“Inform Anaris, Banal’ras, sends her greetings,” I said to the demon in elven angrily.

Imshael’s eyes slowly greyed as its form died. Summoning Veil fire, Solas lit the demons remains before I would release the force of the Fade holding it. Once the remains had completely disintegrated I glanced at Solas.

If Assan’s memories were correct about the old Gods, then the veil that locked the Forgotten Ones and the Evanuris away was weakening if Imshael was able to get free.

Sera shot one of the message arrows into the air for Lace giving her the ‘all clear’ sign for the keep. It did not take long for the replying arrow to answer.

“Well, we might as well get comfortable and clear out this red lyrium while we wait,” I tell everyone grateful that they all began removing the horrible stuff.

Solas moved to stand next to me and his aura was swirling anxiously, angrily, mingling with mine. Laying my hand on his making him focus for a moment, his eyes fell on mine.

“It will be okay,” I say gently and his eyes reflected his anxiety.

“Will it?” he replied and I smiled at him gently.

“It will if we are together,” I tell him calmly.

He gazed at me for a moment and I watched his eyes soften, and his aura calm, before he slowly nodded his head and went to help the others break down the large shard of red lyrium in the middle of the courtyard. I watched him walk away knowing that his mind would be focused on preparing for the possibility of the Evanuris and the Forgotten Ones getting free before he was ready for them. The likeliness of him removing the veil had just shifted to more in the direction of a plausibility than it was before, and I wanted to scream at the setback.

My eyes followed his movements for a moment before I turned towards a small cluster of red lyrium. Knowing him for the last two years, I had felt his strength return at an exponential rate and knew he was close to being at full capacity for an Evanuris. I also knew that once he reached it, no one stood a chance against it in this world.

*I will turn his mind from that knee-jerk reaction…I have to.*
Going Home

Thank you, everyone, for your continued comments and kudos. Your continued support and cheering are what makes this so worth it for me.

Grateful to be leaving Sahria and Emprise Du Lion behind us, I guided Inansha down the mountainous path leading away from the nightmare we had just endured and headed out of the frozen area for Skyhold. I was looking forward to the nights we were going to camp on the planes before hitting the base of the Frostbacks, and taking the mountain pass home. A few nights of actual warmth really sounded good.

I glanced over at Solas who rode silently beside me on Siugen and I poked his aura with my own, pulling him from his thoughts. He glanced at me with a soft smile before sending his own aura to poke at mine.

We had talked a little about what it would mean if Imshael had gotten free before both of us agreed it was a conversation that could wait for us to return to Skyhold to discuss in detail. His obvious concern over what we learned from encountering Imshael and sending it back to the void was troubling him.

I knew his Eluvian was still hidden in the chamber beneath the castle as was his pack and spare gear. Even from Assan’s memories, Fen’Harel was a consummate planner and strategizer. The man was revered for planning out attacks and then has back up plans for his back up plans. These thoughts were concerning and did not sit well with me and what this meant for us.

Leaving the mountainous path we finally hit flat land and Dorian moved to ride beside me and I was lost in thought not noticing him.

“Have you chosen a gown for your ceremony yet?” He asked from beside me.

I looked at him slightly addled having been lost in my own thoughts of Solas and what he was thinking.

“What?” I ask him with obvious confusion to repeat.

Dorian gave me one of his patient looks and I mentally grimaced knowing that whatever he would say next would be completely snarky.

“A gown my dear – for the big day, remember? Bonding Ceremony to the broody, old-fashioned elf,” he replied a touch sarcastically.

“Oh, well, I thought we would just do the ceremony wearing our armor,” I replied cheekily for calling Solas broody and old-fashioned. Though, he was not wrong…Solas was those things in a nutshell, quite often.

Dorian groaned and I flashed Solas a smile over my shoulder. I could see his mind was elsewhere as he smiled back somewhat distractedly. Restraining the urge to sigh loudly or throw something at him with his complete preoccupation of Imshael, I focused on Dorian’s frustrated tone and ignored my
broody, old-fashioned elf.

“You may joke, but I would not put it past you to do exactly that,” he replied making me laugh, and him frown.

“Fenlin, you must have traditions that you will take into account. Types of foods, the color of apparel, ceremony requirements…”

I used Assan’s memories and what I had learned in the Vir Dirthara pouring over the ancient books on bonding and nodded my head in agreement with him.

“There are traditions that we will follow, but why are you concerned Dorian? It’s not like you’re the one getting married,” I mutter the last part earning a scathing look from him before he could cover it.

“Because my dear, you do not have much time to plan. It will take time to order your gown, prepare the menu and decorations…”

“You mean you need enough time to prepare your outfit,” I point out teasingly and heard Bull’s full laughter from next to Dorian.

“She has you there Kadan,” Bull pointed out earning him a glare from Dorian.

I started laughing and shook my head at him and Dorian stopped talking and looked at me with annoyance.

*Jesus him and Josephine must have talked this through together, it is almost verbatim of what she said.*

“Dorian, please stop fussing you’re almost worse than Josephine,” I teased and he gasped with a fake offense.

“I am going to ask Helene to make my gown and Solas’ outfit; they are quite simple in design not lavish like Orlesian’s. The Ceremony in itself will take all of a few moments as they are statements we will speak to each other…no Chantry sister required and no long damn speech making everyone fall asleep. Francois will take care of the food needs but there are only two things we require - cake and wine.”

Bull, Varric, and Sera started laughing and I felt Solas’ gentle aura mingle with mine tenderly.

“No decorations…no one to give the bride away?” Dorian questioned me looking almost offended by the simplicity of the ceremony.

He looked at me with the same look Josephine got when I told her the same thing and I found myself loving the fact that he thought I deserved something lavish and over the top. He was the type of man that would have made my parents proud had I brought him home. That thought slightly startled me since I hadn’t thought of my parents in a long time.

“No, nature will be the only decorations we need since we are holding the ceremony in the garden. As to ‘giving a bride away’, why do I need to be given away? I am not property, I am my own person. A bonding ceremony is not about contracts and dowries, Dorian. It is about two people choosing to commit to the other in the most sacred and personal of ways. Linking our spirits together for all time and eternity, from this life to the next is what we are promising with our action and our words. It is personal and believed very private because it is such an intimate moment between a couple. That is what we want our friends to share with us.”
Dorian had this soft smile on his face by the time I was finished and I was pleased that I had explained it to him in a way that he would understand. Solas and I didn’t care about lavish parties, and from Assan’s memories, she had been to plenty as had Solas. The Evanuris was a very self-absorbed group that if there was not a party celebrating themselves someone was in trouble. From my own memories, my mother and father were well known for their little soirées that would consist of over two-hundred guests, fully catered with entertainment. My lips slightly curled at the similarities between my parents and the Evanuris. No wonder I didn’t get along with them.

Solas guided Siugen a bit closer so his knee could bump mine, and I glanced at him giving him a tender smile, pleased that he had paid attention to our conversation. When his eyes focused on me as they were at the moment my stomach fluttered and my pulse raced.

“It all sounds so romantic,” Cassandra said with a soft sigh while she gazed slightly off into the treeline.

Solas’ eyes still held mine captive. His blue gaze was reflecting his love for me and I was in awe of the sight of it as he spoke answering Cassandra, and the sound of his thick voice sent shivers down my spine.

“It is.”

*****

Two days from Skyhold we found a good place to camp for the night nestled within a grove of trees. Everyone moved around the camp like well-oiled machines doing their part in setting up. I had just finished brushing the animals down for the night, hobbling the horses so they could graze on the grass around the area comfortably. The two Harts and Bull’s Druffalo were the only ones I didn’t hobble knowing they would not go anywhere while grazing.

Sera jogged towards me holding her bow with a big cheeky grin on her face.

“Fenni, come on” she motioned for me to follow her. “It’s our turn to get dinner,” she reminded me.

Heading towards her she quickly linked her arm with mine as we headed into the woods to find something.

After an hour of hunting, Sera and I both had hold of a completely skinned, cleaned ram and were walking back towards camp.

“Ya ever think ‘bout what you’d be doin if ya hadn’t been drug through a rift and become the Inqie?”

I glanced at her for a moment slightly surprised with the question because I had never actually thought about it. Once I realized I wasn’t dreaming and that this place was real I just set my old life aside and became Fenlin. But now that I am thinking about it, I realize I would still be in my cabin in upstate New York. I would probably be painting for some art gallery show or working on some private commission and absolutely bored.

“I would be doing exactly what I was doing before – nothing important,” I told her jokingly.

Sear laughed and we continued towards camp, but now my mind was whirling with thoughts spawned from her question.
When I was human, I was in a rut and it was one of my own makings. I banished myself from people; chose to be alone because I was tired of being disappointed. I had no friends and very few acquaintances, and I had them only because they were people who circulated in the art world. Even meeting Seth was done at a gallery opening.

I thought about him for a moment realizing how absolutely asinine it had been for me to accept his proposal. I knew I didn’t love him, or him me, but I had convinced myself it was the right thing, the most logical next step in my life.

We entered the camp and my eyes found him and my heart sped up at the sight of him. Bull came over and took out the already dressed out ram and prepared to hang it over the fire.

And there would be no him there. I definitely did not want to go back to that world.

“Good job ladies,” Bull said hanging the ram over the fire.

My eyes were still locked with Solas’ and I couldn’t stop the slight blush that rushed my face. That man had a way of turning me into a hormonal, blushing, teenager with simple looks. Slipping some hair that fell out of my braid behind my ear, I took the offered mug of ale Varric held out and went to sit next to Solas.

The soft way our auras mingled made skin tingle as I took a sip of my ale.

Yeah, I definitely don’t miss my old life – at all.
The sound of the horn put smiles on everyone’s face as we approached the castle as if to say ‘finally’. I wanted to take a week before we left again…or at least that was the plan and I knew what the Gods would think of my plans and that was probably before they would start laughing at me for even trying to make any. Shaking my head at myself, I directed Inansha towards the barn and his soft clopping of hooves over the dirt was soothing, as was seeing Master Dennet waiting for us. He looked nervous and now it occurs to me how odd it was that he would be waiting for us at all. Reaching the large open barn door Master Dennet approached me as I slid off Inansha.

“Is everything okay Master Dennet, you look worried?” I asked him and noticed his slight grimace before he shook his large grey-haired head.

“It is not,” he started not mincing words solidifying the reason why I adored this man. “My wife fell ill a week ago and I will be returning to my farm immediately.”

I grasped his arm compassionately unsure why he had not already left to be with her.

“You did not need to wait for me to return to tell me this, Master Dennet. I will speak with Cullen and get some men and a healer to ride with you back to the farm to help out if Elaina is ill.”

Something about the look on his face stopped me from heading to Cullen’s office right then.

“Who told you that you had to wait until I returned?”

“It was Miss Josephine that requested I wait, she was worried that there would be no one to take care of the animals if I were to up and leave, and I could see her point. I have trained up a young man to take my place in the meantime that will fit Lady Josephine’s needs quite nicely. I promise, he will do exactly what you tell him,” he said quickly making my own throat tighten with his words.

For the love of…

Pinching the bridge of my nose with my growing irritation with Josephine, I nodded my head slowly and patted his arm reassuringly.

“Pack your bag and get a horse ready for yourself. I will send men and a healer to attend your wife directly to accompany you. You will leave within the hour, Master Dennet, I promise.”

“Thank you,” he said grabbing my shoulder emotionally before moving quickly towards his quarters.

A young man came forward to help with Inansha and take him to his stable while I watched Dennet scurry for his room beside the barn. Inansha suddenly pawed the ground at his approach with distaste pulling my attention back to the present. Of course, the young man stopped quickly eyeing the
animal warily and I patted the large animal’s shoulder getting his attention emitting disapproval at his behavior.

“Stop that! You behave yourself and follow this man to your stall,” I told him with a tone of reprimand.

The Hart butted his nose into my chest quickly apologizing and I scratched his chin before I patted his hindquarters and he followed after Dennet’s replacement without anymore attitude. *Silly damn creatures*, letting out a sigh I glanced out the door.

*Introductions would have to wait for this new guy; Dennet needs an escort home – pronto.*

Pulling my pack onto my back, I took the stairs that led to Cullen’s office with hurried steps and rapped on the door twice before opening it. Cullen sat at his desk with mountains of paperwork around him and both he and Raj looked up as I entered.

“Fenlin, it is good to see you,” he said in greeting and I smiled before kneeling down and accepting the wiggling, excited tackle of fur as Raj enthusiastically greeted me with his large paws on my shoulders.

“I missed you too,” I crooned rubbing his head and shoulders as he whined and almost turned himself inside out with his enthusiasm.

“Good to see you too, Cullen,” I finally replied while Raj rubbed himself over me excitedly. “Master Dennet is leaving for his farm to care for his ill wife. I would like a couple of men and a healer to accompany him on his travel and be prepared to leave within the hour if you would be so kind.”

Cullen stood and moved to his opposite door where one of his recruits was posted while I gave massive attention to Raj. He had grown a lot in the month that we had been gone and it was a little astonishing to see that he was fast moving past puppy. I would need to speak with Solas about taking him into the woods to teach him his hunting skills.

“Get me Carl Mumsford and John Shilling,” he said and turned back towards me.

The sound of Cullen’s growled order brought me back to the present. The names he requested sounded vaguely familiar and I rubbed Raj’s tummy, finally calming the animal. I pulled my pack from my shoulders and handed him the small stack of correspondence with information on Sampson that I knew he eagerly waited for. Before he could say anything the two men that had escorted me around Val Royeaux entered his office.

*Ah, that’s where I remember the names from.*

“Commander, Your Worship,” they said in unison while standing at attention.

I nodded at them though internally groaning with the title and continued to scratch Raj’s chin, listening to Cullen.

“The two of you will escort Master Dennet to his farm in the Hinterlands. I would also like for you to take Lieutenant Amell with you. Master Dennet’s wife is ill and the Inquisitor would like her to receive care if there is a need for it. After, you may visit with your family for a week before returning. Is that understood?”

Both men saluted quickly before scrambling from the office to gather their things.

Slipping my pack back over my shoulders, I know I had a big smile on my face because he had
actually applied the vacation time for his recruits. His concern before was that because we were at war with Corypheus and the red Templars that he couldn’t spare even one man to leave.

I wanted to prove to him that we could afford to let our people, in rotations, leave to see their families. So we did a head count and found that our army was made up of over fifteen hundred men and women and that was not counting those out in the field already. He stopped being so concerned then and agreed with me that it would not hurt the Inquisition to allow men and women leave time.

“Thank you; I will leave you to study the letters. We can discuss them tomorrow after the morning meeting if you prefer,” I offered and saw his reciprocating nod.

“That would be better, thank you,” he said walking towards his desk and then stopping.

“Also, that amulet you requested us to find for Cole, arrived yesterday morning. I believe Leliana had it delivered to your quarters.”

With a smile of acknowledgment and a wave, I whistled for Raj and we ran across the battlements for the door that led to the rotunda.

Someday, not today, but someday I will walk across these fucking things.

Raj bounded through the door at the sight of Solas who was talking with Dorian, and almost knocked him over with his enthusiastic momentum, making me chuckle as I closed the door behind me.

I watched as Solas sat on the floor and rubbed Raj’s larger head and laughed as the animal proceeded to nuzzle his face and neck in his excitement. Dorian smiled at me as he observed me walk across the rotunda towards them and readjusted his pack over his shoulder.

“It would appear he missed you,” he said jokingly.

Solas laughed as his hands slid over the animals face and he hugged the wolf to him affectionately in obvious pleasure.

“It would appear that is the case, Master Pavus,” he said softly laughing as the animal turned itself over onto his back in his lap and pawed at him, signaling that he was to rub him.

I could help but laugh at the sight of the two of them together. The adorable lopsided smile on Solas’ face as he lavished affection on Raj sent flutters in my stomach flying and my heart to speed up and that was all before he looked up and gazed at me.

I am so going to jump this man later.

I could see the slight dilation of his pupils as my own aura conveyed my sudden need and desire for him at the simple sight of him with Raj.

I watched Solas lean down and speak into the animal’s ear softly and I could not hear what he was saying, but Raj instantly unfurled himself from his lap and sat on his haunches in front of him gazing at him adoringly.

His eyes slid to mine with a slight smirk and I chuckled softly before shaking my head.

Only a wolf could get another wolf to calm the hell down.

Solas held my gaze as Raj could only sit still for so long before he continued to love all over him and
held a small smile pleased that the animal seemed to still need to please him.

“I need to talk with some of my Advisors…you good?” I ask calmly feeling the thrill of his soft laughter tingle over my skin.

“Yes vhenan, we are good” he replied holding my gaze rubbing Raj’s head.

“Take care of our son,” I tease him and see his slight smirk and subtle shake of his head as he focused on Raj, rubbing his hands over the animal’s head and shoulders adoringly.

After leaving Raj with Solas for a few moments, I left for Josephine’s office. Entering, I greeted her with a pleasant smile while strolling towards her desk. Still unhappy with what was requested from Dennet, I squared my shoulders preparing for the unpleasant conversation.

“I am glad you have safely returned, Inquisitor. There is a letter that arrived for you this morning from Clan Lavellan and a stack of course,” she said absently as she gathered up more paperwork from her desk. “Of other correspondence that requires your attention,” she finished holding out the large stack.

I gathered the stack of papers from her and adjusted the pack on my back, clearing my throat knowing Josephine was at the core a really good woman, knowing that was going to make this discussion a lot more difficult.

“There is something I would like to discuss with you before I leave you to your work.”

Josephine nodded her head and waited quietly for me to continue and I swallowed passed the nervous ball in my throat and pressed on.

“Master Dennet’s wife fell ill while I was away, and you requested for him to wait and train someone before he left?”

Josephine nodded her head agreeing with what I was saying so far and I felt horrible that she had done that to such a good man. I couldn’t even begin to imagine how worried he has been this past week.

“Yes, he had no one trained in caring for the Inquisitions mounts. I asked him to train someone before he left,” she replied her eyebrows slightly pointed downward in obvious confusion at my line of questioning.

I looked at her slightly surprised that she didn’t understand that it had been a cold-hearted request that she had made.

“So you basically put the importance of caring for animals over his wife, when our mounts need only food, water, and shelter – that’s it. Any trained monkey could do that, and I am sure that Cullen has more than a few farmers in his ranks that could have taken over the position easily, releasing Master Dennet from his duties.”

Josephine looked surprised at my irritation and I shook my head.

“Josephine – he has been married to that woman for over forty years. As soon as he approached you and told you that his wife was ill, you should have immediately released him to leave so he could care for her and figured out something else. His wife and daughter are more important than a barn full of damn horses.”

Josephine looked suddenly very uncomfortable as I moved the stack of papers from one arm to the
other as she spoke quietly.

“Thank you, Josephine,” she replied and I let out a sigh.

“I am not angry with you Josephine, just disappointed with your decision. Going forward, I would appreciate that you keep in mind that everything we do here,” I said gesturing around the room before looking at her and holding her gaze. “We do it all for the people of Thedas because no one else will. Everyone is important…noble, commoner – stable manager.”

“Yes Inquisitor,” she replied looking properly ashamed of her actions.

Tapping my fingers on the papers I held, I smiled at her wanting to convey that I truly was not angry with her I was only too happy to see that she understood now what she had done.

“Thank you, I know you will Josephine you are a good woman with a kind heart. Mistakes are made, and we are only people, we all make mistakes, now I am off to drown in paperwork.”

Josephine gave me a hesitant smile, her face reflecting her relief and understanding as I left her office and I internally cringed. I only hoped that Mistress Dennet was just a little ill like with the flu or something and not dying or I was going to feel like a complete and utter shit.

Chapter End Notes

  vhenan - my heart
Chapter Notes

Okay first of all...

OMG OVER 8K HITS IN UNDER 3 MONTHS SINCE BEGINING!!!!!!!

This is only possible because of all of you that are reading my madness and I am grateful!

THANK YOU!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Moving through the kitchens with Raj trailing beside me, I grabbed a couple of apples and waved at Francois who was busy at the stove. Pushing the door that led outside open, I look up and the sky showed clear with a few cotton ball clouds floating lazily above. Jogging down the stairs to the stables, I checked on Inansha and Etta in the barn. Spoiled babies knew I would bring apples for them to snack on earning me headbutts from both of them. Raj rubbed his head against Etta’s legs making me giggle when the horse dropped her big head and lipped his ear. The young man that is filling in for Dennet, came over when he spotted Raj and me at the stalls.

“Inquisitor, my name is Riley,” he informed me.

I held my hand out to him and as he took it, I quickly informed him I don’t like the titles.

“Good to meet you, Riley, I prefer to use my name and not one of the many titles they’ve given me, so just call me, Fenlin.”

He gave me an easy smile and we talked for a few minutes. I learned that he was twenty-three, and joined the Inquisition after Haven. He seemed like a pleasant young man and was eager to be of any help and didn’t care where he was placed.

Waving goodbye to Riley, I walked up the stairs leading to Cullen’s office with Raj and knocked on the door a couple of times before swinging it open. He glanced up from whatever he was reading and gestured towards the chair across from him. I closed the door behind me and Raj ran over to his little sleep over bed next to Cullen’s desk and lay down after Cullen ruffled the hair between the wolf’s ears.

“I’ve been reading the letters you brought back from the quarry. Sampson is making red lyrium from people?” His whole demeanor was disgusted with the idea.

“Not anymore…not in that mine,” I point out to him sitting back in the chair.

Cullen looked down at the papers again and then leaned back in his own chair. He glanced at all the papers strewn across his desk and then ran his hands through his blonde hair in agitation.

“I knew Sampson had fallen, but this? It’s monstrous; we have to put an end to him. Look at these orders from the encampment,” he said handing me the piece of paper he was talking about. “That armor must give Sampson extraordinary power. We may not be able to stop him.”
I read over the orders and physically flinched at reading that the former Templars armor was made of red lyrium. I looked at Cullen steadily pretty positive my expression held a cross between disgust and horror.

“Sampson is a menace. We can’t ignore his existence, and I refuse to believe now that we can’t do anything about him. Everything has a weakness, we just have to find Sampson’s and exploit the hell out of it.”

I placed the piece of paper back on his desk and stared at him stubbornly. I would not let that greasy bastard get away, not with everything I had learned and seen in that fucking mine.

“Then we must destroy the armor, although I couldn’t say how. Templars are trained not to destroy expensive magical equipment,” he said and tapped his fingers on his desk thoughtfully. “Discuss it with Dagna and see if she has some ideas, she crafts the impossible every day.”

I shrugged my shoulders and then nodded my head in agreement.

“Well, if anyone would know how to destroy magical armor it would be her. I will talk with her.”

Cullen nodded as he stood with me.

“She has already read over the orders you found, so she should have something. In the meantime, if you need any assistance you have but to ask,” he said when I opened the door that would lead me to the rotunda.

“Will do,” I replied. Whistling softly for Raj and when he ran out the door I waved at Cullen before closing the door behind me.

Taking a steadying breath, I focused on the opposite door and counting to ten I sprinted across. Grabbing the door handle I walked into the rotunda where Solas was sitting at his desk reading and Raj moved to lie quietly next to him after rubbing his face against his knee. His head turned slightly towards me and a smile slowly built on his face sending sparks to scatter over my skin making goosebumps in their wake.

Everything about that man sent my hormones into a crazy tailspin. I strolled towards him and noticed he was closing his book and setting it on his desk making me smile devilishly. He already knew I was going to sit in his lap, just to catch a moment of cuddle time with him before I went on with the rest of my duties.

“Was your meeting with the Commander, productive?” He questioned as I slipped onto his lap and nestled my face into the crook of his neck. There was really no way to describe how happy I felt snuggled into him and breathed in the scent that was distinctly his.

“Yeah, I am passing through actually on my way to talk with Dagna. According to the notes we found, Sampson’s armor is enchanted with red lyrium.”

His hand rubbed lazily up and down my arm while I listened to the steady thrum of his heart beneath my ear and felt the vibration of his baritone voice rumble beneath my cheek.

“That sounds most unpleasant,” he replied making me chuckle at his dry sense of humor.

“Yeah, it does. So, did our son behave this morning when you took him into the forest?” I teased noticing Raj lift his head to look at me before laying his head back down on his paws.

I heard his slight sigh of annoyance with my teasing making me giggle.
“Am I to understand that you believe our children will resemble animals?” He asked me clearly annoyed and arrogantly sarcastic.

His tone made me curious enough to lift my head from its comfortable perch and look at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Am I to believe, you actually want children?” I question him using the same sarcastic tone.

He held my gaze steadily and his face registered shock, surprising me.

“You do not?” He questioned me now his tone completely serious.

I leaned back slightly surprised. He is serious...does that mean he wants children? Oh, my God, little Dread Wolf’s running around...stopping my imagination from completely running away from me, I swallowed now slightly nervous. I had never believed I would have children or want them even. I had been fully prepared to grow old and become the crazy cat lady or in this case the wolf lady. Now that he says something about it - I am unsure.

“I haven’t really thought about it, to tell you the truth” I finally answered him, all traces of joking and sarcasm absent from my tone.

“Perhaps we may discuss this topic over dinner this evening in our quarters. I am most curious now as to your opinions and thoughts on the subject.”

Oh, dimpled baby Jesus butt, why is he looking at me like that. His eyes are all warm and tender making me feel all gooey and sappy. He pressed his lips to mine and I completely melted into a puddle. When he lifted his head, my eyes slowly opened to look at him and see the soft smile on his beautiful lips.

“I believe I would really like to have that talk with you, will you take care of dinner?” I ask him hearing the thickness in my voice. God, I am such a sappy goof.

“I will have it taken care of, vhenan” he replied smoothly with his lopsided smile.

Sweet Jesus, with a smile like that, who wouldn’t want to have this man’s babies?

I pressed another quick kiss to his lips and got up from his lap with a disgruntled sigh.

“No matter how much I would prefer to sit in your lap and make out all day long, I still have shit I gotta get done.”

Solas softly laughed and picked his book back up.

“We shall see each other later,” he said still smiling at me.

Slipping my hands behind my back to keep myself from touching him, I walk towards the door that would lead to the main hall whistling for Raj to follow. As soon as I exited the rotunda Mother Giselle approached me glancing at Raj cautiously. I paid attention to those Raj did not like and so far I had not found a person he did not like...yet.

“My lady Inquisitor, if I may have a moment of your time” she began and Raj moved to rub his head beneath her hand making the Chantry woman smile.

“Of course, what can I do for you Mother Giselle?”

“It is good of you to speak with me,” she said before getting down to what she wanted.
Her directness was what I appreciated about her; she really didn’t mince words like her fellow Chantry sisters.

“I have news regarding one of your – companions, the Tevinter.”

My eyebrow rose a bit at the disgusted tone she used when saying ‘Tevinter’.

“Is that a hint of distaste I detected Mother Giselle?”

Her eyes immediately cast towards the floor in embarrassment. It was quite unlike her to show any private feelings she might harbor towards others.

“I…I admit his presence here makes me a bit uncomfortable, Inquisitor. But my feelings are of no importance. I have been in contact with his family, House Pavus out of Qarinus. Are you familiar with them?”

“Well, I have not met them if that is what you are implying but Dorian has discussed his family with me a time or two.”

I would be damned if I would tell this woman that he and his parents didn’t get along. They definitely weren’t going to get along when they found out that Dorian was in love with a Qunari.

“I am only curious to if you are aware of his situation, Inquisitor. The family sent a letter describing the estrangement with their son and pleading for my aid. They’ve asked to arrange a meeting quietly, without telling him. They fear it is the only way he will come. I thought that since you are on good terms with the young man, I’d hoped…”

“Are you sure this isn’t some kind of trap, I mean why the secrecy?”

Mother Giselle nodded her head in agreement with me.

“That did occur to me, what if it is a plot of those mages the Venatori. Another reason to put this into your hands, Inquisitor, I pray that isn’t the case. But you are far better equipped than I to handle such treachery.”

“What kind of meeting do they have in mind?”

“I believe they just want to talk, to understand why Dorian had to come here. Somewhere private, away from Skyhold, but not in Tevinter. You make them nervous; I think they don’t understand why he is here with the Inquisition. They want him to come home,” she said simply handing me the letter.

I read the letter quickly and found where they wanted to meet in Redcliffe. I let out a slightly heavy sigh and nodded.

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention, Mother Giselle. I will take care of it,” I tell her.

“Bless you, Inquisitor. The family will send a retainer to meet the young man at the Redcliffe Tavern.”

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my love
Cole's Peace of Mind

Chapter Notes

Have a great Sunday and thank you for your continued support.
You guys are awesome!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I slipped the letter from Dorian’s father into my pocket before continuing to the undercroft.

*If she thinks I’m not going to tell Dorian, she is crazy.*

I pulled the door open and immediately the smell of melted steel greets me and Raj sneezes. It is not an unpleasant smell or really a pleasant one either. I relate it to like the briny smell of the ocean, you either like it or you don’t. Here, I can smell a hint of Sulphur mixed with oils and acids in the air from the smelting, and I find that I like this smell.

I spy the Dwarven women at her bench working on something and walk towards her, Raj padding quietly beside me.

“Hey Dagna, Cullen tells me you are just the woman to talk to about Sampson. So what can you tell me, if anything, have you learned about him?” I ask her pulling up the other stool.

She glanced up from her work and gave me a cheery grin rubbing Raj’s head.

“Hey big guy, every time I see you, you are bigger,” she told the wolf scratching his chin and finally addressed my question.

“He should be dead. I mean you could make a hat out of red lyrium and kill people, especially the wearer. Sampson’s armor, its genius. To do all this and not go insane, he must be resistant. Or he is insane – or both.”

As my resident arcanist, I had gotten used to Dagna’s eccentric way of not only speaking but doing things. I still found it creepy that when I returned from Adamant that she wanted to take samples of my skin to see if she could discover anything about the Fade. The woman was brilliant – but a tad ghoulish at times.

“So in addition to killing others, it is slowly consuming him too?”

“Yes, but slow is not fast” she replied and recognized my obvious confusion with her statement and laughed. “Doesn’t matter, I can find a way to hurt him. I just need time, and red lyrium for tests.”

Both my eyebrows shot up with her request for the red lyrium. That shit gave me a bleeding headache.

“You really think that wise, Dagna?”

She laughed and patted my hand trying to reassure me…it was not reassuring. For all of Dagna’s bubbly personality, cheerful get it done attitude, if given her way, she could cheerfully blow up the entire castle and call it an experiment.
“Everything is safe if handled properly, and you don’t touch it long. Or breathe it…I mentioned the hat, right? No hat. Time and resources, Fenlin, I’ll get what you want. Now shoo, I’ve work to do.”

I left Dagna after reluctantly signing off on what she needed and ran to my room to grab the amulet for Cole. He had been very agitated lately, and I knew it was because he thought someone would find out what he was and bind him like the demons in Adamant.

Picking it up from my desk I glance at the letter from Towen of Clan Lavellan and grimace. Turning away from it with the amulet in hand, I left my room thinking about the letter and what Towen had written. The nobles of Wycombe were acting quite strange and still blamed the elves for whatever was causing the town to get sick.

_I’m gonna have to talk with Leliana and Josephine. Maybe we can find out what is ‘mysteriously’ making the people of Wycombe ill, and Josephine can smooth some ruffled noble feathers and get them to leave the elves alone._

Walking through the main hall, I headed out the front door towards the Tavern where Cole liked to hang out and listen.

Waving at Cabot as I entered, I saw Bull talking with his Chargers, a large tankard of ale in front of him and when he saw me he called out to me.

“Hey Boss, when you got time there is something I want to talk to you about.”

I moved towards him saying hi to the Chargers sitting around him while Raj jumped up on his leg for head scratches.

“Hey guys and sure Bull let me meet up with Cole first and when I am finished you and I can hook up for a beer.”

He gave me one of his dazzling smiles waving me off while Raj slipped down from his leg and followed me up the stairs. I followed the stairs to the third floor and found Cole leaning against a wall, his eyes closed as he listened to whatever hurt he could hear from people.

“Cole,” I called out to him as I approached.

His eyes slowly slid open to look at me, and I could see that they were slightly out of focus.

“Never trust half an elf,” he said calmly before his eyes focused and he bent to hug Raj.

“You need me?” He questioned and I just shook my head at his cryptic statement.

“They found the amulet that Solas told us about. Would you like to try it on?”

His face suddenly split into a large smile and he nodded his head excitedly.

“Yes! But not here…I like it here. We need someplace that can go away if it becomes sharp.”

He grabbed my hand and led me down the stairs and out of the tavern back towards the main hall with Raj following behind us. I had a feeling he was leading me to the rotunda and sure enough as we crested the steps he pulled me towards the door leading to Solas. As soon as we entered the room, he released my hand and walked towards Solas holding the amulet.

“What do I do with it?”

Solas moved to stand from where he sat at his desk and laid the book down recognizing the amulet in
Cole’s hands.

“They found one of the amulets, excellent. May I?” He requests holding his hand out for it.

Solas took the amulet and studied it for a moment. The metal appeared to be Onyx and it was circular in shape, about two inches thick and three inches in diameter with runes inscribed on the front and the back. The item was really quite nondescript when you looked at it. Solas smiled at it pleased with whatever he saw before handing it back to Cole.

“It is simple enough. You put it on, I charge it with magic, and you should be protected.”

“Are you really sure about this, Cole?” I question him hesitantly.

“They can’t make me a monster,” he said heatedly. Pulling his large brimmed hat that hid his face off, he slipped the amulet over his head and put his hat back on looking at Solas.

Solas focused his magic on the amulet and it glowed softly white then suddenly the magic reversed and backlashed, zapping Cole and Solas at the same time with a sudden electrical shock knocking them back a few feet. The smell of ozone filtered through the air and I looked at them worriedly.

“Aah,” Cole cried out suddenly gripping his head.

“Are you two okay?” I asked stepping closer.

Varric must have felt the magical backlash or heard Cole’s painful yell because he was now walking in from the main hall looking at us like we were doing something wrong.

“What was that?” he questioned seeing Cole holding his head and instantly looks at us accusingly.

“Oh, for…what are you doing to the kid?” His tone protective as he stared from me to Solas.

Cole turned and looked at Varric with a nervous expression.

“Stopping blood mages from binding me like the demons at Adamant. But it didn’t work,” he said with a slight hitch of disappointment to his voice.

“Something is interfering with the enchantment,” Solas replied rubbing his neck.

Varric crossed his arms and looked at Solas irritated.

“Something like Cole not being a demon?”

I shook my head at Varric’s words and moved to stand next to Cole patting his arm soothingly.

“Cole may look like a human, Varric, but he’s not.”

“Neither am I; neither are you, Sketch or even Chuckles here” he replied flippantly making me groan.

“Regardless of Cole’s special circumstances, he remains a spirit,” Solas interjected making Varric look even more annoyed.

“Yes, a spirit who is strangely just like a person!” He retorted obstinately.

Cole threw his arms up in frustration at the circular argument slightly surprising everyone watching.
“I don’t matter, just lock away the parts of me that someone else could knot together to make me follow.”

Solas shook his head giving Varric an angry gaze before moving to stand next to Cole and folded his arms behind his back.

“Cole, focus on the amulet, tell me what you feel,” he requested soothingly and Cole looked at him for a moment before he did as Solas asked and his watery blue eyes became unfocused.

“Warm, soft blanket covering, but it catches, tears. I’m the wrong shape, there’s something…” he suddenly points towards the door leading out into the main hall. “There, that way.”

“We’ll find whatever is preventing the amulet from working, and we will make you safe” I promised him.

Cole’s eyes darted to mine softly smiling at the reassurance. Varric looked at him and nodded his agreement.

“All right, kid, get with Cullen and work with him on the map to figure out where you’re sensing something wrong.”

Cole looked at him for a moment still appearing panicky.

“Will you come with me?” he asked him and then looked at Solas and me. “All of you?”

“Sure,” Varric replied easily as both Solas and myself nodded our agreement.

We stood in pregnant silence as Cole seems to accept our agreement and headed for the ramparts that would take him to Cullen’s office. As soon as the door closed, Varric looked at Solas in disappointment.

“All right, I get it. You like spirits, but he came into this world to be a person, let him be one.”

I shook my head at him.

“Cole is a spirit, Varric, no matter how you romance it. He has magical abilities and vulnerabilities. I cannot ignore that.”

He looked at me and sighed.

“Fair enough, but that ritual of theirs only works on demons, right?”

Solas crossed his arms and shook his head clearly annoyed with Varric’s lack of understanding that a demon is a twisted spirit.

I knew it was because Varric saw Cole as a real person and not a spirit of Compassion in a human form. In some ways it was comforting that he had befriended the spirit as fully as he has because others were still hesitant to do so.

“This is not some fanciful story, child of the stone. We cannot change our nature by simply wishing.”

“You don’t think?” Varric pushed, and I could see that Solas was mentally counting to ten as he kept his arms behind his back narrowing his gaze at him.

“However we deal with the problem, our next step is to track down whatever is interfering with the enchantment.”
Varric let out a sigh of frustration and waving his hand as if to say *fuck it*, he left the rotunda.

“Why is everything such a fucking struggle,” I mumble rubbing my face.

Solas slipped his arms around my waist and pulled me into him, kissing the top of my head giving me the silent comfort I sometimes really needed.

“It is not our destiny to lead uneventful lives, vhenan,” he said softly against my temple and I snorted unladylike in agreement.

“Just once I would like something to go as planned…just once. I might die of surprise when it does, but I would still like to experience it just once,” I joked and felt the soft rumble of his laughter against my chest.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Thank you, everyone, for your comments, kudos, and just the general all around good vibes. AO3 Readers are the freakin best!

Letting out a heavy sigh for everything I still needed to do, I tilt my head up for a kiss. The gentle press of his lips against mine was comforting, as was the way his hand softly caressed my cheek.

“I am going to speak with Dorian, and then I promised Bull I would meet with him...he has something he wanted to talk to me about. Are we still on for dinner?”

Solas kissed my forehead and little actions like that always melted me into a complete puddle of mush.

“Yes,” he replied against my forehead before letting me go.

Patting his chest, I walked towards the steps that led up to the library where I knew I would find Dorian. I was not looking forward to telling him, his father wants a meeting. Reaching the last step, I spied him sitting in the corner reading and walked over towards him. His eyes came up from his book and smiled as he saw me.

“Fenlin, my other love, you look absolutely fabulous today, and I should know, I look fabulous all the time.”

Laughing at him, I moved to where he sat and plunked down on the floor next to him.

“Dorian...there is something I need to tell you about,” I started and saw that he closed his book and gave me his full attention.

“There is a letter that concerns you,” I began hesitantly and his eyebrow rose.

“A letter? From who? Some Antivan dowager I’ll wager asking for my hand in marriage?” He joked and damned if I didn’t wish that was exactly what it was because then it would be a good laugh.

“No, it’s from your father,” I told him finally glancing up at him. His grey eyes registered an instant coolness to them at the mention of his father.

“Show me this letter,” he demanded and I pulled it out of my pocket and handed it to him.

Dorian immediately opened the letter and scanned the contents. I could see his whole begin to stiffen in anger as he finally looked up from the parchment to me.

“I know my son!” He said sarcastically his tone full of anger, shaking the paper with indignation.

“What my father knows of me would barely fill a thimble. This is so typical of him,” he said before standing to begin pacing in agitation in front of the bookshelf.

“I’m willing to bet this so-called ‘retainer’ is a henchman, hired to knock me on the head and drag me back to Tevinter.”
My eyes followed his angry pacing, and I wished there was something I could do to make this easier. I knew he wasn’t going to be happy, moving from my seated spot on the floor to stand, I rubbed my face.

“Do you really think your father would actually do something like that?” Saying it aloud, of course, made it sound ridiculous and Dorian’s eyes dashed towards me briefly.

He stopped pacing and finally looked at me running his hand through his hair with his agitation.

“No, although I wouldn’t put it past him,” he said with a slight smirk. “Let’s go, let’s meet this so-called ‘family retainer’. If it’s a trap, we escape and kill everyone. You’re quite good at that,” he said folding the paper. “If it’s not, I send the man back to my father with the message that he can stick his alarm in his ‘wits end’.”

I can’t help but understand his feelings of angst for his parents, I wasn’t really much better with my own.

“Why is there so much bad blood between you and your family, Dorian? You’ve never mentioned to me what actually happened.”

His eyes held mine steadily and he laughed humorlessly.

“Interesting choice of words you use my dear. We’ve never really gotten into the reasons, have we? Let’s just say they are not happy with my choices, you see, nor I theirs.”

“What choices? Leaving Tevinter?”

“That too,” he replied and I shook my head. I could already see that he was not going to discuss it.

“Okay, we will meet this retainer and see if it is really on the up and up or if it is a trap.”

Dorian kissed my cheek and I watched him leave for his private quarters. Sighing heavily, I made my way down the steps and headed for the tavern to meet up with Bull. I could already see that this day was swiftly turning into a colossal shit storm and I could use that beer.

When I left the main hall I could see Bull sparing with Krem over by Cassandra and her practice dummies. Walking towards them, I could hear Bull’s bantering with Krem to push harder.

“Ah, come on, Krem! I’m working my ass off trying to get you to see that move.”

Krem wiped at the sweat on his face and glared at him.

“You’ve still got plenty of ass left, Chief,” he countered back before he saw me. “Uh, your Worship,” he said embarrassed.

I shook my head as I finally reached them and crossed my arms.

“How many times am I going to have to ask you to stop calling me that, Krem?”

Krem blushed and nodded his head as Bull chuckled.

“I’m glad you came by Boss, I got a letter from my contacts in the Ben-Hassrath, already verified it with Red.”
I know that surprise is registered on my face that he is talking so openly in front of Krem and then I remembered that Krem already knew that Bull was Ben-Hassrath.

“Okay, what was in this letter that’s brought you out here to beat up on your second in command,” I joke with him and see Krem’s agreeing smile.

“The Ben-Hassrath has been reading my reports. They don’t like this Corypheus or his Venatori and they really don’t like red lyrium. They’re ready to work with us, with you, Boss. The Qunari and the Inquisition, joining forces.”

My eyebrow rose at the offer and I knew Bull could read my skepticism at the idea since he has told me a million times I don’t have a ‘bluffing face’.

“Well, that would be a first-time kind of offer, if I believed it was legitimate – which I don’t.”

He gave me a knowing smile and nodded his large head in agreement.

“Now, ordinarily that would be the way to go but they’ve identified themselves; they’re not running a game on you.”

I was still feeling leery at the idea of a partnership with the Qunari, but I would hear Bull out. He would never have brought it to me if he thought it was a trick, or that is what I would currently like to believe in with my Ben-Hassrath friend.

“They’ve found a massive red lyrium shipment operation out on the coast.”

Krem raised his shield, squaring his body bracing for Bull to charge at him with the shield he held as he spoke.

“They want us to hit it together. Talked about bringing in one of their Dreadnought’s; always wanted to see one of those big warships in action,” Krem said just as Bull slammed into him knocking him back five feet making him stumble.

Bull shook his head at Krem in annoyance.

“Did you see that?” he replied sounding annoyed. Dropping the shield he held to the ground he pointed towards the tavern. “Go get some water.”

Krem slid the shield onto his back and walked away towards the tavern rubbing his arm. Bull’s voice pulled my attention back to him.

“They’re worried about tipping the smugglers, so no army. My Chargers, you, me, and maybe some backup.”

Why such a small group? This isn’t adding up.

“What does this alliance actually get us, Bull?”

“They wouldn’t use the word ‘alliance’ if they didn’t mean it. What it would bring to the Inquisition is a naval power, more Ben-Hassrath reports, Qunari soldiers pointed at the Venatori…it could do a lot of good.”

A fleeting look of uncertainty flashed over the large man’s face. It was telling since I knew that Bull never showed anything unless it was completely pre-planned and calculated for optimal results – something was wrong.
“You don’t seem entirely too thrilled about this,” I said holding his one-eyed gaze.

He let out a heavy breath and smiled.

“No…I’m good,” he started off hesitantly and then rubbed his neck. “Who am I kidding, I’m not going to bullshit you, boss. I’m used to them being over there, it’s been a while.”

I patted his arm understanding now what had him nervous. He had gotten used to making his own decisions for so long to have to suddenly be around those that would see him as a Talvashoth, a traitor to his people, especially being around all of us uncollared mages, I nodded my head in agreement.

“Alright Bull, I think the Inquisition could use some help from the Qunari.”

“Good, I’ll pass on the word to Cullen and Red and let them know when the next shipment of red lyrium is expected and then set up a meeting.”

Nodding my head in agreement, I headed back towards the keep deciding that now would be a good time to get in some paperwork before anyone else asked me to do something for them. I could already see that I was stretched seven ways from Sunday.

Busy reading a correspondence from Empress Celine my head came up at the sound of the soft knocking on my door. My eyes glanced towards my timepiece against the wall and shoved the hair out of my face. I sped down the stairs to open the door pretty sure it would be one of the women from the kitchen with our dinner. Opening the door I saw that it was Ariana who held the tray and hid my knowing smile. I really couldn’t blame the woman for her crush, Solas was magnetic.

“Master Solas requested dinner brought for you this evening, Your Worship.”

Ugh…for the love of God would some of these people listen to me when I tell them to stop with the fucking titles.

“Thank you, Ariana, it smells delicious” I replied instead.

Holding the door for her she smiled shyly at me and walked up the steps as I followed behind her. She was just setting the tray down on the table when I felt the caress of Solas’ aura and heard the door open. I caught Ariana’s blush as soon as Solas crested the top step, and bit the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing at the look of discomfort now on his face.

This time I could see that my wolf was paying attention and he saw the instant flush rush over the woman’s face and ears and his eyes darted to mine. His instant distress now knowing Ariana’s feelings was absolutely comical.

“Good evening Ariana,” Solas said politely, calm mask in place as he walked around her towards me.

Ariana’s voice slightly stuttered with her nervousness and I knew he could see the twinkle of humor in my eyes at the situation.

“E…Evening Master Solas,” she replied and moved quickly to the stairs.

As soon as the door shut, I couldn’t stop the laughter from escaping any longer.
“See, I told you…and you thought I was mistaken,” clapping my hands together. “HA!” I said watching him shake his head at me and my silliness.

Placing my hand on my hip, I held his steady blue gaze that made my skin tingle and crooked a finger at him.

“Now come over here and greet me handsome.”

He wasted no time and pulled me into his arms. My pulse raced with the seductive tilt of his lips before he pressed them to mine. Caressing his jaw, I nipped at his lower lip eliciting a small moan from him before he lifted his head and held my gaze again, his eyes searching mine. His hand came up to caress my jaw and his thumb slid over my lower lip seductively making it tingle with the soft touch.

“I find that I can never get enough of you,” he admitted. His voice sending tantalizing shivers up and down my back.

“Is that so,” I reply coyly enjoying the way his lips form a lopsided smile with my answer.

“It is a fact,” his voice softly growled before his lips pressed against mine demandingly.

The way he kissed me stole my breath and always amazed me how quickly my entire body would tune into him. Every sense in my body would awaken, every nerve ending tingling with the caress of his mouth on mine; always pulling me towards a place of nothing but sensations and kaleidoscopes of color.

My eyes slowly opened to gaze at him as he broke the kiss and my thumb rubbed slow circles on the soft skin of his neck while my other hand pressed gently against his chest over his heart.

“Shall we have our dinner before it becomes cold?”

His softly spoken question made me smile and I pressed my lips quickly against his for another brief kiss.

“I think we should, fish doesn’t usually taste good cold.”
Talk about the Future

Chapter Notes

One of my readers named So vintage, left a comment wanting to read something about a pregnancy scare or Thedas’ birth control. This is what spawned from her comment and I wanted to just shout out to them and say:
Hey, I told you I liked your idea…I hope this works.

Also, another shout out for all of you that are still reading this and enjoying the story, thank you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Taking my hand he led me to the couch and we set about preparing our meal. I portioned out the plates while he opened the bottle of Nevarran red wine and poured two glasses. We sat and ate in a companionable silence for a while, discussing bits and pieces of our day and my mind wandered to our discussion in the companionable silence.

I took another bite of my fish and chewed, lost in the thoughts of ‘did I or didn’t I’ want children.

Well, if he is going to tear down the Veil, then the answer would be a solid, fuck no. It wouldn’t be fair to raise children in such chaos, not to even begin thinking about what the Evanuris would do if they found out we had children. That thought sent a little shiver of dread down my spine.

But even with those thoughts I felt this soft, warm feeling when I thought about holding a tiny little being that we would create together, and realized that the more I thought about it, the more I wanted that pretty picture. That happily ever after with him, something I never thought I would want with anyone.

I’m pretty sure if I hadn’t visited Enchanter Leandra when we had first started sleeping together, I would have already been knocked up for sure. Back home I would have just went to my doctor and got a shot every three months, Thedas you get a small potion the color of sage moss that is for the prevention of pregnancy and drink it weekly.

It was a curious invention with Andraste’s Grace flowers and the roots of Embrium and Felandris all ground and boiled together to make this no more than maybe thirty ounces of minty tasting potion to drink every week. The perk of it was I didn’t experience a cycle, not a bad thing if anyone were to ask me.

I took another bite of my dinner and mentally snort realizing that there was probably a lot more to potion making than just ‘grind and boil’ but as long as the shit worked, I hadn’t cared to learn how to make it myself.

Finished with my meal, I leaned back into the couch with my wine and stared into the flames dancing in the fireplace. The more I thought about his reaction to our conversation, the more I was convinced that he did want children. Taking a sip of my wine a small smile formed as I thought about all the fun it would be just creating one and my skin flushed with the idea. Oh yes, that would definitely be the fun part.
“Vhenan, I am curious to what that look is about that you have this moment.”

His voice startled me out of my own mind and my eyes darted to him. Blushing now as I realized what I had been thinking because my mind likes to stray…often to him, and I slightly shook my head.

“Oh, just my dirty mind getting away from me.”

His eyebrow rose and a wicked grin formed.

“Well, then you must now tell me what it was that you were thinking.”

I took a sip of my wine and finally shrugging my shoulders laughing at myself preparing to tell him.

“I was thinking about our conversation earlier about children and did I want them or not. As I thought about it, I started to think about the fun I would have at least trying to create one.”

Solas started laughing and shook his head at my admission; his expression was of happiness and a bit of mischief with the insight into my thoughts.

“Is that your only conditions for wanting children? It must be a pleasurable night of creation?” He teased me.

I took another sip of my wine and set the glass down looking at him now seriously.

“Well that would help, but no, it is not, but that is why we are having this conversation isn’t it.”

He obviously caught the change in my tone and set his own glass down, focused on the discussion.

Swallowing my nerves, I slightly squared my shoulders.

_Time for me to be an adult now…showtime._

“I am not opposed to having children with you. I know that you would be an attentive, loving parent, and a good partner to raise children with,” I began cautiously.

He was looking at me curiously now and leaned forward turning his head just slightly he held my gaze.

“But…” he gently prodded for me to continue.

“But, I would not want to bring a child into this world if you are planning to tear down the Veil. There will be too much chaos to try and raise a family in.”

I saw his face change to the unemotional mask he wears often when we discuss the removal of the Veil and sensed the subtle retreat of his aura with my statement. I instantly felt a profound sense of frustration at the sudden lockout.

“I see,” he replied calmly.

I let out an annoyed sigh and held his gaze completely frustrated with him.

“I don’t think you do,” I replied simply not missing the way his eyes narrowed slightly with the comment. “Would you really want to raise a child during a time of such disorder? Give the other Evanuris a target to get to you and me once they are freed?”
I saw his instant anger with the idea that his child or myself would be a target and he let out a loud, heavy sigh before he finally shook his head and the mask subtly slipped. Rubbing his hands over his face, he finally looked at me again, his eyes holding questions I wasn’t sure I had answers for.

“No, you are right to have such concerns. What would you suggest we do then?”

I swallowed past the sudden lump in my throat ignoring the buzz of wings at hyper speed in my stomach. He said ‘we’…this is good. This might be my chance to possibly get him to change his mind, and I took a deep breath steadying my suddenly racing heart.

“Reinforce the seal on their prison and allow the world to progress the way it has. Let the Veil come down at its own pace. Let the people of the world live their lives however they choose to do so, and we shall do the same. We already know the veil is falling, let it…let the world transition slowly as it is clear that it has already begun. We can help the Elves of Thedas; we can also save the Humans, Dwarves, and Qunari of this world because their lives matter just as much as ours.”

I could see he was listening and compiling everything and I bit my lip nervously.

“You would sacrifice the people? You would ask me to ignore my duty to them?” He questioned sounding slightly surprised and I shook my head glad he was not angry.

“No, I would ask you to sacrifice the Evanuris by keeping them locked behind that barrier. I would ask you to work towards lifting the people from how far they have been brought low. Immortality is all well and good, but it doesn’t mean shit when you’re a slave destined to live a very long fucking time under someone else’s control and we both know this.”

His expression held surprise at my blunt honesty. He picked up his wine and sat back with me on the couch, and I could see his mind stirring the possibility around like a spoon in a stew pot.

“Focus on keeping them locked away and allowing this world to continue in its tranquil state of disconnection from the Fade, this is your suggestion?”

I could tell by his tone that he was skeptical and that told me that he was at least contemplating the possibility. I knew he hated the way the world felt to him, that disconnect from the Fade that shouldn’t be there and wouldn’t be there had Mythal not given him the idea.

“Not all these people walking around are tranquil and disconnected and you know it. You are holding so tightly to what use to be that you are missing what could be.”

“And that is?” He questioned me holding my gaze.

I grasped his hand and linked my fingers with his.

“Life Solas, an actual fucking life,” I replied adamantly. “For all your knowledge you have lived but never really lived. Even in Arlathan, we would never have been able to actually live our lives the way we would have wanted to. The people always needed you, and you took that duty seriously but you also took your duties as an Evanuris seriously too. You can still help the people, Solas, it is just in a different way this time.”

He stared at me for a long moment before setting his wine down and cupping my face before placing a tender kiss on my lips.

“‘I would like to think about what you have suggested,’” he said quietly holding my gaze.

My internal cheerleader jumped up and down at the definite move forward.
“Of course, take all the time you need. It’s not as if I am going to stop taking that potion anytime soon,” I replied with a cheeky smile.

His look of confusion made the smile slowly slide from my face.

“What potion?”

I kind of laughed and shook my head at him.

“You know, Thedas’ version of birth control,” I told him sounding slightly surprised that he didn’t know about it. *He has to have seen me drink the damn thing.*

I was growing slightly concerned now as his expression grew somewhat thunderous.

“How long have you been taking it?” He questioned his tone a touch frosty surprising me even further.

“Since I got back from the Plains, why does this upset you? It would definitely not be a great time for me to get pregnant right now,” I pointed out.

*Well if this conversation didn’t just make a full circle. Start with baby talk, moved onto the removal of the Veil and now back to baby talk…I am getting a headache.*

“It upsets me that you did not think to discuss this with me. So this is why you have not had a cycle,” he said with a slightly accusing tone igniting my irritation.

“I didn’t see how it was any business of yours and yes, that is why I do not have a cycle. I did not see that as a drawback but a perk of it and if you were a woman you would totally agree,” I said with more than a touch of annoyance.

I watched him suddenly move to stand and I was not only getting angry now but completely confused about why he was angry.

“Will you explain the fucking problem you have with it instead of just getting angry with me? I have no idea why you are so upset.”

Solas stopped and stared at me.

“There was no need for a potion that is most likely hurting your immortal form, had you just discussed it with me, I could have told you this,” he finally said.

I laughed humorlessly and raised my eyebrow at him not hiding my obvious mockery with his blind statement. Although, I was a bit concerned about the idea that it could be hurting more than helping.

“Yes…what a wonderful conversation to have with your lover. “Oh, can we sit here like a couple of girls and talk about birth control and menstruation? Do you get cramps during that time of the month like I do?” I snorted and held his now uncomfortable gaze. “Yes, a stimulating conversation you want to have with someone you like seeing naked on a regular basis,” I said knowing my tone dripping with sarcasm.

His eyes had blown wide at my snarky dialog as his cheeks flushed with embarrassment. Soon there was a small tilt to the corner of his lips and a beautiful smile bloomed on his face while he shook his head at me before sitting down and taking my hands into his again.

“I apologize, you are correct. But there are other methods available to you as an Evanuris now,
vhenan,” he answered and I just stared at him in surprise.

“What other methods?” I asked him quickly my anger forgotten.

“An Evanuris woman can control her cycle without the aid of potions. You would not have known that having never been one before. I apologize for my anger at your ignorance in this matter, that is not your fault,” he said.

I gave him a cheeky smile and poked him in the chest.

“And you being a horny Evanuris man knows these ways,” I said teasingly and saw his blush spread over his face and ears.

*Damn, he is adorable when he does that.*

“I will not lie that I was not at one time more libidinous in my youth, however, this method was something one learned regardless of orientation.”

“Horny Solas, it’s called a horny teenager, it is totally okay, I was no saint. Now show me what you are talking about and I will definitely stop drinking that stuff if I don’t have to.”

He blushed even more which I seriously didn’t think was possible and walked me through the steps of the spell that I would cast over my ovaries. Simple really how it all worked, as a repression spell and I frowned when he told me I would go back to having a cycle but I could control my ovulation.

“You will begin a monthly cycle again, but this will be much safer for you than the mortal potion you are currently using.”

I grimaced and nodded in agreement. I would only hope that having cramps, bloating, and irritability would be something I left with my human form.

“Seriously going to cut into my sex life then,” I joked and heard his mutual laughter.

“Mine too,” he replied cheekily making me laugh and bump his shoulder with my own.

“Have I told you today how much I love you?” I inquired moving to straddle his lap.

His hands slid around my hips and pulled me just that little bit closer stealing my breath with the subtle action.

“No, but I believe you have shown me…often today,” he replied before pressing his lips to mine demandingly.

Running my hands over his head and down his neck to his shoulders, I gripped him tightly and mouthed against his lips breathlessly when we broke apart, “take me to bed wolf. Let me show you some more, we need the practice.”

“Ma nuvenin,” he replied before capturing my lips again and carried me to our bed.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Ma nuvenin - As you wish
Sighing at the situation I found myself in my eyes took in the large map. Well, at least we can kill two birds with one stone, I told myself trying to sooth the annoyed feeling I felt at having just returned to only turn back around and leave again. My eyes followed to where Cullen pointed.

“Cole said he felt…whatever it was he felt, coming from Redcliffe,” running his hand through his hair he held my gaze. “I don’t know how you…” Cullen began and I raised my eyebrow at him waiting for him to continue and dig himself a hole. It wouldn’t be the first time they had argued about Cole.

Cullen stopped talking when he saw my expression silently telling him to shut up and just shook his head instead. I was glad he understood because I was tired of people saying shit about either Cole or Dorian. Sera has literally pranked everyone and even she didn’t get as much smack talked about her as those two. I really wished people could move past their personal hold-ups and see that Dorian is nothing like his countrymen and Cole isn’t trying to possess anyone.

I glanced towards Leliana who held a small knowing smile on her face as she cleared her throat.

“I was able to confirm the information Bull gave me from his Ben-Hassrath contacts with my own agents. The shipment of red lyrium is coming in on the Storm Coast in three weeks.”

Ah, yes, the lovely Storm Coast. Rubbing absently at the scar in the middle of my chest it was not an action that went unnoticed by any of them watching me as I continued to study the map.

“What a fabulous place the Storm Coast, Lace told me the rain is supposed to be good for my soul. The rain was fine, I can handle rain…them damn militia is another thing entirely. Maybe this time I could try not getting shot,” I joked and heard both Cullen and Leliana’s snort of an agreement while Josephine just looked at me horrified.

“Don’t worry Josephine; I will do my best to not do that again. It really hurt last time,” I muttered still rubbing the spot and Cullen gave me an understanding look.

My eyes ran over the map and I looked at the distances between Redcliffe and the Storm Coast. We would have to skirt around the backside of Lake Calenhad, but if we hustled, we could stop in Crestwood on our way and check on the progress of the area before moving on to the Storm Coast. It might be a tight schedule but it was definitely doable.

“We will need to leave in the morning if I am going to go to Redcliffe and then make it to the Storm Coast in time to meet this Ben-Hassrath contact of Bulls,” I told them.

Well, there went that week off I desperately wanted. Pushing away from the table I glanced at Cullen.

“Cullen, would you mind watching Raj for me again while I am gone?”
Cullen nodded his head quickly, which I figured he might.

“Of course, it is no hardship and I enjoy his company,” he replied with a smile.

Leliana shook her head at him letting out a very unladylike snort at his comment.

“No, of course it isn’t, especially when you get him into more trouble than he would normally get into,” she said with a raised eyebrow.

I did not miss Cullen’s sudden flush of embarrassment or the way his eyes darted to Leliana trying to silently beg her to be silent.

“Trouble? What kind of trouble does Raj get into when I am gone?”

Now even Josephine begins laughing at Cullen’s obvious discomfort over the situation and shares a knowing look with Leliana.

“It was the one time…the one bloody time and you won’t let it go. Just like a damn Mabari with a bone,” Cullen mumbled running his hand through his hair.

Crossing my arms, with my eyebrow raised interestedly, I stare at Cullen now overwhelmingly curious as to what he was getting up to with my wolf’s help.

“Commander,” my tone brought Cullen’s eyes quickly to mine. “What kind of trouble have you been getting my wolf into?”

Cullen had the good graces to look sheepish as he tried to explain what Leliana meant.

“Well, it was just…you see…honestly, I thought Sera’s idea was brilliant,” he rambled and now both my eyebrows shot up in astonishment when he said Sera’s name.

“Sera’s idea?”

Cullen’s face turned even redder as he started rubbed his neck with embarrassment and gave Leliana a glare full of promised retribution before finally looking at me.

“Well, she had suggested that the only one who could get into the rookery unseen was Raj. You know how smart he is,” he said absently.

I nodded in agreement with him enjoying how flustered he was at getting caught being silly. I thought it was about damn time the man loosened up a bit and lived a little bit, but why the rookery?

Leliana sighed with annoyance at how long it was taking Cullen to explain and shook her head obviously ready to spill the beans on what happened. I swear…sometimes I’m in charge of a fucking daycare.

“You sent that animal, into my domain, to intentionally scare Barron Plucky,” she accused him.

Both I and Josephine covered our mouths instantly to keep the laughter from escaping. Everyone knew that Leliana had two loves – her pet nug, Shmooples, and her raven, Barron Plucky. Shmooples was very friendly and played with Cole’s pet nug, Snuggles. Barron Plucky, however, was an asshole, and the only one who could get close to him was Leliana. The bird would sooner pluck out your eye then as look at you. I honestly don’t think anyone here has received a missive carried by the damn bird that hasn’t gotten bitten.

“Bird’s a bloody menace,” Cullen replied earning him a narrow, maternal glare from Leliana.
I could no longer stop my laughter earning myself a glaring stare from my Spymaster. Holding my hands out in surrender towards her, I tried to bring my laughter under control. Oh, *it feels really good to laugh this hard.* Wiping the moisture from my eyes I shook my head at the both of them.

“Okay, I must agree with Cullen on the matter that Barron Plucky is an asshole, Leliana. He bites everyone but you,” I finally said and heard her huff of indignation before looking at Cullen. “And you sir are supposed to be a positive influence in Raj’s development, not teaching him such bad habits.”

Cullen looked properly ashamed.

“I’m still amazed you listened to Sera,” I mumbled earning a small laugh from Josephine.

Shaking my head at them, I left the war room to tell the others we were leaving in the morning.

I headed towards the tavern first to let Bull know what I was planning. Opening the door and finding him in the middle of a drinking game was not uncommon even if it wasn’t even lunchtime yet. Walking towards the table, he held up his enormous tankard towards me with a large cheesy grin on his face.

“Hey Boss,” he greeted.

“Hey Bull, I wanted to let you in on what’s going on,” I started and he stood up from the table and gestured towards a corner table away from the others who were loudly cheering about something.

“You spoke with Red then?” He said sitting in the chair across from me.

I nodded my head ‘yes’.

“I’m sure Dorian told you about his father?”

Bull grimaced and nodded his head before taking another drink.

“Well, it appears that it is also the same place I need to bring Cole, so for once luck favors me. We have three weeks to get to the coast, so I wasn’t sure if you wanted to leave with your Chargers, or if you wanted to come with us, but I am going to go to Redcliffe first. I thought that if you wanted to come to Redcliffe, we could send the Chargers on ahead, scout out the area and meet up with them later. What do you think?”

Bull tilted his head slightly as he thought about it and I found myself studying his horns that lay flat out like a longhorn bull. *I should try drawing him and the chargers like a cartoon; it would be funny as hell especially if I throw in Dorian. He almost looks like a horned pirate with that eyepatch, and then...* His deep voice interrupted my thoughts and I focused on what he was telling me.

“I will go with you to Redcliffe…don’t know how much support I will be for him, but I want to be there for Dorian. I will send my Chargers ahead Boss if that works for you?”

I nodded my head and smiled happy that Bull wanted to be there for Dorian. The couple was literally the weirdest match possible. Their two countries had been at war for a long time. Not to mention it was such an odd thing for a Qunari to love someone anyway. The fact that Dorian was a mage *and* from Tevinter, only made them being together more interesting. Especially knowing how the Qun felt about both. Even Bull told me they didn’t waste energy with such a silly emotion such as love, but yet here he was, obviously in love with Dorian and willing to waste that energy.
“It does, and I have a gut feeling Dorian is going to need you,” I replied patting his arm before standing up.

“Well, I am off to let everyone else know we are leaving in the morning. See you in the barn tomorrow big man.”

Bull clapped my shoulder thankfully not hard or I might have gone flying and went back to his table to talk with his Chargers as I headed up the stairs to let Cole know.

Solas sat at his desk staring at the same page he had been trying to read for the last five minutes and let out a sigh of annoyance with himself. After their talk, he thought of little else than what she had suggested.

Her thoughts were not something he had not thought about before. Laying the book down on the table he rubbed his face and glanced towards the door when he heard it open and saw her walking in. His heart double beat in his chest at the sight of her and it always surprised him the effect she had on him. Was he selfish for wanting it all?

“Don’t move, I’ll be right back handsome, I need to speak with Dorian real quick,” she said giving him a bright smile that made his stomach tighten as she ran up the stairs leading to the library.

He sat back in his chair with his fingers tented as his mind analyzed her suggestion again.

*Reinforce the seal on their prison and allow the world to progress the way it has. Let the Veil come down on its own.*

Her suggestion on reinforcing the seal on the mirror was sound. With her help, together they could keep the Evanuris imprisoned. It was what he had planned to do, to begin with until he was ready to bring the Veil down. It was the second part of her suggestion that he was unsure he could live with.

She had said that not all the people were disconnected and tranquil, yet he had seen little evidence to support that. He knew what her motivation was for such a suggestion and he could not fault her for it. She was a gentle spirit by nature. What he was contemplating doing was a violent solution to a problem that he helped create.

He would not lie to himself however, her words created an image in his mind that his spirit wanted.

*Her, children, family, freedom to live our lives as we wanted, together.*

His thoughts stopped when he heard her steps coming back down the stairs and turned. He saw the softness of her smile as she walked towards him, and the twinkle of mischief dancing in her amber eyes. He would love this woman until the end of time, this he knew as definitively as his next breath. She perched herself on the corner of his desk, folding her arms watching him with a smile that lit up her whole face. *Spirits she is beautiful.*

“What are you doing for lunch?” She questioned him.
He was glad to see her trying to eat regularly; maybe his constant reminders for her to do so were finally beginning to set in. She still hadn’t gained the weight back that she lost when they were in Sahmria.

“I had no plans, any suggestions?” he replied enjoying the way her eyes sparkled at him and her aura almost lazily caressed his skin. The subtle touch always made his skin tingle with the tempting feeling.

“Good, I was going to grab a tray from the kitchen and take my lunch in our chamber. Share it with me?” she said with a wiggle of her eyebrows.

He laughed at her penchant towards silliness though he felt the rush of desire roll through his body swiftly. His body refused to listen to him when it came to his need for her and he nodded his head in agreement with her suggestion.

“Ma nuvenin ma vhenan,” he replied hearing his voice thick with need.

Her knowing laughter and wink at him only made his blood boil hotter as he watched her leave the rotunda for the kitchen. Shaking his head at himself and his lack of utter control over his desires when it came to her, he stood and headed for their chambers.

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Sliding my pack over my shoulders, I grabbed my staff from the weapons rack that hung on the wall closest to the steps. Turning, I watched as Solas slipped his cloak over his shoulders and felt my heart speed up at the sight. Jesus, it would be nice if I could tone down the horny teenager syndrome.

“Come on handsome, get a move on before I peel all that sexy armor off you and have my way with you…again,” I tease wiggling my eyebrows at him.

His short bark of laughter made me giggle and I whistled for Raj to follow before heading down the stairs. Pushing open the door leading out into the main hall, I saw Varric coming in from the side door with Bianca strapped to his back and travel pack in his hand.

“Morning Varric,” I greeted him cheerfully and he still looked half asleep or hung over…or both.

“I do you ever have an off morning, Sketch?” He questioned rubbing his face.

I laugh, shaking my head.

“Nope, I am a perpetually happy person when I wake up, Varric. Can’t help it,” I tell him bumping his shoulder teasingly.

Varric’s expression was one of disbelief and looked over at Solas for confirmation to see his slow nod of agreement.

“She is not lying Master Tethras, she wakes with a smile almost every day.”

I started to blush at the double meaning his words held. My thoughts swept me away to what usually put the never-ending smile on my face, and felt Solas’ aura poke at me. Glancing up I see his wicked, knowing grin at where my thoughts had meandered. Smug ass...

Taking the steps that led to the lower courtyard just outside the keep, we headed for the barn. We stopped at the bottom as Cullen jogged up to us holding a missive in his hand.
“Fenlin, there is something I want you to see before you leave,” he said handing me the missive.

His hand scratched Raj’s head while I read the brief report about the dragon in Crestwood and grimaced.

“We will have to address it on our return trip,” I tell him handing the paper back to him.

“I have informed Cassandra, and she will meet you with the others in Caer Bronach to handle the situation.”

Nodding my head, I adjusted my pack and watched him leave taking Raj with him.

“What was in the missive?” Solas questioned me quietly and I glanced up at him.

“The dragon in Crestwood will have to be dealt with after all. It has decided that people are a better snack than Druffalo,” I answered him.

“Shit,” Varric said quietly.

“My thoughts exactly,” I replied before continuing towards the stables pushing my concern for fighting a dragon to the file labeled ‘fucking later’.

Reaching the stables, Bull and Dorian were busy getting their mounts ready and Cole stood feeding his horse an apple while petting her neck soothingly. I went to get Etta out of her stall and Inansha kicked at his stall door with disapproval at my actions. Solas softly laughing and shaking his head at the animal’s obvious displeasure at being left behind, I rolled my eyes. _Men…babies, the lot of them if they don’t have all your attention._ I reached up and scratched his nose.

“Hey now, it is Etta’s turn to leave for a bit, now settle down and behave,” I tell the animal soothingly.

I watched Riley move to get Etta saddled and check her hooves, all part of the routine and saw something that made him hesitate.

“You might want to rethink taking out Etta here, Inquisitor,” he said propping Etta’s hoof on his knee while the animal stood patiently.

I moved to stand behind him and look at what he was talking about and saw the crack in her hoof and worried my lip.

“You can fix that, right? I mean if I leave her behind you can heal that?”

The last thing I wanted was to come back and find that they had put her down because of it.

Riley dropped Etta’s hoof and stood to dust his hands off turning towards me.

“Sure, it will be fine. I just wouldn’t take her out for a few months until this is healed up or it will only split further.”

“Then that is what we will do,” I reply and move to Etta’s head and scratch her forehead lovingly while Riley walked away.

“Sorry girl, you are going to have to stay after all,” I told her soothingly. Kissing her muzzle, I led her back to her stall. Closing the gated door, I moved to open Inansha’s.

If an animal could smile, you would have seen Inansha’s large moose-like head split with a wide grin
resembling Bullwinkle. He positively pranced out of the stall making small chuffing noises before rubbing his face against mine. Silly creatures antics made me giggle.

Focused on Inansha's antics, I didn't notice that Riley walked from behind the barn wall carrying a stool for me to use. But everyone else in the barn did and started laughing at the sight of it. I rubbed my face and shook my head tossing glares at those laughing once I saw what Riley carried. Being short was not something I could just suddenly change and graceful was not part of my repertoire. I worried my lip as Solas placed a hand on Riley’s shoulder stopping him and shook his head at the young man.

“It is unnecessary, I will assist the Inquisitor onto Inansha,” he informed him quietly before moving towards me.

Blushing with embarrassment at the obvious vertical challenge I faced daily, Solas stood in front of me with a smug little tilt to his lips while the others continued chuckling watching Solas help me mount up.

“You are enjoying this moment far too much vhenan,” I say softly. Melting at the sight of his smile widening and I shook my head. “I am so going to get even with you for this,” I warn him quietly.

He laughed softly as he picked me up placing me on Inansha’s back. Patting my leg he glanced up to where I sat with a wicked smile on his beautiful lips that made me want to nibble on the lower one.

“I look forward to it,” he said softly. His rich voice making me blush for completely different reasons now I watched him move towards his own mount and hop on.

Chapter End Notes

Ma nuvenin ma vhenan - As you wish my heart
vhenan - my heart
Sitting around the campfire the atmosphere was tense and quite frankly, damned depressing.

My gaze fell on Cole, first. He paced in one four foot spot, back and forth and if that wasn’t enough to make me uncomfortable, he was muttering to himself while twisting his fingers. If I had a Xanax, I would have given him one…maybe two, just to get him to calm the hell down. His eyes darted around from one person to another, finally landing on me and then he just disappeared entirely.

Then there is Dorian, my wonderful fashion guru, drama queen. He is sitting quietly staring into the flames of the fire, while Bull tries to alleviate his worries about the so-called ‘family retainer’. It is all quite adorable to see Bull trying to console Dorian; however, I think he is wasting his time.

Rubbing my neck, I glance to my right. Of course, Solas would be quiet…especially after our discussion about our future. Life, children, placing stronger seals on the Evanuris’ prison, and then there is the fact I don’t want him to fucking burn the world by tearing the Veil down. Letting out a small sigh, I knew he would be a broody butt so totally not unexpected.

But the most disconcerting and unexpected was Varric…my normally talkative, always has a story for everything, dwarven friend. He was completely silent, lost in his own mind while gazing into the fire. I was almost curious about whether it had something to do with Cassandra or if it was something else that had snagged the storyteller’s attention.

I rubbed my face at the almost laughable fact that Bull and I were the only two people that weren’t being broody…go figure. I had a sneaky suspicion this trip was going to be uncomfortable, but damn…this was the type of uncomfortable like my underwear riding up in the wrong direction while giving a speech in public, kind of uncomfortable. I could fell the heavy, repressive negativity in the air surrounding our small campsite.

Bull glanced at me from across the fire and I just gently shrugged my shoulders at him. What the hell could I do? I watched the large man let out a heavy sigh obviously giving up trying to bring Dorian out of his funk. I should have brought Sera for entertainment. No sooner does the thought cross my mind and I start laughing aloud startling everyone out of their own thoughts and pulling their gazes towards me.

“Sketch, you doing okay over there?” Varric asked appearing slightly annoyed with being disturbed.

I rubbed my face again and glanced at everyone around the fire.

“I was laughing because I actually just thought that I should have brought Sera to lighten up this fucking funeral,” I replied holding his surprised gaze. “The sheer fact that I thought Sera was needed to lighten this group up, should be very telling.”
Everyone’s eyebrows rose at my comment, and I gestured at them all with a sweep of my hand as if to say *fuck it*.

“You know what? Piss on it. You guys wanna sit in your pity party for one, you go right ahead. I’m going for a walk to get away from all you depressing shits.”

I stood up and grabbed my staff, leaving the camp to go sit on the shore of Lake Calendath.

I could feel the disapproval in Solas’ aura as I left him seated in front of the fire and gave not one fuck as I continued walking away from them. I would so rather be sitting at my desk working on correspondence back in Skyhold than be around all of them right now.

I walked through the thin forest of trees until I reached the water’s edge and plopped down laying my staff next to me. Taking a deep, calming breath to get rid of the negative energy that surrounded my campsite, I started to feel a bit better…lighter.

Pulling my knees up, I wrap my arms around them and prop my chin on my knee staring out over the softly lapping water. The comforting sounds of its gentle waves bring me a level of peace I seriously needed tonight, and I close my eyes just listening to the soothing sound.

I felt his aura long before I heard his soft steps and smiled at him when he sat down next to me, laying his own staff down next to him. Pulling me onto his lap, I curled into him laying my head in the crook between his shoulder and neck. With his arms wrapped around me, it was literally the best feeling in the world to me, and closing my eyes I let out a pleased sigh.

“I’m sorry…I just couldn’t take it anymore. Everyone is acting so…*tense and depressed*, and it was just too much for me to take. Our ride here has been full of silence and gloom…it just finally got to me.”

He slightly tightens his arms around me and places a gentle kiss on my forehead. At that moment it just seemed to make everything right in my world.

“They do not understand that you share their worries, and are concerned about them. I too sometimes forget that as I work through something, that I am also effectively shutting you out as well.”

I shrugged and burrowed a little closer into his neck breathing deeply his scent of elfroot, parchment, and glacial ice.

“I know what you are pondering…or at least, I think I do, and that is okay with me. Yes, you do tend to shut me out when you do but I understand,” I tell him and tilt my face up so I can look at him. “I know you love me, Solas. It makes the whole process a lot easier to deal with,” I tell him before placing a kiss on his cheek and moving my face back to its comfy spot on his shoulder and neck.

I felt the soft rumble of his laughter on my side that was pressed against him and my cheek. His lips pressed against my forehead again.

“It is humbling, and a bit frightening to know how much you do, truly, know and understand me and yet still love me. I will forever be thanking the spirits for bringing you to me, and in time, perhaps, I will forgive my sister for what she has done.”

I smiled at his words and kissed the side of his neck.

“If she hadn’t done what she did Solas, I wouldn’t be here now and we wouldn’t have another chance. Having you in my life…experiencing this,” I said gently. “I will thank her for the opportunity until I take my last breath.”
They sat silently listening to the gentle laps of water against the shore before he spoke.

“There is wisdom in your words that shame me, vhenan,” he admitted quietly.

I felt his deep intake of breath as I leaned against him before feeling the soft vibration of his voice beneath my cheek.

“Your forgiveness for what was done to you is astonishing. You face your challenges and take ownership of what must be done and nothing stops you, there is no hesitation. It is quite admirable and I find myself unworthy of you often,” he quietly said surprising me.

I lift my head and place my hand on his face making him look at me.

“I told you once that it was you who thought you unworthy, I have always believed you worthy. I have no great wisdom, Solas. I mostly find myself very grateful to be here, held in your arms, loving you and being loved by you. Even without Assan’s memories, I would still feel the same way. As for facing my challenges and owning what must be done? There is no other way, and I refuse to believe I can’t.”

His eyes softened before his lips pressed against mine tenderly and I melted into him. *I will never stop fighting for you wolf...never.*

*****

Walking under the large archway into Redcliffe, both Cole and Dorian were as jittery as flying squirrels with what was to come. I will be very glad when this whole thing is over. I placed my hand on Cole’s arm stopping him as a memory of what was to come flittered across my mind. *The game makes the player choose, but this is his existence, not mine. I cannot choose for him...he must do this himself.* I could see Cole’s eyes suddenly widen as he tapped into my thoughts and his head tilted just slightly while listening. His large brimmed hat tilted and for once his face is visible as he stares at me.

“But I can’t,” he said desperately shaking his head. I could hear the underlining fear in his tone and I wished I could make this easier for him, but I couldn’t.

I reach up and touch his cheek giving his agitated state comfort and felt his subtle trembling subside.

“You can,” I assure him before letting my hand slide away and continue our walk into the town.

We headed towards the monument for the Hero of Ferelden. This was pretty much the center of Redcliffe with small shops that surrounded the large, marbled monument. Approaching the center we saw a tall man with a dwarf standing just off to the side of the monument. He wasn’t really out of the ordinary for a Ferelden man. He had a brown mustache and hair, and he wore standard brown travel leathers. Overall nothing out of the ordinary, what was curious was that he was pocketing something the dwarven man handed him.

That was just when I notice that Cole stiffened at the sight of him.

When the tall man noticed us walking towards him, he quickly thanked the dwarf and headed in our direction. Everything about the way the man walked screamed Templar and I surprised Solas with my instant bonding of auras with him. His eyes darted to me curiously but I kept my gaze on the approaching man.

After everything I had experience in the Hinterlands, I didn’t trust the free Templars that were still running around out here. I barely trusted the Templars that lived in Skyhold if I wanted to be honest.
“Greetings, can I help you?” He asked politely while fooling with the laces of his leather gloves.

Cole stopped suddenly, his whole demeanor and posture screamed rage as he suddenly pulled one of the rabbit daggers I had given him from his thigh.

“You,” he said with disgust before disappearing only to reappear in front of the man.

Everyone looked around with surprised expressions that quickly turned to horror at what we were witnessing. Cole already had the man down on his knees begging with one hand holding his leather collar within a tight, white-knuckled fist, and with his dagger ready to plunge into the man’s throat with the other.

“You killed me!” He yelled at the man angrily.

Fade stepping to his side I grabbed his wrist and held on hoping I could keep him from stabbing the man.

“Cole?” I said sounding very nervous and somewhat scared for what could happen next.

The man held his hands up in surrender staring up at Cole scared.

“What? I don’t even know you!” He said quickly only angering Cole even more.

“You forgot. You locked me in the dungeon in the spire, and you forgot, and I died in the dark!” He spat venomously pulling on the wrist that I was holding bringing his dagger closer.

The man looked at him nervously now, eyes shifting everywhere as I could see he was wracking his brain for some memory.

“The spire?” He whispered with confusion.

“Cole, stop!” I demanded of him and his pale blue eyes darted towards me. I suppressed the shiver at the coldness I saw in them. This was not my sweet loving, Cole.

Cole reluctantly released the man. We watched as the man quickly moved to his feet to run away from us. Cole’s eyes full of anger, followed him as he slowly following the man’s footsteps around the monument, uncaring that he is dragging me along with him. I knew the man would never get far enough away that Cole wouldn’t find him.

Varric stepped into his path while Cole slipped the dagger back into its scabbard on his thigh as if my weight and me still holding tightly to him was insignificant.

“Just take it easy, kid.”

Cole stared at Varric angrily sending chills up my spine and I darted a glance towards Solas and saw that he was as unnerved by the spirits display of vengeance as I was.

“He killed me, he killed me!” He yelled, pointing in the direction the man had run. “That’s why it doesn’t work. He killed me, and I have to kill him back!” Cole yelled moving to step around Varric.

I moved my hold from his wrist to his arm before he could drag me very far talking quickly hoping he would listen to reason.

“Cole if he killed you, you would be dead,” I tell him logically and I notice Solas’ nod of agreement as he stepped towards us.
“Cole, this man cannot have killed you. You are a spirit. You have not even possessed a body.”

Cole glanced at him quickly for a brief moment before his eyes took on a distant look as he remembered.

“A broken body,” he whispered before looking at me. “Blood, banged on the stone cell, guts gripping in the dark dank, a captured apostate. They threw him into the dungeon in the spire at Val Royeaux. They forgot about him…he starved to death. I came through to help…and I couldn’t,” he said his voice full of anguish and I felt his arm relax beneath my grip. “So I became him…Cole,” he explained and tears fell from my eyes at the imagery.

My heart wept for the young mage that died in such a horrible way and felt Solas’ aura move soothingly against mine as Varric spoke quietly while Dorian and Bull stood back looking horrified and angry at what was done to the former Cole.

“If Cole was an apostate, that’d make the guy we just saw a Templar. He must’ve been buying lyrium.”

Cole’s voice shook with anger as he spoke and I felt his arm tighten beneath my hand.

“Let me kill him. I need to…I need to.”

His eyes held mine and I gripped him tighter wanting to keep him here…I didn’t want him to become a demon that I would be forced to destroy.

“Solas,” I said anxiously darting a glance at him as I kept my hold on Cole.

“We cannot let Cole kill this man,” he said frankly.

Varric looked at him and shook his head in annoyance as I let out a sarcastic snort and stared at him in frustration.

“Well no shit,” I muttered under my breath.

“I don’t think anyone was going to suggest that, Chuckles.”

Solas’ eyes narrowed on Varric.

“Cole is a spirit. The death of the real Cole wounded him, perverted him from his purpose. To regain that part of himself, he must forgive.”

Varric stared at him in surprise, but to me his words made sense.

“Come on! You don’t just forgive someone killing you,” he said angrily.

Solas held his gaze and folded his arms behind his back.

“You don’t, a spirit can” Solas replied angrily.

Varric rubbed his face in aggravation and finally looked at me.

“The kid’s angry; he needs to work through it.”

I saw Solas shake his head.

“A spirit does not work through emotions, it embodies them.”
Varric stepped a bit closer towards Solas as he argued his point.

“But he isn’t a spirit, is he? He made himself human, and humans change. They get hurt, and they heal. He needs to work it out like a person.”

I could feel through his aura, Solas’ anger and internally cringed.

“You would alter the essence of what he is for your own comfort?” He questioned angrily.

Varric held Solas’ angry gaze and crossed his arms.

“He did that to himself when he left the Fade. It has nothing to do with comfort; I just want to help him survive it.”

Squeezing Cole’s arm, I spoke using a soothing tone.

“Do not go anywhere…promise me,” I requested and saw his quick nod of agreement before letting him go grateful he stayed where he was.

I looked at the two arguing and rubbed my face.

“Okay, time out. One of you break this down for me please,” I requested from them and Solas pulled his gaze from Varric to look at me.

“It seems the real Cole was an apostate. Captured and taken to the Circle by Templars,” he said sounding still very angry.

“Who aren’t known for their gentle nature,” Varric interjected.

“As the young man starved to death in a dungeon, his pain caught the attention of a spirit…likely one of compassion,” Solas continued rubbing the back of his neck, his tone sounding less angry and more just tired.

“Compassion?” Varric questioned sounding skeptical and Solas frowned at him.

“An uncommon spirit, certainly…and all too fragile, especially when its efforts to help prove in vain.”

My heart broke for what Cole must have endured while the real Cole suffered and I walked back towards Cole and took his hand.

“It is time my friend, what do you want?” I asked him quietly and Cole looked at me scared.

“What do you think I should do?”

I could hear the fear in his voice and shook my head.

“I cannot choose for you Cole. You must look within yourself and find your answer.”

He looked at me for a long silent moment before squeezing my hand and letting it go.

“Solas, will you help me?” He asked quietly before looking at him.

Solas nodded.

“I believe I can help you, Cole. Come with me,” he replied and gestured for Cole to follow him as he
led the way towards where the Templar had run off to.

I watched them walk away while Varric came to stand next to me. I knew Varric could not be angry at me or Solas as this was Cole’s decision. I felt Dorian's hand on my shoulder as he moved to stand beside me and I gave him an anxious gaze.

“It was the right thing to do,” he said gently squeezing my shoulder before letting it go.

I heard Varric’s heavy sigh and saw his nod of agreement.

“It was Sketch…letting him choose was right,” he admitted and I wrapped my arm around him and pulled him to me. I know what Varric wanted, but it was in essence against Cole’s nature.

“Thank you, Varric. I know you care about him…and he does too.”

Cole led Solas towards the water’s edge and they caught sight of the former Templar. As soon as he saw Cole he began to run. Cole disappeared and materialized in front of the man cutting off his escape.

“Not possible…not possible,” he said looking from Cole to Solas before hitting his knees in resignation.

Solas looked at Cole and spoke calmly.

“Can you feel this man’s pain, Cole?”

Cole’s head tilted just slightly, obscuring his face from view as he listened and finally nodded his head looking at Solas.

“He remembers now. He knows he killed me.”

Solas took a calming breath.

“No, feel his pains,” he reiterated. “Feel his guilt, the shame that drove him from the Templars,” he advised him.

Cole held his gaze for a moment before looking at the former Templar again and tilted his head listening.

“Don’t worry, we’ll erase his records. They clap me on the shoulder, the smell of oiled metal and blood. They smile like Louis did when he made me drown the kittens. Laughter bounces off the walls like a thin child’s fists,” he said his eyes unfocused as he listened to the man’s pain.

The man stared up at him in horror at hearing his own worst memories said aloud and shook his head.

“I’m sorry…I’m so sorry,” he said softly his voice thickening with the threat of tears.

“He’s hurting, Cole, and you are a spirit of Compassion,” Solas reminded him gently.

Cole moved towards the man and Solas watched as he flinched expecting a blow as Cole held his hand out. The soft white glow emanated from the spirit’s hand close to the former Templar’s head.
“Forget,” Cole whispered taking the horrible memories away from the man.

The man stood quickly looking around as if he had no idea how he had gotten there or who they were, and Solas walked towards Cole.

“I believe we are finished here,” Solas said calmly laying a hand on the spirit's shoulder.

Cole looked at him for a moment and nodded.

We stood together watching Cole and Solas finally return, and Cole’s face was lit with a bright smile.

“You alright, kid?” Varric asked as soon as they were close enough.

“Yes, …he’s free…we are both…free” Cole replied grasping Varric’s shoulder before stepping in front of me.

“You were right…thanks to you I am me again,” he said before wrapping me in a tight hug.

I wrapped my arms around his waist and unsuccessfully held back tears, crying with relief and joy for him.

“I just want you happy Cole, that is all that matters to me,” I whispered thickly against his leather covered chest and felt his arms slightly tighten before letting me go.

“I am,” he replied his voice filled with joy. “You are a true friend,” he said making me even more emotional and I slapped his arm while everyone else chuckled at my display.

“Oh, stop…you're making me cry,” I reply wiping at my face while he smiled at me.

Taking a deep breath, I took the handkerchief that Dorian held out and wiped the tears from my face. *I must look a fucking hot mess.* Gazing up at Dorian who held a soft smile I grabbed his hand.

“You ready to meet this so-called ‘family retainer’?”

Dorian gave me a look of *no* but nodded his head in agreement making me softly laugh.

“Like you said my dear ’if it’s a trap, I kill them all’.” I reminded him with a soft poke in the ribs with my elbow.

Winking at him, I saw the pleasure of his words being repeated to him as he smiled.

“You weren’t wrong…I *am* really good at that,” I tell him making him laugh.

Assan’s memories had definitely helped me distance myself from what must be done at times, without losing myself in the process. If I allowed all that fighting knowledge to take over, the only person I wouldn’t scare would be Solas.
Yeeha, it's Friday!

Thank you for your continued reading and support, it is truly awesome.

Pulling Dorian along behind me, we headed for Redcliffe’s tavern where the meeting was supposed to take place. My stomach was churning as we took the stairs leading towards the door.

*Cheese and rice…please, just don’t let this be a fucking set up.* Quickly sending the prayer up, we stood in front of the tavern’s door.

“Shall we?” I questioned and saw Dorian’s hesitance before grabbing the door handle.

“I believe we shall, my dear, let’s get this over with,” he replied pulling the door open.

We walked in and the tavern was completely empty of any patrons. The tavern in itself was well lit. All the braziers were going, a fire in the hearth and I could even smell freshly baked bread in the air. Walking hesitantly into the room, I continued to glance around looking for at least the tavern owner. *This…this really doesn’t look good.*

“Uh-oh, nobody’s here…this doesn’t bode well,” Dorian said speaking my thoughts aloud looking around at the empty room as I did.

Bull, Cole, and Solas slipped in behind us and eyed the empty room uncomfortably. Solas’ aura subtly connected with mine in preparation for a possible ambush and Cole placed his hands on the hilts of his daggers.

“Kadan…this does not feel right,” Bull said to Dorian. Reaching back, he wrapped a large hand around the hilt of his ax slowly pulling it out and stopped at the sound of another man’s voice.

“Dorian”

Dorian sudden froze in place before turning towards the bar to look at the man standing there watching him. The man wore mages robes of brown, green, gold, and red, with a symbol that resembled a sunburst in the center of his chest. He wore his dark black hair that was greying at the temples parted on the left and short enough to be above the collar. He had a strong aristocratic nose and slightly wide jaw with a perfectly shaped chin that was neither too long nor too short. Overall this man that was probably in his late fifties reminded me so much of Dorian, especial as he stood gazing at us out of the same color of hazel eyes as Dorian’s.

“Father,” Dorian said with a touch of disdain and scorn lacing his tone. “So the whole story about the ‘family retainer’ was just…what? A smoke screen?” He questioned sarcastically.

I watched as the man visibly flinched with his son’s acidic words. His eyes nervously darted to Bull who stood behind me then moved on to Solas who stood beside me before finally looking at me. It didn’t surprise me that he did not see Cole; most people didn’t unless he wanted to be seen.
“Then you were told. I apologize for the deception, Inquisitor. I never intended for you to be involved.”

I held the man’s gaze steadily preparing to reply as Dorian spoke angrily.

“Of course not!” Dorian spat out angrily. “Magister Pavus couldn’t come to Skyhold and be seen with the dread Inquisitor. What would people think?” Dorian’s complete disgust with his father was palatable and I laid a gentle hand on his arm.

Dorian stopped for a moment and took a calming breath as he looked at me. I could see his discomfort and distress written on his face before looking at his father again.

“What is this exactly, father?” He said spitting out the name as if it tasted bitter on his tongue. “Ambush? Kidnapping? A Warm, family reunion?”

His father lets out a heavy sigh and his regret is written clearly in the way his body slightly hunched as if he were defeated.

“This is how it has always been,” he says to me and my eyebrow rose at him.

“Well, considering you lied to get him here…I believe he has every right to be angry with you,” I tell the Magister slightly taken aback that he actually looks surprised by this.

Dorian turned towards me and held my gaze. His hazel eyes stormy as anger churned within for his father.

“You don’t know the half of it! But maybe you should…” he began as his father held up his hands imploringly.

“Dorian…there is no need to…” he started and Dorian angrily interrupted him.

“You already know that I prefer the company of men,” he says calmly glancing at Bull. The love for him clearly written in the way he gazed at the large man. “My father disapproves,” he said frankly with a clipped tone.

Dorian’s father did not miss the not so subtle look Dorian threw Bull and slowly shook his head.

“This is not exactly news, Dorian,” I tell him unsure where this was going.

“And why should it be? Why should anyone care? I have no idea,” he replied looking at me.

“This display is uncalled for,” his father said loudly obviously uncomfortable and I looked at him crossly.

Dorian turned towards his father with a sarcastic smile.

“No, it is called for. You called for it by luring me here,” he replied coldly.

“This is not what I wanted,” Magister Pavus tried to explain and I couldn’t keep the snort of my own disgust from leaving me.

“Oh, I don’t doubt that Magister Pavus,” I replied softly.

Dorian stared at his father with hurt and anger reflecting from his eyes and in his posture.

“I am never what you wanted, father, or had you forgotten?” He spat out coldly.
Magister Pavus wiped at his face radiating frustration.

“So preferring men…this is a big concern then…in Tevinter?”

Dorian held my gaze and nodded angrily.

“It is if you are trying to live up to the impossible standard. Every Tevinter family is intermarrying to distill the perfect mage, the perfect body, perfect mind, the perfect leader. It means every perceived flaw – every aberration – is deviant and shameful…It must be hidden.”

I caught Dorian’s father slowly lower his head in shame and worried what Dorian would tell me next.

“So that is what all this is about? Who you choose to sleep with?” I questioned and hazarding a glance towards Bull who for the first time since I had met him, showed all his emotions on his face as he watched Dorian. The sight of such devoted love was unexpected coming from the Qunari. It was obvious that Dorian’s pain was his pain.

“That’s not all this is about,” he replied.

“Dorian, please, if you’ll only listen to me,” his father begged of him.

“Why? So you can spout more convenient lies? He taught me to hate blood magic, ‘The resort of the weak mind.’ Those are his words,” he said stalking towards his father angrily.

“But what was the first thing you did when your precious heir refused to play pretend for the rest of his life?” He questioned turning away from him then spinning back towards his father angrily pointing his finger at him.

“You tried to…change me,” he said with a broken voice.

I grasped Bull’s wrist quickly when I heard the sound of the low growl that emanated from his large body with Dorian’s admission. It did not take much of a stretch to come to the conclusion that Magister Pavus had resorted to blood magic to try and make his son straight. Well, that is just seriously fucked up.

“I only wanted what was best for you,” his father implored holding Dorian’s angry gaze.

Dorian stalked towards him and shoved him against the tavern wall angrily. The dull, thudding sound of Magister Pavus’ body hitting the hewn wood was a little jolting.

“You wanted the best for you! For you fucking legacy! Anything for that!” He snarled into his father’s face.

Dorian turned away walking towards the bar and placed his hands on the surface. I knew he was angry, I didn’t blame him, but he had never let his father talk to even explain why he went to such lengths to get him here. I walked over to where Dorian kept his back to everyone and I placed my hand over his. He jolted slightly startled.

“Don’t leave it like this Dorian, you’ll not only never forgive yourself, but you will always wonder why he wanted you here,” I tell him gently.

His eyes held bitter anger and grief that stared back at me and my heart went out to him. I could not imagine the horrors he has experienced or the hardships he has endured for just being who he is. I squeezed his hand in silent support and his head slowly dropped. Dorian closed his eyes and finally
nodded his head taking a deep breath before turning around to face his father again.

“Tell me why you came,” he said walking towards his father with cool, clipped tones.

Magister Pavus watched his son with pleading eyes, his mannerisms almost begging Dorian to listen to him.

“If I knew I would drive you to the Inquisition…” he began and Dorian quickly cut him off.

“You didn’t,” he said in exasperation. “I joined the Inquisition because it was the right thing to do. Once, I had a father who would have known that” he interjected.

You could hear the disgust in Dorian’s voice before throwing his hand to the side in a gesture that told everyone he was done talking. Walking towards us his father started talking quickly before Dorian could leave.

“Once, I had a son who trusted me, a trust that I betrayed. I only wanted to talk to him, to hear his voice again, to ask him to forgive me.”

Dorian stopped, his face was a myriad of expressions ranging from surprise, to shock to wariness with the olive branch his father was holding out towards him. He turned to look at his father unsure of what would come next and Bull spoke softly to him.

“Go speak to him, Kadan. I will be right here if you need me.”

Dorian looked at Bull with a grateful smile as he hesitantly walked towards his father.

I took Solas’ hand in mine and gestured with my chin to follow me outside so Dorian could have his privacy.

Solas closed the door behind us and I took a breath of the slightly briny air before expelling out of puffed cheeks.

“Well that was something,” I said quietly.

Solas took my hand and we started walking towards the fishing pier.

“It is a terrible thing what his father tried to do to his own son. I can understand his anger and his heartbreak. It is always the most difficult when someone you held in high regard falls so low.”

We reached the pier and stood quietly watching the small fishing boats and the men pulling up nets with their catch.

“You did a wonderful thing for Cole today,” he said softly.

I glance up at him and see that he is looking at me tenderly making my heart melt.

“How so?”

“By allowing him to make the choice himself, to choose which path he would like to take.”

I shrugged and looked out over the water of Lake Calenhad. I loved Cole, as a sister would love her brother. He was everything I strived to be…compassionate, kind, a good listener. This world needed a lot more Cole’s in it.

“It could never be mine to make. Cole came here of his own choice. He chose to become ‘Cole’ and
stay to help those who needed him. I can’t imagine what it was like to watch the real Cole suffer, unable to help, to fulfill his purpose as a spirit of Compassion. But it took courage for him to choose to stay and not become twisted. To continue on and find a new purpose.”

“And,” he said sensing there was more.

Gazing back up at him, my lip slightly trembled with the memory that was still fresh in my mind.

“And...I didn’t want what happened to Wisdom, to happen to him. I don’t know if I could kill him if I had to.”

Solas nodded his head in agreement and wrapped an arm around my shoulder pulling me into his side. Placing a tender kiss to my temple, I felt him exhale the small breath and ruffle the loose hair before he spoke softly.

“I would not like that to happen to him either. We have far too little compassion in this world now.”

I leaned into him silently agreeing and we gazed out over the water in companionable silence while we waited for Dorian and his father to finish their meeting.
We Leave In The Morning

Chapter Notes

*****NSFW*****
WARNING POSSIBLE TRIGGER - there is a bit of a submissive/dominating undertone with this chapter's love scene.

Also, thanks everyone for your continued support and reading of my story. I hope this chapter does not disappoint.

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Finished with my bath, I slipped Solas’ beige tunic on and wrapped my hair in the towel. Today had been the ultimate emotional rollercoaster and I was quite thankful to have finally gotten off. I moved to sit on the bed and folded my legs beneath me as I towel dried my hair. I glanced around the small, but very clean room with its rough wooden floors and walls. It was very nice of Dorian’s father to have rented out the entire tavern for them before leaving. After everything Dorian had finally told me about his father as he was on track to getting totally drunk, his father had been a royal fuck-monster.

My eyes moved towards the door as it opened and I saw it was Solas coming. I could hear Bull’s booming laughter and Dorian’s drunken slurred speech echoing up from the tavern below. Shaking my head at the sounds, I smiled softly at him while he closed the door and warded it before placing his staff next to mine in the corner. His eyes assessed me from head to toe and I felt as if I wasn’t wearing anything at all before he removed his cloak and placed it on the chair.

“How was Dorian when you left?”

I ran my hands through my hair loosening it a bit and massaged my scalp as he started working on the buckles of his armor. The action alone sent the flutters buzzing and my pulse to kick it up a notch.

“How was Dorian when you left?”

I ran my hands through my hair loosening it a bit and massaged my scalp as he started working on the buckles of his armor. The action alone sent the flutters buzzing and my pulse to kick it up a notch.

“He appeared quite drunk and in Bull’s capable hands,” he replied.

“Well after today, can’t really blame him for wanting to escape. Would you like me to start you a bath?” I ask him my voice a tad husky from watching him remove his armor and his blue eyes glanced from what he was doing. Flutters buzzed quickly from the look that could only be described as ‘hungry’.

“Please,” he finally answered after a few seconds of silently looking at me before turning his focus back to removing his gear.

Hanging the towel I had been using on the small hook on the wall, I went about getting his bath ready as he continued removing his armor. At least doing this would keep my hands busy and keep me from helping him with that armor. If I had known how distracting it was seeing him in all that metal or how it would affect me, I don’t know if I would have had it made. It was hard enough controlling my hormones on a regular day around him…put him in black metal and wham! I’m trying to climb him like some crazed monkey in a tree.

Finished with getting his bath prepared, his arms slipped around my waist and startled me out of my
thoughts of peeling all that gear off of him. Soft, full lips skimed over the skin of my neck teasingly setting my skin on fire where they pressed.

“I do enjoy the way you look in my shirts, vhenan” he growled. Moving the collar of the shirt out of his way, he nipped at the tendon in my shoulder.

Lightning flashed and danced behind my closed eyes. A small smile lifted the corners of my mouth with his words. Damned if this man didn’t know exactly how to excite me.

“Mmm…I bet you enjoy what I look like out of them too,” I teased huskily.

His deep chuckle made my blood sizzle with its vibration over my sensitive skin.

“I do,” he whispered next to my ear and goosebumps sprouted on my arms.

“Shall I attend you while you bathe?”

His fingers skimmed under the shirt over my stomach and I moaned softly, leaning back into him. His lips trailed along the line of my jaw stopping just at my earlobe before biting it gently. Shivers of delight and heat gathered low in my belly, dampness gathered between my legs with his manipulations of my ear.

“I would like that,” he finally replied reluctantly letting me go.

Opening my eyes slowly, I took in his perfect, naked form and sighed. He stepped into the tub and I reached for a washcloth from the table before moving a chair to behind him so I could start with his back.

Wetting the cloth, I lathered it up and started washing his neck and across his shoulders while he tilted his head forward. I loved his shoulders; they were broad and strong, but not overly bulky. There was the definition of the muscle groups that led to the arm. That little ‘v’ shape, just below the actual shoulder on the outside of the arm that led towards the actual muscle groups in his arms…sexy as hell. I found myself tracing the shape often when we were lying in bed just talking.

Running the cloth over the musculature of his back was mouthwatering. The way the lean muscle moved beneath the skin as he leaned forward and wrapped his arms loosely around his legs. There was a deception in the simple way the muscles stretched because I knew how strong they were. Running the cloth over his sides the definition of his lateral muscles was gorgeous. Dropping the cloth in the water I used my hands to rinse the soap from him.

Reaching towards the small table next to the tub, I grabbed the small bottle of oil I purchased in Val Royeaux. One thing about being here in Thedas that surprised me was that the air dried out my skin something horrible. I brought the bottle to my nose and sniffed at the light sandalwood smell of it before pouring some into my hand. I began at his neck first. Working the tension out of the muscles enjoying the way they felt beneath my fingertips. His soft moan of pleasure at the action echoed softly around us and his aura hummed with his pleasure against mine.

Once I felt the suppleness of the muscle beneath my fingers, I poured just a little more into my hands and moved to his shoulders. There was tension built up and it was not a surprise. He is always tense because of his thoughts… I wonder if that is how he gets his muscles? The thought lifted the corners of my lips for its ridiculousness and his soft moan as I found a knot in his shoulder and worked it into relaxing made my smile grow.

I grabbed the washcloth out of the water and slid the chair to the side and his heavy, lidded blue eyes looked at me and my heart skipped. He looked so relaxed; slightly drowsy from my manipulations of
his muscles but most of all…he looked happy.

“You ready to let me wash your arms and legs,” I ask him.

The soft lopsided smile he gave me had me biting my lip while he leaned back propping his arm on the side of the bathtub. Closing his eyes, my eyes feasted on the expansion of perfect body now exposed to me. I wonder how red he would get if he saw the pages in the back of my sketchbook of him…I worried at my lip while a desire for him ran thick like honey through my veins.

“Ma nuvenin,” he replied. His voice is as thick, and it vibrated the air powerfully around me with his completely relaxed state stirring the flutters in my stomach. Raising an eyebrow at him, I smiled impishly.

“As I wish, you say” I repeat his simple statement and watch his eyes slowly open and take in my mischievous smile as I was leaned forward preparing to wash his arm.

“Vin,” his voice slightly growled sending shivers up and down all my nerves.

His eyes slowly close again and his head rested on the back of the tub and a small knowing smile teased the edges of his beautiful lips. Well okay then…game on.

My smile still in place, I started washing his arm and when finished, I dropped the cloth in the water and rinsed the soap from his skin. Reaching over for my bottle of oil, I poured a bit into my hand and this time using magic, I heated the oil before starting at the top of his arm and working my way down. I then caressed his aura with my own. Subtly slipping my aura against his skin alluringly…as I wish you said. This should about do it, I think. Watching him carefully while I continued to caress him with my aura teasingly, his skin became flushed with the subtle action.

He opened one eye to look at me and I still wore my impish smile as I lazily massaged his wrist and hand now.

“You bait me,” he stated his voice still deep and vibrating, and my body sizzled deliciously with the heady sound.

I finished with his hand and grabbed the cloth from the water before looking at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Oh, yes…I am totally baiting you, Fen’Harel. The question is…how long can you take it before you snap at the bait?”

Now his eyebrow rose at my blatant challenge. Holding each other’s gaze for a long silent moment, obviously reaching a stalemate, he finally closed his eye and rested his head back against the tub.

“Longer than you may think,” he finally replied.

“Would that be because you have had more practice than I, perhaps?”

His eyes stayed closed as he chuckled at the wordplay and I began washing his chest and stomach. This was probably more torturous for me than it was for him because I loved his body, and he knew it. The muscle definition, the dips, and curves, the way the muscles made that ‘v’ shape that led to his…oh my, I believe I have someone’s attention. My mouth went dry at the sight of him aroused.

Restraining the sudden urge to pull this shirt off and take hold of him, I swallowed past the lump of desire in my throat. Pull it together…you can do this for fuck’s sake…yes, it is very nice to look at but it’s not like it is the first time you have seen it!
Rinsing the soap from his chest and stomach, I poured oil into my hands and like before I used magic to heat it and began massaging his chest. *This might not have been your brightest idea.* That thought donned on me as my fingers slipped over the ridges of his stomach. *Why does this man have to have such a nummy looking body? Isn’t it illegal or something to have a six-pack, on top of another damn six-pack on just one man’s stomach?*

Finishing the massage, my hands slightly shook as I moved to his legs and my mouth watered at the sight of his thighs…*oh, this was a horrible fucking idea why did I ever think I could beat him at this?* At this point, all’s I wanted to do was climb into the water with him. *Focus! I can do this, damn it!* Taking a small breath and sending a quick prayer to whoever would listen for some damn restraint; I lathered the washcloth and started washing his leg from hip to foot noticing the small smug tilt to his lips as if he knew I was having an internal argument with myself.

Once done, I repeated with the oil and magic, massaging the small knots I felt in his thighs and calves working my way to his foot. I heard the catch in his breath when my hand brushed against his length when working the oil into his hip. The sound did nothing but escalate my eagerness for him. I was feeling quite feverish by the time I finished and I noticed that he was breathing a bit heavier than before.

Dragging my chair to the other side, I started with his arm and lathering the cloth again, I washed the beautiful appendage before rinsing and picking up the oil to repeat my actions. I could hear his panting breaths with the ministrations of oil, massage, and enticing caresses of my aura over his skin. It was exhilarating to know that I affected him as much as he did me.

I dragged my chair to the end and started lathering the cloth again to begin on his leg and felt the increase in his aura’s vibration as I started washing his hip. I kept my mind focused on the task and worked my way down the long expansion of leg to reach his foot. Finishing, I rinsed the soap away and grabbed the oil so I could begin from his hip and work my way down.

My hand brushed against his length again and his hips moved ever so slightly towards the touch and I held a devilish, knowing smile on my lips. *He is just as bad as I am.* Finishing with massaging the small knots I found, I moved onto rubbing his foot enjoying the small panting breaths and the small flare of his nostrils with each caress.

Grabbing the soap and lathering my hands, I moved to wash the part of him that I had been trying to ignore for more than half the bath. Feeling the heavy softness of his length in my hand finally, I let out a small sigh. His eyes flashed open with the gentle movements and I gave him a knowing grin.

On a slow, washing downward stroke, his eyes rolled back and slid closed as a low moan of pleasure escaped his now corded throat. I could tell he was desperately trying to maintain his control with the gentle attentions of my hands on him, but cracks were visible.

The removal of my hand from him had his eyes popping open to look at me again and the sight was breathtaking. His eyes were twin turbulent oceans filled with desire, his lips slightly parted and his chest moved with an exertion of his heavy breaths as I held his gaze and heat coiled tightly, deep in my belly. I stood moving the chair away from the bathtub and grabbed a towel for him.

“I believe I have attended to your bathing, Fen’t’Harel. Shall you now leave your bath so that I may dry you?” I asked him holding the dry towel open for him to step into.

Without a word he stood in one fluid movement and stepped from the bath, his eyes following me like the wolf I knew he was. I patted the towel against his skin as the oil I had used made the water bead. Finished, I wrapped the towel around his waist and knotted it just over his hip.
Gazing up at him, his eyes scanned mine and I knew he was done being seduced and teased...he wanted to prove me wrong. He expected me to break, and a small feral flame of my own rose to the challenge I saw in his blue gaze.

Grabbing my hips, he pulled me tightly against him and plundered my mouth possessively. With my hands on his chest, I could feel the racing thump of his heartbeat beneath my fingertips. I melted against him with each stroke of his tongue against mine, lightning raced over my skin with each bite on my lip. He was mine. Completely, irrevocably, all mine, and I delighted knowing that no other could ever complete him the way that I do.

His lips moved from mine, nibbling at the corner before grabbing the hem of his shirt and pulling it over my head throwing it away from him hastily. His growl of approval with my sudden nakedness sent shivers of delight rushing over my skin. His eyes traveled over my naked body before dropping his head and taking one of my nipples into his mouth. I moaned as he sucked on it hard while his aura slid into me, filling me.

The sensations from his lips and aura were on the edge of too much and yet I gripped his arms tightly and breathlessly begged him for more. I could smell his desire for me in the air while his tongue swirled around my nipple, it was spicy, a heady blend of the oil I used and the wild earth scents of musk and my body responded to this smell as much as his mouth pressed against my breast. His seductive laugh only heightened my want of him and when he treated my other nipple to the same, my head fell back and I moaned low holding his head to me.

His eyes held mine as he licked at my nipple and my whole body shivered with the sensation. He slowly swept me up and carried me towards the bed setting me down, his eyes never leaving mine. His gaze was predatory and possessive as I watched him remove the towel around his waist. Licking my lips in anticipation, his eyes narrowed on the action as he lowered himself to the bed.

My hands drift over his chest to his hips and pulled at him towards me provoking another husky laugh from him. Smiling at him cheekily, I moved my hand down his stomach to caress him and his low, guttural moan filled the air as I slowly stroked him. Using my other hand, I pushed on his shoulder for him to lie on his back and his eyes held mine.

“I believe the unspoken challenge was you could hold out longer than I?” I whispered before nipping at his nipple summoning a low moan with the action.

“Just lay back and enjoy the ride, Fen’Harel, and tell me when you’ve had enough and are willing to admit defeat,” I mouthed against his chest. Solas’ low groan made me chuckle as I moved slowly down his body kissing and licking every dip, curve, and small bulge along the way. The tightening of muscle beneath my tongue delighted me.

Biting at his hip, the slight buck of his hips towards me made me softly laugh and do it again pulling a low growl from him. His hands reached back and grabbed a hold of the top of the headboard while his eyes followed my movements.

I continued my slow investigation of his body loving the soft texture of his skin. I could tell he was determined to show me that he could endure and I was determined to show him that he couldn’t and nipped at his navel as I traveled towards his other hip with my lips.

Biting his other hip, his low groan with the bite of my teeth against his flesh excited me even more. The sounds he made awoke a predator side in me I did not know I had, and I liked it. The heat of my breath caressed his length before nipping at the flesh of his inner thigh and his body started to slightly trembled.
He growled with the action…actually, truly, I have a wolf in my bed, animal growled and I did it again. The sound of the headboard suddenly splintering beneath his grip surprised me.

“Venavis!” He panted grabbing me under my shoulders and yanking me up roughly, pinning me to my stomach.

My low laugh at his complete loss of control only spurred him on as he grabbed my hips and pulled me to my knees.

“Vaslasa,” he growled near my ear using his knee to spread my legs for him.

“Never,” I replied breathlessly feeling his hands grip my hips bruisingly as he positioned himself at my entrance that begged for his length to enter. Every particle of my being wanted him, but I would never submit.

“Vaslasa,” he demanded again and I shook my head, my face shrouded in all my hair that fell on my face and the bed as I panted with my need for him.

“Ma vaslasa,” I replied and his hand slid over my hip to slide between my wet folds.

“Vhenan,” he growled warningly and bit my shoulder hard making me moan in pleasure with the pain.

“No,” I moaned as his fingers teased over my hidden gem and his aura rushed through me powerfully taking my breath away as I gripped the sheets tightly turning my hands into bloodless fists. My blood was boiling and my skin felt…tight, and I took a panted breath as his magical fingers brought me to the brink of pleasure only to deny me that sweet moment of blissful release.

“Vaslasa…mala vhenan,” he growled. The demanding tone of his voice vibrating through the room so strongly that even my bones shook.

Every part of me screamed for him to enter me, fill me already, and his hands touching my breasts, pinching my nipples, spurning my desire even closer to an edge of unrestrained release. I only have to submit. The way he was biting at my shoulder and back intensified the tight feeling in my skin. I had such an intense urge to deny him and take what I wanted from him that my body shook with it.

“No,” I growled again as he slid just the tip of himself into me and my eyes watered wanting more of him and bit my lip to suppress the whimper that threatened to escape.

My body was not acting the way it should, everything felt tight…different…powerful, and I moved quickly. Taking him unaware as I suddenly spun beneath him and rolled him, pinning him onto his back. There was something different happening, something within me was changing and I was far more focused on my desperate need for him to really pay attention and pushed the feeling to the back of my mind.

“Ane emma,” I growled slipping over his length basking in how he filled and stretched me.

Solas groaned with my sudden move and his hips snapped up to extract a cry from me. His hand wrapped in my hair tightly and then rolled us so that I was on my back, legs wrapping around him tightly. His thrusts were demanding, pushing my limits of pleasure and I met his thrusts with an upward roll of my hips gladly. Mewling cries escaped from between my lips with each claiming thrust.

Our lovemaking was uncontrolled, like animals in heat. We bit at each other, my nails scored a red path down his back and when we came it was so much more than just animalistic, it was primitive
and wild. I growled as pleasure rolled through me. Crashing waves, sweeping through me dragging me into a vortex of kaleidoscope colors and heat. My brain completely blank of thought just need and then he moaned with the intensity of his release.

Solas rolled from me pulling towards him, kissing my neck as we both try to catch our breath.

“Ar lath ma vhenan ar ame bell’ana mar,” he whispered tenderly against the skin on my shoulder.

“Dirtha’vhen’an?” I whispered and felt his arms tighten around me a little tighter.

“Vin,” he replied quickly.

Rolling towards him I pressed my lips to his.

“I love you,” I breathed into his mouth before kissing him again.

Chapter End Notes

Ma nuvenin - as you wish
vin - yes
Venavis - stop
Vaslasa - submit
Ma vaslasa - you submit
vhenan - my heart
Vaslasa...mala vhenan - Submit...now my heart
ane emma - you are mine
Ar lath ma vhenan ar ame bell’ana mar - I love you my heart, I am forever yours.
Dirtha’vhen’an - Word for an unbreakable vow
The dawning of day encroached on my senses and my eyes opened slowly. Glancing towards the small window in the room I saw that it was indeed pre-dawn. Stretching lazily, his arm over my side pulled me closer into his warmth.

“Mmm, good morning handsome” I mumble with a sleep thickened voice and felt his answering kiss on my shoulder.

Caressing his arm on my side, my skin still felt weirdly tight and sensitive as it brushed against the blanket and mentally shrugged it off. Probably just not awake yet.

Solas kissed the nape of my neck and it was as if every particle in my body was instantly awake and now on fire. I’m awake now. The feeling of his breath on my skin, the light skim of his lips, the subtle smell of elfroot, parchment, and glacial ice…everything he was, everything he was doing, made all my senses overload.

The room grew unbearably hot when he kissed my shoulder and I moaned in a low begging tone. Turning in his embrace, I wrapped my arms around his neck and kissed him hard. His arms pulled me closer in reaction and a low moan escaped as I bit his lip teasingly. The sound spurred me towards the need to dominate him and I had never felt this urge before. Pushing him onto his back and straddling him, taking him into me with a swift move and a long, grateful moan escaped at the pleasure of him filling me so fully.

His eyes opened with the sudden maneuver and held my gaze steady while his hands moved to cup my breasts, teasing my nipples with the pad of his thumbs. My head fell back with the rush of heat through my body and I rolled my hips forward taking all of him deeper.

His eyes closed with the movement and his hands slid to my hips as I controlled the pace. Our hips moved in sync. Each thrust hit that hidden spot within me and my panting breaths turned to moans that grew louder the closer my body came to the edge of that blissful cliff of desire.

I heard him groan with the sudden tightening of my core around him as I drew closer. The rhythmic roll of my hips grew in pace as I chased the sensation of pleasure that was building. Gazing at him, loving that his face is the picture of ecstasy. His eyes heavy-lidded and looking at me, mouth slightly open and the sound of heavy breaths on soft moans escaping him. Leaning down, I bit into his shoulder marking him while gliding my aura into him. The slow rolling wave we had built suddenly crashed over us.

“Damn I love waking up with you,” I tell him huskily as I am still trying to catch my breath.

His vibrating chuckle beneath my cheek made me smile. His hand pushed some of my hair behind
my ear and I felt the press of his lips against my forehead.

“I do prefer waking this way as well, vhenan.”

I snorted with his answer and rubbed my face against his chest. *His skin feels like the softest satin.* Rubbing my nose just over his collarbone, a deep rolling rumble worked up from my stomach. The sound was like a very large cat purring beneath my skin and my eyes popped open scared with the sensation that vibrated through me. Sitting up quickly I slapped my hand to my stomach, my eyes looked at him suddenly scared.

“What the hell?” I squeaked jumping off of him.

With my sudden movement the sensation and thank fucking God, the sound, stopped. Solas’ eyes studied me now like I was some experiment and my eyes narrowed at him.

“What?”

His calm look took my already scared senses and upped it about ten notches as I worried about what he was going to say.

“All of the Evanuris have alternate states of being, vhenan. I was curious if yours would manifest early or later.”

“What the hell does that mean ‘alternate states of being’? Wha…do you mean like shapeshifting?”

He looked at me patiently as he sat up and I suddenly felt the urge to shove him out of the bed.

“Mythal can form a dragon and I can form a wolf, need I continue?”

Okay, now I’m scared. I always thought that the changing forms thing was strictly to the original Evanuris…I…shit…shit…shit…I don’t want that!

“Okay, now I’m scared. I always thought that the changing forms thing was strictly to the original Evanuris…I…shit…shit…shit…I don’t want that!”

“I don’t want any of that…especially the dragon part,” I said suddenly terrified with the idea. The thought of flying sent a cold chill rushing through me and my heart rate sped up. Wrapping my arms around my now drawn up knees, I tucked my head wishing it all away.

Solas softly chuckled and pulled me onto his lap, wrapping his arms around me. I burrowed my face into his neck taking a shaky breath as I absorbed the comfort he offered.

“You know I am afraid of heights Solas…I would be the only dragon that never left the ground,” I told him.

His low laugh vibrated through my side and he rubbed his hands over my back trying to soothe my suddenly frazzled nerves.

“All will be fine, Fenlin. You worry too much,” he said softly kissing my head.

“Is it something that just…happens or is there something I have to do to…um…you know…make it happen?” I ask him worrying my lower lip over what his answer will be.

“The first time it will just happen, after that initial change, you will recognize how it is done and will control it from that moment on.”

I absorbed the information and felt his arms tighten slightly around me.

“Were you scared?” I asked him because I sure as hell was scared.
“The first time it happens it is always a bit frightening. You have no control over it when it finally chooses to manifest.”

His arms squeeze me and he gives me a quick kiss.

“Come, enough worry for now. It will manifest in time and we must get up if we are to leave for the Coast.”

I moved off his lap and glanced at him as he too got up. His whole, ‘it’s not a big deal’ attitude, was not comforting.

“I sure hope it doesn’t just ‘manifest’ while we are out with everyone.”

He gave me another patient smile that made me clench my teeth as he reached for his leggings. So glad this is nothing new to you, you smug ass!

“I can shroud you from their view if that happens, vhenan. Trust me,” he replied slipping on his leggings. “However, I am most curious to see what your form will be as it will give insight to the name other Evanuris will know you by.”

“’You’re not the only one,’” I mutter as I pulled my shirt over my head and heard his responding chuckle. “But then again only you and Mythal are roaming free, so can’t we just continue with Fenlin? I mean, it works, I answer to it…” I told him ignoring his laughter while I slipped my leggings on.

“It will not always be,” he reminded me before buckling his chest plate on.

Yeah…it won’t always be just us three Musketeers…ugh.

The thought was a sobering one and I continued putting on my gear in silence.

*****

It took us a little over a week and a half to skirt Lake Calenhad. I knew we would reach outside of Crestwood in a couple of days. Just another week on the road and we would be at the Storm Coast to meet with Bull’s contact in time. The further we got from Redcliffe, the better Dorian’s mood got.

Myself…the further we got from Redcliffe the more I worried about whatever creature I was going to change into. I don’t know why I am so worried about this; if Solas is not worried about this… probably change into a fucking house cat.

I could tell my silence was worrying for the others, and I tried to participate in conversations… pretend that everything was just peachy, but I was in fact, a horrible liar. Everyone could tell I was not okay and that something was weighing heavily on my mind.

Dorian sat down next to me and bumped my shoulder to get my attention while holding out a bowl of stew. I glanced at him and his raised eyebrow and gave him a half smile taking the bowl.

“Eat…all of that,” he said authoritatively and I chuckled.

“Yes father,” I joked and heard him snort.

“Well then, tell father Dorian what has you in such a state of obvious distress” he teased back.

“I just have a lot on my mind is all,” I evaded ignoring his knowing look.
I took a bite of the stew not tasting it hoping that he would get the hint, and heard his sigh of annoyance with me.

“Fine dear, just know that if you need to talk, I am always willing to listen.”

“Thank you, Dorian, I appreciate that,” I tell him meaning it and watched as he got up and went back to sit next to Bull.

There was so much running through my mind it was hard to focus on just one thing. As an Evanuris, am I technically raised to some sort of Godhood? That thought made my nose wrinkle…no, definitely not a god, don’t even want anything to do with all that. Shaking my head with the thought, I forced another bite of stew in my mouth. What will be expected of me now that I have ascended? I internally grimaced at the idea. Hopefully, not a whole hell of a lot, because I don’t know shit. Chewing thoughtfully while gazing into the fire, I felt Solas’ aura brush against mine and I sent mine to do the same. I loved that he did that often, it was reassuring. Sighing heavily, even with the reassuring touches, there are just some things I am going to worry over.

I wonder...if anything, what I will be known for over time. Well, that is a good question…they were all known for something, but they were also known as Gods. Maybe I will be the first one not to be known as a God.

Elgar’nann, known as the God of Vengeance was also the bond mate to Mythal, the Goddess of Justice and Protection. Falon’Din, the God of Death and Fortune, and his twin brother, Dirthamen, the God of Secrets and Knowledge. Andruil, the Goddess of the Hunt, and Sylaise, the Goddess of Hearthkeeping and her lover June, the God of Craft. Ghilan’nain, the Goddess of the Halla, and then Fen’Harel, the God of Rebellion.

Ticking them all off in my head, I had to wonder where I would fit into all that. Letting out a small sigh, I stared into the fire. How will I react if I am to confront Andruil if ever she is freed? That question brought a small, probably very sinister looking smile on my face. I would kill the bitch without a second fucking thought...that is how I would greet her.

Rubbing my face at how vicious my thoughts had been getting as of late, I took another small bite of my stew. My memories of the Evanuris only solidified my thoughts on what I had thought of them when still human. They were all a complete bag of dicks. Only two of them had done anything for the people, and if I was, to be honest, it was not enough. Neither one of them ever really confronted the others on their behavior, thus allowing it to continue. Battles were waged, slaves were freed, but not one of them walked up to the other and just said, ‘hey! Nock this shit off, you’re being a real asshole.’

Getting up from my place on the log, I went to clean out my bowl unable to finish it. I will be really glad when we can head back to Skyhold; I am so done with all this emotional shit.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Changes

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support and wonderful comments. You guys are awesome!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

*God damn it’s hot in here*

Throwing the blanket away, I tried to move out from under Solas’ arm but found him only tightening it. My blood bubbled…boiled as if being held over a cooking fire and I started panting uneasily. *Is it happening?* My skin was tingling and tight, it felt as if my entire body was being pulled, and stretched like taffy. My pulse started racing as sweat poured off of me like I was back in the Western Approach in the middle of high noon.

I finally couldn’t take it anymore and shoved Solas’ arm violently away from me as I rolled to my knees waking him, panting nervously.

“Solas,” I tried to say and grasped at my throat. It sounded garbled as if I had marbles in my mouth and growly as I stared at him with sheer terror.

“Breathe vhenan, it is going to be okay.”

“This is not okay,” I tried to say, and the first couple of words were understandable…sort of, it was the word ‘okay’ that came out with a deep growl.

My eyes darted around the tent. *I needed to get out of here*.

Solas must have read my mind as he quickly picked me up and carried me from the tent to take me into the forest that surrounded our camp. It was Bull’s turn to watch and his head came up as Solas carried me outside.

“She isn’t feeling well, and is afraid she will be sick in the tent.”

His easy half-truth seemed to please Bull’s questioning look because he just nodded at him and went back to sharpening his ax. I hid my face in Solas’ shoulder as he moved swiftly away from our camp.

Solas sprinted through the woods on silent footsteps until we were far enough from the camp and I was hitting his chest to put me down. As soon as he did, I curled up into a tight ball. My pulse was racing so fast I couldn’t hear anything Solas said through the loud pounding. *I’m going to have a heart attack…something is wrong.*

I felt Solas’ cool magic suddenly encase us like a large bubble and clenching my fist, I drove long nails into my hands and cried out with the pain…only it wasn’t an actual cry but a very loud roar. My eyes moved to where Solas knelt next to me watching me, his eyes tender and loving. He pushed my soaked hair away from my face sympathetically as I began going through the transition.

I watched in terror as my hands rounded and widened. Finger shrunk, thickened into large cat-like paws covered in short, black fur. *No…oh my God…no, no, no…make it fucking stop.* Clenching my
eyes shut tightly, I covered my face blocking out the sight of my body changing with my arms. What I couldn’t ignore was the actual feeling of my body changing.

I felt as my nose widen and flatten on my face, smelling my own fear in the air around me while my upper canine teeth grew in my mouth past my lips, my bottom ones slid up and I could feel them pressing against the insides of my lips. My jaw widened and my face and head grew, rounding to form the large feline I was I guess to become. My ears grew larger, wider and I let out a rumbling growl as the sensations I was experiencing scared the hell out of me.

I felt the way my limbs stretched and formed growing larger and longer. There is a heavy sensation as my muscles thickened and moved in different patterns over bones that were growing. The weirdest sensation was around my tailbone. I felt the bones of my spine elongating well past my body. Please...finish already. No longer did I feel the sensations of my blood boiling or my skin feeling tight or itchy. In fact, the only thing I could feel was the racing of my heart and I took a steadying breath to calm the frantic organ.

Solas watched her transition to her animal form with a large smile. He knew she was terrified of what was happening. He could feel her power, it was growing and vibrating the air with the change. She is so beautiful.

Her eyes were clenched closed, but her profile was stunning. A slow, majestic slope of her nose with a slight downward curve. Short, thick black hair covered her animal body and it was shining with the light of the moon. Her tail was long and sleek; easily the length of her body and it was thumping against the ground almost lazily. He knew she was some type of feline, but she was unlike any creature he had seen before. Her transition complete, her panting breath echoed around them in the forest as he gazed at her in wonder.

“Vhenan, this is not a creature of this world so it must be of yours.”

Her large, rounded head lifted and she moved from her laying position on the ground with an unhurried grace. He could now really look at her and saw that her large, wide-set eyes were still amber in color that he loved and they stared back at him. Her face rounded with powerful jaws, her nose wide, and triangular in shape. The whisker pads around her lips, pronounced and noticeable, her whiskers long and black as the rest of her stretched out from her lips.

Her ears were proportionate to the size of her head and well-rounded at the tips. Her neck large in diameter but not overly long. Beneath that she had wide, powerful shoulders and long, thick legs. Her body was muscular, sleek, powerful, and two times the size of Bull’s druffalo.

He had wondered if she would be small in stature as she was in her elven form. When she spoke the power of her voice vibrated through him as only an Evanuris’ voice could and he closed his eyes basking in it.

“I think it is a very big Panther or,” she replied her voice rumbling around him.

He chuckled as he watched her run her tongue over her elongated canines that protruded from either side of her mouth about four to five inches in length, much like his own.

“Or a cross with a Sabertooth, maybe?”
“A Sabertooth, what type of creature is that?”

Her eyes held his for a moment and the sight of her in this form was exciting for him.

“A very large cat that was extinct in my world, they had teeth like this. I will draw one for you.”

He moved closer towards her. Laying a hand on her large feline face, he witnessed her eyes slip closed with the simple touch and lean into his hand. The softness of her fur slightly mesmerizing and he now understood why she ran her fingers through his when in his wolven form.

“I have always believed you unique and you continue to prove it to me, vhenan. You are beyond breathtaking,” he told her.

“Sweet talker,” she growled making him laugh.

“You recognize the path for the transition so that you may change at will?”

She swiftly changes back to her own elven form wearing only one of his long tunics and exposing her beautiful legs. Slipping his arms around her, he pulled her in tightly.

“That was scary,” she said into his chest tightening her arms around him.

“The first time always is,” he replied pushing her long, wild black hair away from her face and kissed her forehead.

“I will heat some water so you may wash up a bit before we retire,” he said softly.

“You trying to tell me I smell like sweat?” she teased poking a finger into his side.

“Among other things, not all unpleasant” he teased enjoying the sound of her laughter.

“That’s precious…you tell me I stink and smell good all at the same time,” she shook her head at him with a large cheeky grin. “You really got to start writing this stuff down Solas. The woman would love the way you insult and flatter in one go,” she said before taking his hand and led him from the small grove of trees back towards their camp.

Laughing, he pulled her hand to his mouth and placed a kiss on it.

“My words are only meant for you, vhenan” he replied, her laugh caressing his skin.

"You slay me," she replied with a slight giggle.

He would never get tired of the way she teased him or the feel of her hand within his.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
The damp, chilly camp held a fire in the center with a small tarp for cover over a log. Entering cautiously, Bull looked around for his contact. Solas kept his aura linked with mine expecting an ambush and I agreed with the action. I could smell the man’s scent on the air warning me that he was close by. Something about this whole thing just didn’t sit well with me.

“All right, our Qunari contact should be here to meet us,” he said.

An elven man with dark brown hair and sharp green eyes, wearing Dalish warrior armor walked out from behind a large tree with a smirk formed on his narrow lips. I studied the elven man and saw the sword strapped to his hip and the round, metal shield strapped to his back and the braan he wore on his feet. The man was clearly not Dalish with his lack of vallis’lin, but he wore the gear. His nose was narrow and slightly hooked at the tip making his eyes look like they were a bit closer, more narrowed together than typical. His ears were long, with sharp tips laying closely against his head and he stood probably about five foot ten if he was lucky.

“It is, good to see you again, Hissrad.”

Bull’s eye slightly narrowed at the man hearing the name yet his face held a large smile of greeting.

“Gatt! Last I heard you were still in Seheron,” Bull said holding his arms out in an obvious fake gesture of greeting.

“They finally decided I’d calmed down enough to go back out into the world,” Gatt replied easily.

“Boss, this is Gatt. We worked together in Seheron,” he introduced me gesturing towards Gatt while holding my gaze.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Inquisitor. Hissrad’s reports say you’re doing good things.”

Something about the way he kept using this name I had never heard before bothered me. I couldn’t pin it down, but there was something I really didn’t like about Gatt…maybe it was he held the same look Briała had in her eyes when looking at me.

“Iron Bull’s name is Hissrad?” I finally ask pasting a fake smile on my face in greeting. If there was one thing I learned in Halamshiral, it was how to fucking smile.

“Under the Qun, we use titles, not names,” he answered me simply.

I glanced up at Bull curiously as he began explaining.

“My title was Hissrad because I was assigned to secret work. You can translate it as ‘Keeper of Illusions’, or…”

My eyes narrow at Gatt, I am not appreciating his tone.

“Well, you don’t have to say it like that,” Bull snarled back warningly surprising Gatt enough that he marginally flinched.

“It’s so nice to hear friends say good things about me in their secret spy reports,” I said calmly.

“He does…but they aren’t really secret, are they?” Gatt said looking from me to Bull.

“Look, Gatt…” Bull began and Gatt held up his hand stopping him.

“Relax, unlike our superiors, I know how it works out here. We’re in this together. The Tevinter Imperium is bad enough without the influence of this Venatori cult.”

I glanced back at Dorian when he groaned at the comment, waving his hand as if he were saying ‘hello asshole, Tevinter over here’.

“Yes, filthy, decadent brutes, the lot of them. I’m certain life would be much better for all of us under the Qun,” he spat the last word bitterly.

I noticed Bull looking at him, silently begging for him to stop. Turning towards Dorian with my eyebrow raised, I winked at him before looking back at Gatt who was talking.

“It was for me after the Qunari rescued me from slavery in Tevinter, I was eight. The Qun isn’t perfect, but it gave me a better life.”

Dorian made a scoffing noise and I rubbed my face knowing whatever came next out of his mouth was going to be bitchy, and sarcastic. Solas’ smirking smile as he stood next to Dorian with his agreement only aggravated the situation.

“Yes…one free from all that pointless free will and independent thought. Such an improvement,” he snarked.

Well, I was not disappointed. I turned around, crossing my arms and looked at Dorian as I gathered my patience.

“Listen, the Imperium and the Qunari both have their issues, can we not add to them today?”

Dorian let out a sigh of annoyance and nodded his head in agreement.

“Fair enough I suppose.”

I gave him a small grateful smile before turning back to look at Gatt and prayed that Dorian could keep his comments to himself.

“I’m not here to convert anyone. All I care about is stopping this red lyrium from reaching Minrathous. If this new form of lyrium helps them seize power in Tevinter, the war with Qunandar could get worse.”

Bull crossed his arms and nodded his large head in agreement and I could not disagree either. If the Venatori were successful in getting red lyrium into Tevinter it would turn into a nightmare for everyone.

“With this stuff, the Vints could make their slaves into an army of magical freaks. We could lose
“Seheron…and see a giant Tevinter army come marching back down here,” Bull said unhappily.

“The Ben-Hassrath agrees that’s why we’re here. Our Dreadnought is safely out of view,” he said point towards a large rocky outcropping out in the water. “And out of range of any Venatori mages on shore. We’ll need to eliminate the Venatori, and then signal the Dreadnought so it can come in and take out the smuggler ship.”

Gatt looked at me and then Bull. I ignored Gatt’s looks and gazed up at Bull wondering what he thought.

“What do you think Bull?”

My question did not surprise him as he crossed his arms and looked down at me.

“Don’t know. I’ve never liked covering a Dreadnought run. Too many ways for crap to go wrong. If our scouts underestimate enemy numbers, we’re dead. If we can’t lock down the Venatori mages, the ship is dead. It’s risky,” he finished rubbing the back of his neck.

“Riskier than letting red lyrium into Minrathous?” Gatt asked sarcastically.

The way that Gatt spoke, in general, was really starting to piss me off. Crossing my arms, I narrowed my eyes at him carefully and silently prayed for patience.

“That is why we are here, Gatt. But there could be Venatori mages on the ship as well. If the Dreadnought can’t handle them…” I began as Gatt shook his head at me and interrupted.

“It’s unlikely there’ll be more than two or three mages on the ship, and they’ll be dead by the third shot. On land though, a half-dozen Venatori attacking the Dreadnought from cover could do some serious damage.”

I didn’t know much about ships, or anything navel honestly, but this sounded like the ship was worthless.

“If it’s dangerous for the Dreadnought close to the shore, why not attack when the smugglers reach open waters?”

“Any decent smugglers ship can outrun a Dreadnought on open water. We need to catch them close to shore.”

“So, excuse my ignorance about Dreadnoughts, but if a smuggler's ship can outrun it, then what good is it?”

Bull glanced down at me before Gatt could answer.

“Firepower, Boss. They pack quite a punch,” he replied.

I nodded my head in understanding having listened to Rocky, Bull’s experienced pyro expert, talk about Qunari bombs. I looked at Gatt now curious why such a small group could only come.

“I could have crushed any Venatori resistance with the Inquisitions forces, why not use them?”

Gatt gave me a look like I was obviously ignorant to fighting and I ground my teeth together trying to keep my calm.

“Because then the Venatori would have seen you coming and run. They’d schedule a new shipment for later, and our spies might not know when or where. This is risky, yes, but it’s our best chance to
destroy the shipping operation permanently.”

Well, you’re in for a big surprise you little twirp. Leliana already has agents in the area for this little excursion. Something about you, the Qunari, and this whole situation are seven ways from Sunday wrong.

“Let’s go hold up our end of this bargain, then.”

“My agents suggested two possible locations the Venatori may be camped to guard the shore. There,” he pointed towards a lower hill to the left of us with a view of the shoreline. “And there,” he said pointing towards his right at a higher peak on the hillside that had a view of the water. “We’ll need to split up and hit both at once,” he finished crossing his arms.

“I’ll come with you, Boss. Krem can lead the Chargers. Let me fill him in; come by when you’re ready to move.”

I nodded at him and watched him walk away. For some reason, I was now glad for the handful of agents that I had in the area. Something about this whole thing, I just couldn’t shake the feeling that this was a setup or an ambush, but it smelt wrong and thankfully, my agents would be following the Chargers.

“You knew Iron Bull back when he fought in Seheron?” I finally asked Gatt turning back to look at him.

“Yes, he led the group that freed me. I was a Magister’s slave, and when the Magister went to Seheron, he brought me along, for company. Iron Bull and his men attacked my master’s ship and killed him, as well as all his soldiers. Bull set me free.”

“And you decided to start following the Qun after that?”

His face took on that smirk again that I had already decided I did not like.

“What do you think? I had just watched a giant, horned warrior kill the Magister who hurt me.”

“Hmm, interesting” I replied glancing to where Bull stood talking with his men. It sounded to me that he had traded one form of slavery for another.

“One of the few things he hasn’t shared with you, I gather. Sure, Bull, share the secret Ben-Hassrath reports, but keep that bit where you saved the elf boy to yourself.”

“That is the second time you have brought up the reports that he shares with us, is Bull in trouble?”

“The Ben-Hassrath aren’t pleased with how forthcoming Bull has been…but he was one of their best agents. He kept the streets clean in Seheron longer than anyone before him, or after. He fought until it nearly killed him. The Ben-Hassrath trusts him enough to accept how he joined the Inquisition, even if they don’t like it. Besides they hate to discard a tool that might still have some use left in it. That’s why I have a job.”

A tool? Are you fucking kidding me? Bull is not some tool to be used and then discarded when he has outlived his usefulness. What kind of fucking reasoning is that?

“It sounds like following the Qun hasn’t always been easy,” I reply trying to keep my jaw from clenching.

I felt Solas’ aura slide against my soothingly probably because he could feel my instant anger
through our connection for this brainless prick.

“I had a temper, Bull’s nickname for me, ‘Gatt’, comes from Gaatlok, the explosive power in Qunari cannons. I was so angry when I was first freed. I wanted revenge, I wanted to find my family still enslaved in Minrathous. I thought about leaving when the Qun didn’t tell me what I wanted to hear, but I didn’t.”

“Why didn’t you?” I asked him. I was honestly curious to why he wouldn’t go back for his family to get them away from slavery.

“The Qunari were always ready to listen, to teach. They cared for me as much as one of their own and if I leave, the parts of the Qun that I don’t like are never going to change.”

So...programming. He didn’t go back for them because he didn't believe he could, or should.

“How does an elf end up working for the Qunari out here?”

“The Ben-Hassrath usually pick elves or humans to work outside of Qunandar. We’re a little harder to spot. I’ve worked in Orlais and Nevarra, but only for a few years now.”

Well that’s good to know...wonder how many of the Ben-Hassrath agents are imbedded in the Inquisition?

“What did you do before that?”

“When I was old enough, I fought Tevinter forces in Seheron. I was too angry to do much else. It took me a long time to accept the Qun, to get past justice, to purpose. Somedays are still difficult.”

Ah, yes, the good old purpose not person. I could never survive under the Qun if individuality was discouraged or in this case completely squashed like a bug under a boot.

“Listen, the Qun isn’t for everyone. I like the simplicity, I like knowing my place and knowing that it’s the right place. Other parts, I’ve struggled with myself.”

Still a slave with just a different master than the one before, how does he not see it?

“Were you always a slave, Gatt? What I mean is, did you know no other life?”

His eyes slightly narrowed with the question as he took in my lack of vallis’lin.

“I was born into slavery, you clearly were not. Were you raised in an Alienage?”

I sighed and slightly shook my head glancing at him with pity that I did not disguise.

“Fair question, I was not. However, your thoughts are not surprising on why you would choose the Qun. You can’t miss something you didn’t know existed. If you have never experienced free will, you wouldn’t know what you never had.”

His eyes slightly widened with my statement and I gave him an understanding smile.

“I’ll let you know when we’re ready,” I tell him.

Gatt’s face became a calm mask of indifference.

“I await your pleasure, Inquisitor.”
I moved away from Gatt with Dorian, Solas, and Cole following quietly behind me to where Bull stood talking with his men, listening quietly while he wrapped it up.

“Once they’re down, send up your signal. That will let the Dreadnought know it’s safe to come in.”

“Understood Chief,” Krem replied quickly.

“Remember, you’re going to want to get a volley to start, but don’t get suckered into fighting at range, they’ve got mages.”

“It’s alright, we got a mage of our own” Krem replied.

I saw Dalish slap at Krem’s arm in annoyance and gave her a knowing smile.

“I’m not a mage!”

I softly chuckle because it was quite clear she was indeed a mage with the staff strapped to her back, even if I couldn’t feel her magical aura.

Bull shook his head at them and his eye narrowed in on Krem.

“Get in close and take their enchanter down before he takes over the battlefield.”

“He’ll be dead before he knows it.” Skinner tapped the tip of one of her daggers with her finger and smiled menacingly.

Bull looked at each of them and took a deep breath.

“Just…pay attention, alright? The Vints want this red lyrium shipment bad.”

“Yes, I know. Thanks, mother,” Krem replied a bit sarcastically.

“Qunari don’t have mothers, remember?” Bull responded with his eyebrow raised.

“We’ll be fine Chief,” Krem reassured quickly losing the sarcasm.

“All right, Chargers! Horns up!” He said in a commanding tone.

All of the Charges instantly stood at attention.

“Horns up!” They all yelled together.

Bull glanced over at me and gave me a sharp nod.

“I’m ready whenever you are Boss.”
I watched the Chargers start to file out and I grabbed Krem’s arm.

“Stay safe,” I tell him and he nodded patting my hand before bending and kissing me on the cheek making me smile.

Skinner and Dalish walked by each patting one of my shoulders, giving me bright smiles and soon Rocky walked over and taking my hand with a flourish, he kissed it.

“Take care of the big guy for us,” he said before turning to follow the others.

“I will,” I replied as he waved at me over his shoulder.

Stitches patted my shoulder as he went by giving me a gentle smile and Grim who I had never heard speak, and honestly thought the man mute, bent and whispered in my ear.

“Don’t trust that Gatt, there is something dodgy about him.”

The sound of his deep voice was shocking, and my eyes widened while I gave him a slow nod patting his armored shoulder.

“Agreed,” I told him. Nodding his head, he walked away.

I didn’t miss the surprised expression on Bull’s face which led me to believe that he too, had never heard Grim speak.

“Well, I guess it’s our turn to move out,” I tell him and glance around at everyone.

Dorian and Solas pulled their staves as Cole pulled his daggers, and pulling my own staff from my back, I look at Bull and gave him a sharp nod that told him ‘let’s go’.

“You gave your Chargers the easier target,” Gatt said and Bull looked at him with his own smirk.

“You think?” he replied sarcastically.

“Lower and farther from the smuggler’s ship? It’s much less likely to be heavily defended.”

I rolled my eyes and hoped that was true, but if it wasn’t then Leliana’s people would be ready.

“Suppose we’ll do the heavy lifting, then. Just like old times,” Bull said staring at him.

Gatt only laughed and shook his head at him as we started up the long trail.

“Be careful, my agents said to expect opposition ahead of the main camp,” Gatt warned as we drew
closer to the top of a hill.

Bull snorted and I could tell he was slightly annoyed as he glanced over to where Gatt walked beside him.

“We’ve all done this a few times, Gatt.”

Gatt looked at him carefully and I noticed the slight narrowing of his eyes as he spoke.

“You’ve been living outside the Qun for years now, Iron Bull. Just wanted to make sure your reflexes hadn’t gotten as soft as the rest of you.”

“Ouch,” Bull replied but I stopped and turned to look at Gatt, studying him carefully.

*Is that what this is? A test? Checking to see if Bull was still loyal to the Qun?*

Everyone quickly stopped with me looking at me oddly. I shook my head and waved my hands at them.

“Sorry,” I said ignoring the looks from Bull and everyone else and turned to continue up the hill.

“You must wish you were back in Tevinter, mage. No soldiers to guard you here, no slaves to wait on you.” Gatt said baiting Dorian with no small amount of anger.

Dorian’s eyebrow rose as he glanced at him and I gritted my teeth.

“It’s the lack of fashion that really strikes fear into my heart,” he replied sarcastically.

“You know nothing of fear,” Gatt replied menacingly and I turned to gaze at him.

“And do you intend to teach me?” Dorian baited back and I internally groaned.

“No, you serve the Inquisition and the Ben-Hassrath wish an alliance. For now, that is enough,” Gatt replied glaring at him.

Cresting the top of the hill, I saw the small group of Venatori and Bull moved to stand next to me.

“Vints up ahead.”

I nodded my head in agreement as Gatt spoke from the other side of me.

“Don’t let them warn the others.”

I looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Fuck Gatt, is this your first time fighting Venatori? Because it sure as hell isn’t ours,” I said to him sarcastically enjoying the slight shock on his face with my blunt words. Bull and Dorian chuckled and Solas’ aura slipped against mine tenderly as we spread out quietly to take down the small group.

I watched as Gatt’s eyes blew wide with Cole’s sudden disappearance only to reappear behind a Venatori mage in the thick of the small group and slice his throat, taking him down quickly before disappearing again. I couldn’t prevent the small smirk from forming on my face at his reaction.

Quickly calling for Fade fire to fall from the skies, there were shouts of surprise from the rest of the Venatori. Bull rushed towards a warrior holding his shield completely unprepared for the hard three-hundred-pound body slamming into him.
The fight was over quickly, and Cole reappeared next to me and I smiled at him.

“Iron Bull’s reports say you’re a demon,” Gatt said eyeing Cole carefully.

“I’m trying not to be. Sometimes, it’s hard. I want to kill a lot of people, but I don’t” Cole replied simply.

“Because the Inquisitor has bound you?” Gatt asked him sounding like he was sure that is what I had done.

My eyes narrowed at Gatt and Cole shook his head at him, his face slightly surprised.

“Because it’s not right; she is my friend,” he replied.

Gatt looked at him with no small amount of disgust and looked at Bull.

“How can you work with a demon?”

“He’s all right,” Bull replied calmly staring at Gatt.

Gatt just shook his head at him and we moved through the camp to continue towards the main one. Walking up the next hill, Gatt glanced from me to Solas and I wanted to groan knowing he was now going to try saying something to Solas now.

“I don’t see any tattoos, but you’re carrying a staff. Are you from a Chantry Circle?”

I stopped and rubbed my face giving Gat an angry stare as Solas glared at him not even trying to hide his displeasure.

“No, and I would prefer not to discuss it,” he replied with a crisp, clipped tone.

“Have I done something to offend you?” Gatt asked him and I looked at Bull, shaking my head. *That’s a loaded question.*

“You joined the Qun,” he replied simply and I hid my knowing smile at what was to come. If there was anything to know about my wolf, he disliked the Qun more than he did the Dalish.

“After they rescued me from slavery,” Gatt replied slightly exasperated.

“And put you into something worse. A slave may always struggle for freedom, but you among the Qun have been taught not to think” Solas replied his voice angry and disgusted.

Bull rubbed his face and looked at him almost pleadingly.

“Solas, not the time.”

Solas held Bull’s gaze for a moment before he nodded his head, his lips an angry slash across his face as he stared directly ahead.

Gatt suddenly turned to look at me and my eyes narrowed at him showing my displeasure with his sudden interest in who was in our group.

“I am sure you take great pleasure in pissing people off Gatt, but I will warn you now. Alliance or no, I will help you take a long walk off of one of these cliffs edges if you try gathering information from me for your reports or continue to passive-aggressively offend any more of *my* team. Do we understand each other?”
I held his hardened green gaze with one of my own and he gave me a sharp nod.

“Let’s get this fucking over with already,” I told Bull and saw his quick nod of agreement.

We moved towards the main camp and both Cole and I swiftly disappeared. Cole moved to where the Venatori mage stood, while I moved to get behind the group as Bull quickly charged in.

The Venatori fell quickly and slipping my staff onto my back, Gatt spoke to Bull.

“Can you make out any of your mercenaries down there?”

Bull looked out in the direction where Krem and the rest of the Chargers would be and shook his head.

“Not yet,” he replied as his eye scanned the area.

“Worried?” Gatt said with a smirk.

“They’re my men. I’ve been with some of them for years.”

I scanned the area and pointed when I saw the flare of mage fire from Dalish.

“There,” I said.

Bull moved to stand next to me and he nodded when he saw that they were almost finished.

“We’re clear, Gatt,” Bull said calmly.

Gatt moved towards the small fire built on the edge of the cliff.

“Right, signaling the dreadnought.”

Pulling a small woolen ball from his pocket, he placed it in the fire and within seconds it shot a red flare into the air. I saw the other one come from the other camp and gave Bull a smile.

“Chargers already sent theirs up, see ‘em down there?”

“I knew you gave them the easier job,” Gatt said.

Bull just smiled at him as we stood to watch a large, wooden ship move slowly out from behind the rock formation. The hull of the ship looked to have horns like the Qunari, mounted on it. The overall bulk of the ship helped me understand why it would move quite slowly in the water compared to a smuggler’s ship.

“That brings back memories,” Bull commented watching it glide through the water.

The dreadnought fired on the smuggler’s ship as soon as it came into range, sinking it quickly in two shots.

“Nice one,” he said slightly chuckling.

No sooner is the smuggler’s ship sunk, Venatori mages came from the cover of the treeline heading directly to where Krem and the Chargers were holding the shoreline.

“Crap,” Bull said.

“There are quite a few of them, Bull,” I told him glancing at the horn on his hip.
“Yeah,” he said moving to grab the horn as Gatt spoke up hurriedly.

“Your men need to hold that position, Bull.”

My eyes narrowed at him with his words, as Bull looked at him angrily.

“They do that, they’re dead,” he replied.

“And if they don’t, the Venatori retake it and the dreadnought is dead. You’d be throwing away an alliance between the Inquisition and the Qunari. You’d be declaring yourself, Tal-Vashoth,” he said in exasperation.

Bull glanced at Gatt angrily and Gatt pressed.

“With all you’ve given the Inquisition, half the Ben-Hassrath think you’ve betrayed us already! I stood up for you, Hisrrad. I told them you would never become Tal-Vashoth!”

“They’re my men,” Bull replied poking his finger angrily into Gatt’s chest.

“I know, but you need to do what is right, Hisrrad. For this alliance and for the Qun.”

This was a fucking set up…they didn’t want an alliance, they were testing him!

Bull looked at me questioningly and I walked around him towards Gatt angrily.

“This was never about any fucking alliance, you and your fucking Qun wanted to make sure Bull hadn’t turned traitor.”

Gatt backed away from me as my voice took on a vibrating growl of anger while I slowly stalked towards him. I looked at the elf in disgust and spat at him.

“We are not basra that can be discarded because you don’t see any purpose in us,” I spat angrily before gripping the elf with the Fade and shoving him to the ground holding him.

Turning towards Bull, I stared at him angrily, breathing heavily with my outrage at the whole situation.

“What will you do Bull? Because I will not choose for you.”

Bull looked at me for a short moment before pulling his horn and blowing the signal for the Chargers to retreat and I stared at Gatt as I held him to the ground coldly.

“You can return to your Ben-Hassrath and tell them the Inquisitor sends her regards and they can take their alliance and cram it straight up their collective asses.”

Letting him suddenly go, Gatt grabbed at his chest dragging in a breath and cautiously moved to stand. I shot a fireball into the air and the Venatori that had turned their focus back on the dreadnought in the water were preparing to fire. With their backs turned away from the treeline, Leliana’s agents came out from behind the trees and sent a volley of arrows into the air, taking down the mages killing them all.

Bull saw the Inquisition agents and looked at me shaking his head. He had to know I would never sacrifice anyone of them, they were my friends and he was my family.

“Get me away from this waste of oxygen before I happily throw him over the cliff,” I said angrily moving away from the elf who stared at the Inquisition agents on the beach removing the Venatori
threat to the dreadnought.

Chapter End Notes

basra - (Qunlat) Rude term for non-Qunari people
The Storm Coast...Again

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, who leave comments for me to enjoy. It is wonderful that so many of you are enjoying the story as it unfolds.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Our walk back towards the camp was silent. I knew it would weigh heavily on Bull leaving the Qun. He had fought and killed so many Tal-Vashoth in Seheron. He had witnessed their brutality, becoming savage, mindless beasts. For him, being declared Tal-Vashoth would only make him wonder if he too, would become some mindless beast without the Qun to follow.

Trying to wrap my brain around the whole premise of the Qun was giving me a headache. Right this second, I believe I will focus on what actually just happened and fuck trying to understand the Qun.

Hopefully, the Qunari won’t see my action as a declaration of war. I needed to get a message to Leliana quickly to tell her what happened. The Venatori were prepared for the Qunari attack if the twelve Venatori mages on the beach were anything to go by. Which leads me to my next conclusion, the smuggler’s ship was empty because someone tipped them we were coming.

Entering the camp, Krem rushed towards Bull with a large grin on his face full of excitement.

“Chief, did you see how quick those archers took out the Venatori mages? Maker damn sight them, showing up when they did.”

Bull smiled and clapped him on the shoulder.

“I did, it was great. You guys did a great job too,” he replied.

“I thought for sure we were done for when I saw all those mages then we heard the sound of the horn to retreat,” Krem said rubbing his face.

I caught the small stiffening in Bull's posture and stopped next to him and Krem.

“There’s a cask of ale in the large tent,” I told them before walking towards Charter, one of Leliana’s best agents that had helped today.

Bull placed his large hand on my shoulder stopping me before I could go too far, and I looked up at him.

“I regret nothing, Boss.”

*Somehow the big ass knew I would worry about him.* Smiling, I wrapped my arms around his large middle. Sadly I could not reach all the way around, but the sentiment was the same.

“Good, I’m proud of you Bull. Now go celebrate with your men. They’ve earned it,” I said letting him go.

*****
The Storm Coast is pretty with all its majestic, mountainous views, and large dense forests. Except for the fucking bears...everywhere I went there was a fucking bear. This is actually...I hate to admit this to myself, but this place is worse than the Hinterlands when it comes to bears. Sighing heavily, I look out over the water from where we have established the main camp.

Just one more day, I tell myself, and I can get off this soggy piece of rock. I took the talisman I needed to challenge the Hessarian asshole from one of the soldiers and slipped it into my pocket.

“Let’s go and introduce ourselves to the Blades of Hessarian,” I tell them gesturing for them to move out.

We walked in silence along the coastal edge and I glanced towards the hill we had climbed the day I got shot. I remember how we had found our dead soldiers in the moldy cabin, and the fight against the Hessarian's when we left the cabin. Knowing this was the first place I had gotten shot made me a little twitchy. It obviously didn’t hold any great memories for Solas either since he had not dropped our aura link since we arrived. In itself, it was kind of endearing when I thought about our connection if not reassuring that he was with me.

We continued to follow the water’s edge towards the Hessarian base. Scouts informed me that we would run into the least amount of resistance from the Hessarian’s patrolling the more mountainous areas. My scouts had not been wrong; there were no Hessarian patrols between this stretch of beach.

We came around a rocky outcropping when I saw the large poles of wood with sharpened tips. They were buried in the ground pointing outward, surrounding the compound. I pulled the talisman from my pocket as we approached the base, and the two guards out front pulled their blades. Holding up the stupid talisman, I looked from one guard to the other.

“I am Inquisitor Lavellan; I come to challenge your leader.”

The two guards slid their blades back into their scabbards before opening the large wooden door and I walked in with the other's close behind.

“A challenger?” one of the guards whispered from the side of his mouth.

The other darted a look at him and shrugged.

“The others failed, this shouldn’t take long she’s not that big.”

I held back a snarky response and walked into the main area.

“She comes with a challenge,” one of the guards yelled from behind us with his hand cupped around his mouth.

I glance back at the guard yelling before looking around the open courtyard of the ragtag base. The Hessarian leader walked out of the only small cabin inside the base. He was a tall man. If she were to guess, he was approximately six foot six maybe seven, with hair sheared close to his scalp leaving half an inch of hair, and a thick, blonde beard like a woodsman. He was big and bulky looking in his dark brown leather armor. Definitely not as large as Bull, but he was built strong, probably similar to the Avaar men I had met in the bog. God that place was disgusting, suppressing a shiver I focused on the leader.

“So you would challenge the Blades of Hessarian?” He inquired with a deep, rumbling voice.

I took in the two Mabari war dogs in armor that followed him out of his cabin before I looked at him, narrowing my gaze and answered.
“No, I came to challenge their leader. Is that you?”

He nodded his head ‘yes’, and looked me up and down slightly shaking his head. His lips formed a condescending smirk before reaching my eyes that had narrowed with blatant disgust with the leader.

“You killed Inquisition soldiers…my soldiers. Will you answer my challenge or not?”

Without any word, he snapped his fingers and his dogs lunged from his side. Solas cast a barrier over me with the Hessarian leader’s actions.

Bull grabbed one around the throat as it lunged towards me throwing it away, while Solas froze the other. Casting Fade fist, it shattered the frozen war hound.

“That’s not very honorable of you,” I spat at the leader seeing the sneer on his face.

“So be it,” I said angrily pulling the fade around me.

I started hammering Fade fists at the leader one right after the other. Each strike pushing the large man back a foot, angering him. He was strong to still keep standing after each hit. I changed my approach to lightning and he finally got the break in my assault he needed and tried lunging at me.

Casting the spell easily, I disappeared and the leader fell to a knee with his momentum. Scrambling up, he swung his head from side to side, his eyes darting around looking for where I had gone. Removing the spell, I appeared behind the leaders back and slid the blade end of my staff through him. The large man hit his knees in confusion and pain holding his stomach where my blade had pierced through. I walked around him towards Cole as the man was now more my height, glaring angrily at him before taking the blade Cole held out for me.

Turning back towards the Hessarian leader, I smiled at him coldly. Sliding the blade over his throat and wiping it off on his shoulder before he could slide sideways to the ground to bleed out.

“It is done, as long as everyone here will respect the outcome.”

Solas observed the graceful way she cast her spells in quick, fluid motions. His vhenan did not think she was graceful, but in this, in battle, she was beautiful. The looks on his fellow companions expressed shock with her aggression, especially Dorian’s with the way she controlled the Fade and pummeled the leader relentlessly. Her magic was tangible on the air; the smell of ozone permeated the area surrounding them. He was aware that soon after she obtained her animal form, her magic’s power had significantly grown.

Trying as he knew it was for her, he was pleased that she had grown into her mantle as Inquisitor and with Assan’s memories she had grown into a formidable warrior. He worried at times when he noticed her lack of appetite, the darker circles that formed under her eyes when she would not get enough sleep. Her concern over trivial matters that her advisors should be concerned about kept her awake with worry.

Their trip to Redcliffe to help Cole and Dorian had been difficult enough. She had worried over Cole, and what could happen to him. Even he had been concerned for the Spirits wellbeing. He’d watched as she picked at her meals as they left Redcliffe, frustrating him. The hard push to reach the Storm Coast in time to meet the Qunari contact had worried her endlessly and he could see the physical side effects of her worries.
He saw Dorian’s flinch as Fenlin slid Cole’s knife over the Hessarian leader’s throat while Bull looked on without concern. He understood that Dorian preferred to think of Fenlin as a woman who was too kind or caring for such brutal actions. For himself and Bull, they were aware of the consequences if she were to allow the Hessarian leader to live.

Dorian would prefer to believe Fenlin incapable of such apathetic killing of another. In fact, it was not that his vhenan uncaring with using such actions, she was only being practical. He knew that she would do anything if it were to protect those she cared for and removing this leader would protect the Inquisition soldiers from Hessarian attacks.

His focus returned to her when he felt the weariness in her aura slide through his own. He kept the frown from forming while letting his eyes follow her movements. He could see the small tale tell signs of exhaustion around the lines of her mouth and this was concerning to him. He would discuss with her later what was consuming her thoughts.

I turned back towards Cole, holding his dagger out and he slipped it back into the scabbard laced to his thigh. I ignored the look of disbelief from Dorian at how cold I was acting and focused on the young man who was walking towards us. I watched him carefully as he approached.

"Your Worship, the Blades of Hessarian are at your service. If you want eyes on the coast, here we are."

_Can it really be that simple?_ I stared at the man for a moment.

"Just like that, you and your blades are loyal to the Inquisition. No ill will over what happened with your former leader?"

"We’re loyal to you. I suppose that’s the same thing, your Worship. The man was a bastard. You’re not the first to stand up to him, you’re just the first to win, and we’re happy with that. Besides, I would rather swear my life to the Herald of Andraste."

Trying not to wrinkle my nose at hearing that title, well okay then, _it is that simple._ I held my arm out to him and he grasped it just beneath the elbow.

"Then I will inform the Commander of my forces that you are here and work for me now."

He nodded his head and let my arm go. I motioned for everyone to follow me out leaving the small base.

Later around the fire, I explained to everyone that we would close the last rift on the shoreline before heading out to Crestwood to handle the dragon. I visibly watched Bull’s ears perk up at the word ‘dragon’.

"We’re going to kill a dragon?" he questioned, his voice full of barely restrained excitement.

I nodded my head ‘yes’ at him, linking my hands together between my knees.

"Sadly, yes, we are going to have to kill her. She has broadened her eating habits to the locals, and they have asked for help in removing her."
Bull had a large grin on his face.

“Hot damn!” he said rubbing his hands together in expectation.

"This is what get's you so excited...fighting a dragon," Dorian quipped watching Bull.

"Kadan...it's a dragon...DRAGON" he replied enunciating each letter as if that would make his meaning clear.

"It is LUNACY," Dorian replied enunciating the letters as he had sarcastically.

Bull waved him off.

Ignoring the two, I glanced at the others around the fire.

“Cassandra is meeting us there with everyone else. Us, them, and the Chargers should be enough to handle the creature.”

I got up and looked at everyone, rubbing my hands over the tops of my legs. *I am really not looking forward to that battle.*

“Try not to stay up too late, I want to get an early start for that rift and be on the road by mid-morning for Crestwood.”

Everyone nodded their heads and waved at me as I left for my tent. Solas stood and followed me, warding the opening after it was tied closed.

“Your mind is heavy, vhenan” he whispered near my ear and I let out a heavy sigh leaning back against him.

“I am just tired is all,” I tell him giving him a tired smile over my shoulder.

“It has been trying these past few weeks; I am not surprised that you are weary.”

He helped me with the buckles of my chest piece, and I slipped it over my head before unhooking the clasps of the chainmail and rolling it off. I went to the small basin and pouring water in it, I heated it to clean up a bit before bed. Finished, I slipped his tunic over my head that I had taken as a nightshirt, and poured the water outside before putting the basin back.

Tumbling into our bedroll tiredly, Solas went through the same motions as I closed my eyes recounting the day while listening absently to his clean up as well. He slipped between the covers and pulled me towards him, and I curled against his side. His fingers ran through my hair soothingly while I listened to the steady thump of his heartbeat that lulled me into a calmer state.

“You are worried about the dragon,” he said softly.

The soft rumble of his voice beneath my cheek was comforting, and I let out a heavy sigh.

“I am worried about everything,” I reply before I start to explain. “I am worried that the Qunari might mistake my actions as an act of war. I worry about people getting hurt while fighting, I worry about what is expected of me as an Evanuris and will I meet those expectations. I worry about you…I worry.”

Solas quietly listened to me, running his fingers through my hair.

“I do not believe you were wrong about the Qunari testing Bull’s allegiance with their offer of an
alliance. You did save their Dreadnought with your actions and removed the Venatori. Their loss of Bull as an agent is what they will focus on, nothing more."

His words were logical, and in some ways made me feel a bit better about what happened with Gatt, although I still wouldn’t mind throwing that guy off a cliff.

“I know you did not want to have to kill the dragon, vhenan. They are majestic creatures, but what it is doing to the people of Crestwood cannot be allowed to continue."

I sighed knowing he was right about that, but I still didn't like it.

"People will always sustain injuries in any battle. Your worry for them is noble and understandable; they are doing what you tell them to. I cannot tell you to stop worrying about people you care about because it would change your very nature if you were to cease doing so."

I softly snorted and rubbed my cheek against his chest. Why does he always have to make fucking sense?

“To address your concerns over expectations of you as an Evanuris, I can only advise that the expectations are of your own making. What do you want to accomplish? What will you do with the knowledge and the power that you have?”

I mulled his question around for a moment and glanced up at him.

“I want to help the people, and not just our people but all the people if I can.”

He smiled tenderly and kissed my forehead.

“Then that is what is expected of you, vhenan.”

Hmm, that will be harder than it sounds but I wouldn’t mind tackling that job. I would rather be known as someone who helps than someone who destroys.

“Now perhaps you will tell me why you worry about me?”

His soft question pulling me from my own thoughts, I held his blue gaze.

“Because I love you, and don’t want to lose you, you old fool. It cannot be hard to understand,” I teased.

Solas’ lip slight curled up at the sides and his low rumbling laughter as he shook his head lightened the mood I had gotten into with my worrying.

“I concede your point. I too feel the same for you, without the fool part of course,” he teased making me laugh.

“Oh no, I’m a fool, just for you,” I tell him leaning up to press my lips against his.

His arms wrapped tightly around me, and his soft chuckle as we kissed swept my worries right out of the tent.

“Then that would make us both fools,” he replied kissing me again.

Melting into him, I wrapped my arms around his neck. Somedays, it really pays to be a fool.
Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Thanks everyone for your continued support!

Finally reaching Caer Bronach, I waved at Sera as we walked through the door.

“Fenni,” Sera yelled skipping towards me.

Instantly, I was swamped with strong arms that hugged me tightly.

“Sera,” I said a bit breathless from the pressure of her arms around me.

Sera slipped her arm over my shoulders and walked with me glancing around at the others as they moved through the door. Solas smiled at me as he entered and slowly shook his head at seeing Sera somewhat draped over me.

“Did you miss me?” she said placing a lip-smacking kiss on my cheek.

“Ugh, maybe a little” I joked with her playfully wiping my cheek.

Cassandra walked out the door that led to a small office smiling once she saw me.

“Hey Cassandra, I hope you haven’t been waiting long,” I said walking towards her with Sera still holding on.

“No, we got here a few days ago. I visited the town and it is recovering very well. The walls are repaired and there are plenty of new buildings, and the fields are plowed once more. Once this dragon threat is removed, they will all breathe easier.”

“I’ll bet,” I replied smiling at her. Sera slipped her arm off and kissed my cheek again before skipping off towards Cole and Bull.

Cassandra’s eyes gravitated to where Bull stood speaking quietly with Cole.

“I received a copy of your missive to Leliana, how is the big lug doing?”

I glanced at her with a partial smile and then looked back to where Bull stood.

“I can see he is hurting, but I also think he approves of his decision to choose his men over the Qun. I just hope the Qunari don’t take my actions as aggression towards them.”

Cassandra snorted and motioned for me to follow her back into the small office.

“If anything, they should be thanking you for saving their ship. Did Bull agree with your assessment of the situation? That you believed it was all a test for him?”

I nodded my head ‘yes’.

“He did. He knew something was up when it was Gatt that was our Qunari contact. I’m just glad that
Leliana agreed with me and my paranoia and sent those agents.”

Cassandra chuckled and shook her head.

“Leliana agreed with you because she did not believe the offer of an alliance to be genuine either.”

Softly laughing, I glance at the list she held out to me curiously.

“This is the list of Qunari spies within the inquisition that Leliana knows about.”

My eyebrow rose as I studied the list of thirteen names. *It was as Gatt had told me…elves and humans.* Pinching the bridge of my nose, I felt a headache coming on.

“I presume that Leliana is watching them closely?” I asked her handing the paper back to her.

“Yes, she is” she replied.

I let out a heavy sigh and rubbed my face. *I am so tired of this shit.*

“Okay, I will worry about the worms in our apple barrel when I get back to Skyhold.”

Cassandra chuckled and patted my shoulder before I walked from the small room.

“And I’m telling you, Amatus…she has changed,” Dorian said quietly looking at Bull.

Bull shook his head at him.

“Kadan, she is growing into a warrior. Warriors see battle and over time they become disciplined,” he replied calmly while Dorian shook his head at him.

“It is not just the way she killed that Hessarian leader, but also how she dealt with Gatt. You saw the way she warped the Veil and picked the small man up before slamming him into the ground. Her voice…it echoed as she spoke,” he told him and saw Bull's skepticism.

Throwing his hands up at him in frustration, he turned away from him.

“What I saw was anger. She was angry that they were forcing me to choose between my men and them. I saw her anger that they used the Inquisition for something that was an obvious setup. But what I saw mostly was she was angry that she couldn’t protect her friends on the other side of the damn beach.”

Dorian glanced at him and let out a heavy sigh, *she is close with Bull's men.*

“Perhaps you are correct Amatus,” he said before kissing his cheek.

He still couldn't get rid of the feeling that something had changed in his friend as he left their tent.

*****

The dawn of day brought puffy white clouds that floated against a bright blue sky backdrop. The sun was bright, and the morning air was not too cold but it was promising to be a beautiful day. Tightening the buckles around my thighs that held my leg armor on, Solas laid his hand on the small
of my back.

"I see you added another hole in the belt."

He held my gaze for a silent moment and I shook my head returning to finish tightening the belt. I already knew where his comment would lead and I was not about to have a discussion on eating habits and the fact that when I get stressed, weight doesn't like me.

"Solas, I love you very much and any other day I would be more than happy to sit through another one of your lectures about proper eating habits and stress management. But today is not a good day for this lecture. Would you be willing to reschedule this moment of education for perhaps tomorrow?"

The corner's of his lips twitched and I could see that he was trying not to smile at my obvious strategy. He folded his arms behind his back and I internally groaned.

"I was unaware that I lecture you so often," he replied.

A burst of laughter escaped and I grabbed my staff.

"If I had a sovereign for every lecture you have given me, Solas, the Inquisition wouldn't need Josephine and her ingenious ways of making money."

He chuckled and bent to give me a quick kiss.

"I shall endeavor to refrain from lecturing you so often," he said kissing me again.

Grabbing the front of his chest piece, I pulled him back towards me with a cheeky smile.

"And I shall endeavor to give your mouth something else to do."

Solas' eyes sparkled mischievously before he closed them and pressed his lips to mine.

"Incorrigible," he breathed against my mouth.

We took the path towards the ruins behind Caer Bronach that the dragon was observed to be nesting in from the keep. I had gotten up earlier than the others and slipped down this path with Solas to draw the magnificent creature in her element. I glanced at the rocky outcrop we had sat on while I sketched the beautiful beast. Something about her wild nature called to me even as she slept curled up in the middle of the ruins. I glanced towards Bull when I heard his laughter.

Shaking my head, Bull could barely contain his excitement over the coming battle with the large beast. He was rubbing his hands excitedly and barely contained his bouncing step as he walked down the long path. When we reached the bottom of the hill, I gazed out over the large field of broken stone walls and pillars. My only hope was that no one got seriously hurt today. I glanced back around at the group of men and women all in different levels of conversation or silence that was with me today.

Hawke and Fenris walked quietly, while Sera talked non-stop next to them. Cassandra was rolling her eyes, and Varric walked on the other side of her chuckling. Dorian walked beside Bull shaking his head at something Bull was saying and Cole walked beside me and Solas.
“She is very big,” Cole said quietly as he saw her perched on the broken ruin.

I glance at him and nod my head in agreement.

“That she is,” I replied.

When we finally reached the outer edges of the nesting grounds, I raised my hand up in a silent motion for everyone to halt as I turned to look at them.

“We work in a buddy system, and that means everyone,” I said staring directly at Bull. “Dorian, Sera, Cole please cover our very excited Bull. Varric, Fenris, Hawke I need you to cover Cassandra. Krem, you and the Chargers come in once they have her attention. Dalish can come with Solas and I, we will be hanging back working rotations of barriers and ranged fire along with Sera, Hawke, and Varric from their positions. Stay safe everyone.”

Bull raised his axe and kissed Dorian quickly on the lips as Dorian touched his face making him focus for one second.

“Please be safe Amatus, I will be very angry if you find yourself hurt or dead.”

Bull smiled and kissed him quickly again, swatting Dorian on the ass as he turned with the others towards the dragon. Varric held Cassandra's gaze for a moment before whispering, “don’t get hurt.” She nodded her head and flashed him a bright smile before she walked away with Cole, Fenris, and Bull.

Watching Cassandra taunt the dragon was unlike anything I could have ever imagined. I knew her family was well known as famed dragon slayers and I could definitely see why. She was fearless. Casting a barrier over her as she lifted her shield, the large creature blew fire at her bathing her shield in flame, and I held my breath.

I exhaled loudly when Cassandra slammed her shield into the dragon’s nose, stunning it. My stomach clenched with anxiety as I cast another barrier over her before sending a barrage of ice bolts at the creature, as the dragon took another swipe at Cassandra with one of its huge claws. From my distance, I could see that Cassandra had a large smile on her face as she just nimbly danced and rolled out of its reach again.

Tiring the beast took a while and Cassandra was in complete control of the battle looking absolutely tireless. Between her, Bull, and Fenris, they swapped taunting the creature. It was during one of those changes when the animal’s focus was on Bull that I watched in amazed horror while Cassandra ran up the dragon’s tail onto its back. Casting another barrier over her and sending up a quick prayer to any deity listening to keep her safe, I cast more ice bolts at the creature.

Just as the creature was beginning to create a sucking wind tunnel with its wings, Cassandra, with graceful elegance, slammed her blade into the creature’s enormous skull. The dragon roared loudly with the sudden pain, and Cassandra held onto the hilt of her sword with one hand and one of the dragon’s horns with the other.

The dragon’s mouth opened wide, throwing its head back roaming with rage and pain. Cassandra wrapped her leg around the horn she was holding to keep her place as it flailed its head from side to side trying to shake her off before finally falling. I was in awe how Cassandra rode the beast as it fell and gracefully rolled away from the animal quickly when its head hit the ground with a loud thump. Bull burst into laughter with Cassandra.

“That was badass!” Bull yelled before picking Cassandra up and holding her in the air as if she
weighed no more than a sack of potatoes and spun her around excitedly.


Everyone laughed at the show. I however was still taken aback at having felt the creature’s spirit leave its body as it died. Glancing around grateful that everyone was okay I felt a euphoric relief flood my body. Smiling sadly, I walked to where everyone stood staring at the enormous beast. Reaching out, I touched its still warm face remorseful that we had to kill it.

“Well the people of Crestwood should breathe easier now that she is dead,” I said miserably.

I studied the hardened scales around the face of the creature in awe at the multi-toned colors ranging between the spectrums of yellow to red. It was rainbow-like with the way the sun glinted off of them and let out a heavy sigh.

“Well, let’s get some people out here to harvest the animal, I don’t want any of it to go to waste.”

Cassandra nodded her head in agreement.

“Of course Fenlin,” she said as I continued to stare at the enormous head.

I would never in my lifetime have dreamed of such a creature existing. I watched as Dorian removed a tooth from the animal out of the corner of my eye, and raised my eyebrow questioningly at him. Dorian blushed as he answered.

“I need it for something,” he said quickly as he slid the tooth into a small bag and hid it beneath his armor.

Shrugging with indifference, I walked back towards Solas. He slid his arm around my shoulders pulling me against his side and I felt his aura slide against mine affectionately. Glancing up at him, he gave me a gentle, understanding smile and I laid my head against him as we headed back towards the keep.
The loud blare of the horn sounding their arrival echoed through the air. The bridge leading to the castle was lined with people. It appeared that our return to Skyhold would resemble a parade. Everyone had clearly been told of our success in slaying the dragon in Crestwood, and the large dragon’s head in the back of a wagon confirmed our deed. Now the people of Skyhold were lined along the bridge and battlements cheering our triumphant return.

I smiled and waved at people as I thought about my conversation with Solas the night we killed the dragon. When I had told him about feeling the creature’s spirit leave, he had looked at me curiously because he had not. When he started telling me about mages in Arlathan that could feel the spirits of dragons and speak to the majestic creatures, I was instantly curious. If there was a way to talk to them, then I won’t have to kill another one. He took me to an area in the Vir ‘Dirthara and found the book that held the information we were seeking.

My eyes poured over the information hungrily and it did not surprise me to read that Mythal had been such a mage who could speak to them; she did change into a dragon so it made sense. But how do you learn to talk to them? I wondered before pushing my thoughts on the matter to the mental folder marked for later when we reached the stables.

Solas slid off Siugen and walked over to help me down from Inansha. Smiling at him gratefully, I gave him a quick kiss before he put me on the ground.

“Shall I gather some lunch and prepare our bath?” he inquired giving me a lopsided smile from my passing kiss over his lips.

Butterflies always flew in my stomach at the sight of that small, little smile on his lips and I shook my head.

“I need to check in with Josephine first; you don’t have to wait for me.”

He took my hand and rubbed my knuckles with his thumb slowly sending tingles racing up my arm.

“Find me in the rotunda when you are ready to adjourn to our chambers. I shall gather Raj from Commander Cullen.”

Smiling because he wanted to wait for me, I slowly nodded my head in agreement and his fingers squeezed mine gently before he took our packs and left the barn. I watched him walk away and sighed, damn I love watching that man walk. Turning around when I heard my name, I found Riley standing next to Etta’s stall.

“Riley, how is my girl Etta?” I asked him.
He nodded his head and patted Etta’s face.

“She is healing quite nicely, Fenlin. Maybe another month or two and she will be able to leave again,” he replied.

Walking towards him with Inansha following, I opened the Hart’s stall and he walked in.

“That is really good to hear,” I tell him while pouring out some grain for Inansha into a bucket.

Riley moved to take the grain bucket from me and I gave him a patient smile while holding the bucket close. Oh no you don’t good sir, this is my time.

“This is something I do, Riley. I know it is your job, but this is a way for me to unwind my mind and muscles before I meet with my advisors.”

He looked at me somewhat curiously before holding his hands up in retreat, smiling.

“As you wish,” he replied and moved to get the rest of the animals settled for the night.

Smiling at him I turned and poured the grain into the small tough and grabbed the currying brush. As Inansha ate his grain, I brushed his coat to a silken black shine. When I was finished with that, I refilled his water before rubbing his face in goodbye. Inansha lipped my shoulder so he could give me a soft head-butt into my chest, the silly act always made me smile. Ready to face my Ambassador, I locked the gate and left the barn. Jogging up the stairs that led to the back entrance leading into the kitchen, I pulled the door open.

Instantly the smells of freshly baked bread, roasting meats, and spices filled my senses and my mouth watered while my stomach growled hungrily. Sneaking a fresh, out of the oven roll from a basket, I waved at Francois as I passed. Peeling off a piece of the flaky warm bread and popping it into my mouth, I moved quickly out of his way as he was busy preparing dinner and slipped out the door. Headed for the stairs I glanced at the warded door and sighed heavily as I passed. I can’t ignore the elephant in the room forever. Popping another piece of the flaky bread into my mouth, I rounded the corridor and jogged up the steps.

Putting the last of the bread in my mouth, I chewed quickly before I opened the door that led to Josephine’s office. The sound of a man’s voice stopped me instantly in the doorway. Knocking tentatively on her door I peaked in. Smiling at her as she looked at me, the man in the chair turned and I recognized that it was King Theirin of Ferelden she had been talking with.

Shit!

“Oh, I am sorry to interrupt Josephine, I can come back later,” I said starting to back out of the doorway hastily.

“No, Inquisitor, please come in. The King is actually here to see you,” she said quickly with a polite smile motioning for me to enter.

Walking in hesitantly, I shut the door behind me as the King stood.

“Your Highness, it is good to see you again,” I said bowing quickly towards him.

He stood and walked towards me with a little smile that only lifted the corners of his lips and took my hand, slightly startling me. At least he isn’t trying to grab the hand with the anchor on it, God how I hate when men do that.
“Please, just call me Alistair, my lady,” he said bending to place a brief kiss on my hand.

As a former Templar and Grey Warden, I could be honest and say the man was attractive. Another thing my graphics screwed me on, I thought with an internal sigh.

He wore his sandy blonde hair with red highlights short and well-groomed for his thick wavy hair, not much different than Cullen’s. His eyes were striking as they resembled a fine, single malt scotch whiskey that held my gaze attentively and he wore a five o’clock shadow like a master. He was dressed in a striking green tunic that hugged his well-built frame, accentuating his broad shoulders and wide chest and the color set off the small green and gold flecks in his eyes. He wore black leathers with matching boots highlighting his muscular legs that were actually quite long.

But then again everyone’s legs are longer than mine, I joke with myself. Overall, Ferelden’s king is a very handsome man. I wonder what he wants with me. Clearing my throat, I smiled at him and nodded my head in agreement to his request.

“I will, if you will call me, Fenlin,” I replied and his smile grew larger.

Eeegads! The sexy smile thing must be something they teach in Templar school because Cullen has one just as magnetic.

“Then it is settled,” Alistair said with a slight flare to his hand movement and I laughed.

One of the things I remembered from the first game was that he really liked cheese and was generally a really nice guy with a sense of humor.

Josephine delicately cleared her throat and I gazed at her waiting for what she had to say. Josephine never cleared her throat unless there was going to be something unpleasant that followed.

“The King has come because of what you have accomplished with Crestwood and would like to show his appreciation for your thoughtfulness, especially with the way you handled Caer Bronach,” she said.

Well, that doesn’t sound horrible, maybe she just had phlegm. I turn my gaze back to Alistair and smile.

“I only hope you will allow one of Leliana’s agents to have a spot there. I am sure that an agreement can be reached that is beneficial for everyone,” I said politely.

With a slight nod to his head, Alistair smiled at me and I realized he had not let go of my hand yet. Gently pulling it out of his grasp, I folded my hands in front of me.

“Of course, I would love to discuss this over dinner if you are not too tired from your travels. I understand that you and your group killed a High Dragon for Crestwood. Another matter you have taken care of that I find myself indebted to you for,” he said holding my gaze.

“It would be my honor to share a meal with you,” I tell him politely bowing my head towards him.

Ugh…there are just some duties I know I can’t get out of, and sitting with the King of Ferelden for dinner was definitely one of them. On the inside I was groaning because all’s I wanted to do was curl up on the couch with Solas and draw.

“Splendid, I shall see you again at seven in the garden,” he said with a large smile.

I kept my smile in place as my stomach plummeted at his sudden meaning. Shit! He wants dinner
alone…oh, fuck me…Mythal’s mercy why me damn it. Can’t these men find dates?! I nodded my head and backed away slowly keeping my smile pasted on my face.

“As you request,” I reply before chancing a glance at Josephine and saw her distraught apologetic expression before leaving, confirming my thoughts.

Closing the door behind me, I lightly leaned against it for a moment and closed my eyes. *That was what the throat clear was for…warning.*

“Fuck,” I muttered aloud.

*Think, think, think…come on brain. How do I get out of this pickle? Hell and damnation!* Really not looking forward to telling Solas about my sudden dinner date with the fucking King of Ferelden, I puffed my cheeks out holding air as I wracked my brain.

Then the idea struck me, *Morrigan.*
I Need A Plan

Chapter Notes

You guys are the best! Thank you for the comments and encouragement.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I left the corridor for the garden to look for her. She should be out there…she usually was. I pushed open the door leading out into the beautiful area full of lush grass, and flowering trees that reminded me of cherry blossoms. There is a plethora of herbal fauna filling the air with their earthy, spicy scents and I took a deep, calming breath.

Spying the dark-haired beauty sitting beneath the gazebo with Kiernan, I moved with quick steps towards her. Her dark yellow gaze lifted to look at me as I took the two steps to where she sat.

“Herald of Andraste, what brings you to me?” she questioned with a small raise of her eyebrow.

I shook my head at her as I took the last step gesturing towards the chair across from her. God this woman enjoys annoying me far too much.

“Oh cut the crap with the Herald stuff Morrigan, you know I hate the title. Now, may I join you?” I poked back at her and saw the edges of her lips twitch as she nodded.

“Aneth ara Fenlin,” Kiernan greeted as I sat down with a large toothy smile.

“Hello handsome,” I replied ruffling his hair.

I gazed at him as he returned his focus back to his studies, and I smiled. Hair the color of his mothers, but his eyes are much like his fathers. Such a sweet, well-behaved boy, you would never suspect that a piece of an Old God’s spirit was in him. With a small, escaped sigh, I turned my focus back to Morrigan and cut directly to the chase.

“You’re aware that King Therein is here in Skyhold?” I asked her.

Morrigan folded her arms and sat back holding my gaze steadily.

“I am aware,” she replied.

The fact that I could remember stuff from the first game a hell of a lot better than any of the others was infuriating most times. But in this instance, I was glad that I knew what had happened for her to end up with Kiernan. I knew her son was Alistair’s or the Hero of Ferelden would have died killing the Archdemon. If that had happened, Leliana would have lost the love of her life and Morrigan her closest friend. Now granted, Morrigan didn’t know I knew all that, but I was betting on her wanting them to meet at least.

“He wants to have dinner with me alone…tonight.”

Morrigan held my gaze; her face as impassive as Solas’ could get only frustrated the shit out of me. I would die to have a poker face like these guys…ugh.
“I am quite unsure what it is you want from me, Fenlin” she replied her tone slightly clipped and laced with boredom.

“I need you to run interference, Morrigan. Will you do that?” I asked her trying not to sound aggravated by her tone.

Her surprised expression was laughable if I wasn’t worried that this dinner could turn into a catastrophe with my lack of finesse in such situations. My last so-called noble dinner ended with me stabbing the Duke in the hand. Did he deserve it? Oh, hell yes, but I did not need to give Josephine grey hair early because of my actions.

“You want me to join your private dinner with Alistair?” she said laughing.

Nodding my head, I held her gaze earnestly. I didn’t care if this woman was an absolute condescending bitch most times; she was at least not a complete gargantuan cunt like Vivienne had been. Thus far my experience with Morrigan was that she treated everyone the same way…and that was to say, she disliked everyone equally, race did not decide for her. I could at least respect that.

“King or no, he is but a bumbling fool, why is it you would need my assistance in handling this?” she stated raising her eyebrow curiously.

I grimaced suddenly realizing that whatever I thought I knew, she might be unwilling to help me.


Morrigan was laughing at me now.

“Yes, I did hear something about that from someone. I thought you handled it well enough,” she replied dismissively.

Sighing heavily, I stared at her.

“Please Morrigan, bring your beautiful, bright, son and join us,” I implored her.

Morrigan held my gaze and I could see her contemplating the idea even as she frowned at me. I recalled she had a love-hate relationship with Alistair. In other words, she loved to hate him. Then it dawns on me that she is posturing, trying to make me think she doesn’t want to come, when in fact, she does. Why must she play this silly game?

“I have a suspicion that you are planning far more than just my interference in this evening’s dinner,” she said staring at me shrewdly.

“Well, I know you and him traveled together with the Hero of Ferelden fighting the blight. There must be some…form of comradery from your time together,” I hinted cautiously and saw her eyes narrow when I glanced at Kiernan pointedly.

“Tell me what you know,” she demanded suddenly very much on guard.

I sighed, this is my moment. Finish it or suck it up and tell Solas you are having dinner with the King of Ferelden – alone, and then just tell Alistair about Solas and hope he listens better than Gaspard did.

“I know how Kiernan was created, and…”I held her narrowed gaze so much like Mythal’s and shook my head unable to finish and saw her surprised expression.
“No one knew but...” she muttered softly to herself gazing at Kiernan.

“And it will continue to be just that, all’s I’m asking is for you to eat some damn food and just help me, will you do that?” I asked her frustrated.

Morrigan’s eyes darted back to mine holding surprise before she could mask it. She let out a long, annoyed sigh looking at me.

“I do derive great pleasure watching him squirm, tis more than just a simple request you ask of me though,” she said shrewdly before folding her arms and leaning back in her chair. “Fine, we shall be there,” she finally gave in and I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding. “What time shall we intrude?” she asked with a slight smile.

“Dinner is at seven, give it about ten or fifteen minutes before you swoop in and rescue me,” I replied smiling and hear her soft husky laughter.

“Alistair would tell you, ‘swooping is bad’,” she said with a rare joke and I laughed.

Grabbing her hand, surprising her, I squeezed it gratefully while holding her gaze.

“Thank you,” I tell her before letting her hand go.

Morrigan nodded her head and gave me a rare soft smile as I stood and went to find Solas.

Pushing the Rotunda door open, I let out a low whistle with the sight of Solas slightly bent over picking a book up from the floor. He glanced at me from around his side smiling, slowly shaking his head.

“You are incorrigible,” he said before placing the book on his desk.

Folding my arms, smiling at him impishly, I leaned against the wall and winked at him.

“I try,” I replied.

His low laughter softly echoed in the round room.

“You succeed, often,” he said looking at me.

The softness of his blue eyes made me want to melt into a puddle of goo.

“Are you finished with your meetings?” he inquired while moving another book to the corner of his desk.

I worried my lip nervously and studied one of the murals on the wall as I answered.

“Not quite, the King of Ferelden is here and has requested that I have dinner with him this evening,” I tell him carefully.

Solas looked up from the small stack of books on his table with a small frown on his forehead that made him look absolutely adorable.

“I do understand there are some obligations that you will inevitably have to attend, vhenan. Do not worry yourself about disappointing me,” he replied.
“Alone in the garden,” I finally finished, chancing a look at him.

Solas’ beautiful blue eyes narrowed faintly with the words as his hands stilled what they were doing.

“Alone,” he repeated deceptively calm when I could feel his aura pulsing irritably.

“Yes, but I have a plan already in place…I will not be alone for long. Morrigan and her son, Kiernan, will be joining me after about ten minutes.”

When I read the book about bonding rituals, there was also a chapter of do’s and don’ts during the pledging process of bonding. There were some specific interactions that were observed among the Evanuris, some I thought absolutely ridiculous when they were pledged to someone. Dining alone with another man or woman, not your intended bond mate, was one of those interactions you didn’t do until after the bonding was complete. Solas’ aura calmed instantly with the information and then he slightly chuckled.

“I suspect the King is unaware of your machinations?” he questioned with that little lift at the corner of his lips.

Every time I saw that small smile, I just wanted to throw him down and nibble at the corners of his mouth, focus woman. Mental slap made, I nodded my head.

“Not a clue,” I replied.

Solas moved around his desk towards me, taking my hand and pressing a soft kiss to my fingers, his eyes tender.

“Ar lath ma vhenan,” he whispered gently.

Laying my hand over his heart, I smile lovingly back.

“I do believe there is a bathtub that has our name on it if I remember correctly,” I remind him.

His eyes sparkled with mischief and I chuckled knowing exactly what he was now contemplating.

“I believe you are correct, vhenan,” he replied gesturing towards the door for me to lead the way.

I winked at him and grabbed the door.

“Then what are we standing around here for, you have far too many clothes on handsome” I teased.

Solas chuckled and shook his head before following me out of the rotunda.

Flattening out the front of my black velvet gown, I latched the long golden chain belt around my waist. It reminded me of a renaissance style with its long sleeves, small scooped neckline and short train in the back that would lightly trail behind me when I walked.

Solas braided the sides of my hair and then combined the two together in the back so that it would fall in the middle of the hair he had not braided. Smiling at him through the reflection of the mirror, he kissed the side of my neck.

“You look very beautiful vhenan,” he said softly before kissing my neck again.

“Thank you,” I replied blushing, slightly embarrassed with the compliment.
Through the reflection of the mirror, I watched Solas pull the wolf’s jawbone pendant from around
his neck and slip it over my head. My eyes held his questioningly while he pulled my hair out of the
way of the leather strap. I ran my fingers over the smooth black surface of the bone unsure why he
had taken it off.

“Perhaps you will indulge my possessive nature for one evening,” he said softly holding my gaze in
the reflection.

A slow smile grew on my face and I turned to look at him, touching his cheek gently.

“I suppose I can be swayed for this one evening,” I replied teasing him.

Kissing me gently, he pressed his forehead against mine and held my gaze adoringly.

“You don’t want to be late,” he said.

Sighing heavily, I held his gaze a moment longer before finally walking towards the stairs. I looked
at Raj who was lying next to my desk and pointed at Solas.

“Keep him out of trouble,” I told him.

His quick yip of a reply made me smile and Solas laughed as I continued down the stairs.

Chapter End Notes

Aneth ara - informal greeting
vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you, my heart
Dinner With The King

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading of this story and for all the comments everyone leaves. It really does keep me motivated to write and continue the story. I wish I could leave kudos for my readers because you guys are the best!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Entering the garden, I passed two of the king’s guardsman at the door. Smiling at them as I passed, I grabbed the material just a bit to walk across the lush garden and follow the path towards the gazebo where Alistair stood waiting.

Holding my chair out for me, I gave him a friendly smile as he sat down across from me.

“I am delighted that we could sit down together. We have not had an opportunity to speak since our brief meeting in Redcliffe,” he said picking up his wine.

Picking up my own glass of wine I took a sip as he continued.

“Nasty business what happened with the mages. They were quite fortunate that you offered them an opportunity at all,” he said very matter of factly.

I put my wine down and folded my hands in my lap.

“I was only glad I could offer them any help at all. Alexius used time magic and blood magic to manipulate them; it was not their fault what occurred.”

Alistair’s eyebrow rose with her words, ‘blood magic’.

“Perhaps you were too lenient with him then when you sat in judgment over him.”

I held his gaze and shook my head remembering that he was a former Templar in training.

“Everything he did was to save his son from the blight. If Alexius had been a Grey Warden, his actions might have been excused in the eyes of the Wardens wouldn’t you say?”

Alistair stared at me for a moment and then softly laughed and shook his head.

“Ah…well, you do have me there. The Wardens did show they were not above using blood magic to stop the Blight,” he chuckled and took a sip of his wine before continuing his questioning.

“Perhaps you will indulge me with where you are from, Fenlin.”

I laughed and took a sip of my wine.

“I’m an elf, and an apostate, Alistair. My kind tends to roam far and wide, skirting Templars, with no place to call home. My true home fell with Arlathan,” I replied. Little did he know that was not a complete untruth, just a stretching.
Alistair nodded his head and set his wine down.

“As a Grey Warden traveling with the Hero of Ferelden, we didn’t have anywhere that we called home either unless you counted a campsite home. Trying to rally everyone to help defeat the Darkspawn and at the time being the only two wardens left in Ferelden; I can empathize with living a nomadic existence.”

“What was it like traveling with the Hero of Ferelden?” I questioned curiously.

“Mahariel? She was crazy,” he joked rubbing his chin laughing.

“Wicked fast with her blades when she needed to be, a constant practical joker, and a very dear friend. I did things during that time I never imagined me doing. She is the one who convinced me to take the throne when I did not want the responsibility of a Kingdom.”

“Why did you not want it?” I asked knowing full well why.

Alistair stared at me for a long moment before answering me, gauging my reaction.

“Because I am the bastard son of King Meric Theirin, that is why I did not want it,” he admitted.

It always surprised me how much stock people of Thedas put into their lineage.

“I take it that is a problem for Ferelden’s,” I commented.

Alistair laughed, nodding his head.

“It was for some,” he replied taking a drink of his wine.

Just as Alistair was about to ask me something else, his mouth hung open slack-jawed as Morrigan and Kiernan approached the gazebo. Morrigan stopped in front of the table staring at Alistair with a raised eyebrow and I heard his mouth snap closed.

“Morrigan,” Alistair said slowly standing.

“Alistair,” she replied with her haughty tone.

I held my arms out to Kiernan and he ran into them, giving me a hard hug.

“Aneth ara, Fenlin” he greeted.

Pushing some of his black hair from his forehead, I smiled brightly at him and his Old God soul and bowed my head towards him.


Alistair stared at Kiernan intensely, looking quite unsure what he should say or do at this moment. I gestured for Morrigan to join us.

“Please sit down and join us,” I offered politely.

“What a most gracious offer,” Morrigan replied to me before looking at Alistair with a small sneer. “Those are what you call manners, Alistair,” she said sarcastically.

Alistair’s eyes moved quickly to mine holding a small glint of annoyance before watching Kiernan move to sit next to his mother.
“Yes, well, I see that you have not changed much Morrigan,” he replied with a small smile.

There was an uncomfortable silence for a long time before Alistair finally cleared his throat and spoke.

“That’s him? I thought he’d look, I don’t know, more demonic, you know, with tentacles and fiery breath.”

Morrigan looked at him annoyed and laid her hand on Kiernan’s back.

“Don’t be absurd, Alistair. He is a normal boy,” she snapped at him.

He rubbed his face with obvious discomfort and I saw a small tender look enter his eyes as he looked at Morrigan.

“Uh, and what does he know of…how he was made?” he questioned uncomfortably darting a look at me.

“He knows his father was a good man. I – I thought he deserved that much,” she replied slightly offhand.

“Was?” he questioned with a raised eyebrow.

Morrigan had the good graces to actually blush causing Alistair to laugh.

“He’s changed you,” he remarked sounding surprised and took a drink of his wine.

“Don’t be ludicrous,” she said quickly her eyes snapping with annoyance at him.

Ariana brought out our dinner, and Alistair’s eyebrow rose at seeing the four plates being served and not the two it should be. I saw Morrigan’s eyes slightly narrow with his reaction and she cut into her pheasant as she spoke.

“Tis remarkable how much Fenlin resembles Mahariel, don’t you agree, Alistair?”

Alistair darted a look at me and cleared his throat uncomfortably before answering Morrigan.

“I had not noticed,” he replied taking a drink of his wine before cutting into his dinner.

Raising my eyebrow curiously at Morrigan, I wonder if she is just pointing out the obvious, that we were both elves, or if there was something more.

“You mean besides the obvious that we are both elves, how so?” I questioned her obviously curious.

Morrigan’s eyes studied me carefully before looking at Alistair with a knowing look. She obviously knew something I didn’t, and I just watched the silent exchange between the two.

“You have never seen Mahariel’s likeness before then? Pity, it would explain much” she replied obviously unwilling to share with me how we looked alike but focused more on Alistair’s discomfort.

I almost felt sorry for him at how thoroughly she scrutinized him.

“They could be sisters, would you not agree, Alistair?”

Alistair held her gaze and I could see he was getting very annoyed with her line of questioning.
“Possibly, but I do not see what her resemblance to Mahariel has to do with anything.”

Morrigan stared at him, and Alistair began blushing and I am now completely lost on what the meaning is here. Did Alistair have a thing for the Hero of Ferelden? Morrigan turned her attention to her dinner before speaking to me.

“Fenlin, have you and Solas been fitted for your attire yet? Tis not much longer before the day, I suspect.”

I could have kissed her square on the lips for her intervention and giving me an opening to kill any thoughts Alistair had of trying to woo me.

“Actually, we are planning on doing that while we are here this time,” I replied taking a bite of my dinner.

Alistair looked from Morrigan to me questioningly, his earlier embarrassment obviously forgotten. Sorry…not for long you poor man.

“Did I miss something?” he questioned.

“Clearly,” Morrigan commented sounding bored and I couldn’t help but chuckle.

“Not really Alistair, it is that Solas and I are to be bond mated in three months. That is why she is inquiring about fittings.”

Alistair sat back looking somewhat surprised and uncomfortable at me.

“I see…I did not…that is wonderful news, congratulations to you both” he said quickly trying to cover up his embarrassment.

“Thank you,” I replied hazarding a glance towards Morrigan and saw her slight smirk.

Once the awkwardness had passed, the dinner went well. Morrigan and Alistair spoke most of the time, or traded barbs with each other were more like it, but I was completely fine with being left out of the conversation. When our meal was finished, I faked a yawn.

“Please excuse me, everyone. I believe my day has finally caught up with me.”

Morrigan glanced at me with a knowing smirk and Alistair stood as I wished everyone a good night making my retreat for my room. Entering the keep, Leliana walked towards me holding some papers. Oh, come on…please don’t let those be for me, I just want to get out of this damn dress.

“Fenlin, I am glad I won’t have to interrupt your dinner with the King. I have news about the former mayor of Crestwood,” she said as she stopped in front of me.

All thoughts of getting comfortable forgotten and I followed her through the corridor to Josephine’s office. Not surprising to see Josephine was still at her desk with candles lit around her giving her added light.

“Don’t you people ever sleep,” I mutter aloud.

Leliana softly laughed and shook her head.

“No, but you will be thankful that my lack of rest has borne fruit,” she teased handing me the paper.
I scanned the missive and saw they had finally captured Deidrick outside of the Crossroads. He was in custody and now in route to Skyhold. I looked at Leliana with a large, toothy smile.

“You are the most beautiful Spymaster there ever was, Leliana. You don’t know how much it means to me knowing that bastard will pay for his crimes,” I told her before hugging her tightly.

The action obviously surprised Leliana, but I felt her hesitation fade as she hugged me back. Letting her go, I handed the missive back to her.

“I would like the King to judge his own citizen since he is here. Please see that he receives all the reports so that he may make an informed decision.”

The corner of Leliana’s lip curled up as she nodded her head.

“As you wish, I am sure he will feel the same way you do,” she replied before leaving.

I glanced over at Josephine and smiled.

“You look very lovely this evening, Inquisitor. I hope dinner was not too uncomfortable,” she hedged making me laugh.

“It was quite pleasant actually. Especially after Morrigan and her son, Kiernan, joined us.”

I smiled a bit impishly at her and Josephine softly laughed and faintly shook her head at me.

“I am going to retire for the evening, Josephine. I will see you tomorrow,” I tell her and she waved me off.

Now to get out of this damn dress and curl up next to my man. Smiling to myself, my fingers touching the jawbone pendant as I pulled open the door leading to our chambers.

Chapter End Notes

Aneth ara - informal greeting
Aneth ara da'ishan - greeting little man
Fittings And Fear

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Helene walked around me taking my measurements and made disapproving noises with her tongue.

“My daughter weighs more than you and she is thirteen,” she said with a shake of her head.

I laughed and rolled my eyes at her.

“She is also a good five inches taller than me too,” I poked back.

Helene chuckled and slipped her measuring tape into her apron pocket.

“My sister in Val Royeaux sent me samples of some material that would be very lovely for your bonding.”

I stepped off the box and pulled my tunic over my head as she went to gather the samples. I was just slipping my leggings on when she came back holding two pieces of cloth. One piece was of lace and the other was solid and silky, both pieces were a soft white and my inner girl squealed. Oh, those look pretty.

“I thought to have the lace overlay the solid, except for around your arms and back, those we should leave as just the lace.”

I look at her with a raised eyebrow and she laughed because she knows that I don’t like my arm to be seen. Vain it may be, but I just didn’t like how people stared.

“The pattern of the lace will obscure the scarring on your arm,” she said handing the lace to me.

I gently finger the material pleased with its designs of small swirls with flowers and leaves. It is really astonishing what some of the women could do with a loom, this will definitely cover my arm. I am staring at the piece of cloth when it truly begins to really sink in that Solas and I are going to be bonded soon…married.

The more I actually thought about it, the more my heart started to pound and race within my chest. Are we really doing this? Is this wrong…something will go wrong. Good things do not happen to me.

“The designs that you brought me for the dress and for Master Solas’ suit will be stunning, and surprisingly quite simple to make. Wherever did you find such a pattern?” Helene asked as she turned towards her.

The sound of Helene’s voice drew my attention from the piece of cloth and my arms started to tingle before I begin shaking uncontrollably. Why can’t I stop shaking?...Is he bonding with me for the anchor? NO…that can’t be, he isn’t that way…he would never…Why am I breathing so fast? None of my relationships have ever worked…this will never work.

I can’t bring my soothing darkness to me to calm down and now I am completely freaking out as my mind starts throwing phrases at me from every direction. I can’t make it stop and I stared at Helene with large, frightened eyes as I grew more and more short of breath. Bending suddenly trying to catch my breath, I grabbed my head and held it tightly.
“Fenlin, Are you okay?” Helene asked me worriedly.

I could only shake my head no. Sliding one hand from my head, I pressed my palm against my pounding chest. Fear like nothing I had felt before, flooded through me as I commenced in having a full on panic attack and slid to the floor.

“I’m going to get someone,” Helene said rushing from the room.

Dorian and Bull ran into the room and found Fenlin curled into a fetal position on the floor breathing fast and crying. Dorian had never seen her in such a state and rushed to her side. He saw a fear in her eyes when she looked at him and shook her head.

“Kitten, what is wrong?” he questioned her pulling her into his arms.

Bull looked at a scared Helene knotting her fingers together nervously while she watched Dorian try to calm Fenlin.

“What was she doing before this started?” Bull asked her.

Helene looked up at him for a moment not exactly comfortable around the Qunari. She looked at the floor and then somewhat shook her head expressing her confusion.

“We had just finished with her measurements for her gown, and she was looking at a piece of lace and then…” she shrugged and pointed at Fenlin.

Cole suddenly appeared kneeling next to Dorian.

“She is scared, ‘Are we really doing this? Is this wrong…something will go wrong. Good things do not happen for me.’ ‘Oh God, why can’t I breathe?’” he whispers.

Cole reached out and took her hand.

“He is almost here,” he told her just before Solas ran into the room.

“Fenlin?” Solas said, his voice alarmed.

He moved to take her from Dorian and pulled her into his lap. He felt a modicum of relief when she curled into him and her face slipped into the crook of his neck. He could feel her struggling to control the tremors that quaked through her as she fought for air. Her aura was a tangle of confusion and fear. Kissing her forehead, he pushed his aura to mingle and bring balance to her own. When he did, he felt the rigidness of her body slightly soften and glanced around at everyone in the room uncomfortably.

“She is having a panic attack,” Bull said simply.

“Does anyone have an idea what would have caused it?” Solas questioned them.

“The wedding,” Dorian replied looking at him.

Cole nodded his head in agreement.

“None of my relationships have ever worked…this will never work,” he said softly looking directly at
Fenlin.

Solas stared at him for a long moment before letting a small sigh of understanding escape.

“She couldn’t possibly think…” he started but felt her small nod of agreement and let out a sigh.

“I see,” he said calmly. *Is she having second thoughts about being bonded to me?* “Would everyone please give us a moment?” he requested.

When the door gently shut, he kissed her forehead tenderly.

“Vhenan, we don’t have to…” he stopped when her hands fisted in his shirt tightly.

“No!” she cried sounding scared. Her eyes looked up at him pleadingly and he kissed her forehead.

“Hush vhenan, just focus on controlling your breathing for now,” he said soothingly.

They sat quietly for a while as her shaking slowly subsided and she slowly regained control of her breathing. Solas continued to rub her back in a soothing up and down motion. Once he felt that her aura wasn’t a swirling mixture of fear and confusion, he spoke calmly almost nervous about the answers he might receive.

“Perhaps now you will share with me why the thought of bonding with me, put you in such a state.”

He heard her heavy sigh.

“It wasn’t you…I hadn’t really thought about it before and then it just suddenly hit me…that you…we are really going to go through with it and it…” she stopped.

“Frightened you?” he asked.

“For a moment it did. I’m not sure if I can explain it really. I have never actually *wanted* someone in my life before and then all the past relationship failures came flying at me and…It’s not like I have done anything like this before;” she replied.

“And now?” he questioned her wanting to know.

“And now it doesn’t; I can’t imagine my life without you in it. I know that probably doesn’t make sense,” she replied.

Relief flooded his body that it wasn’t fear of being bonded with him that brought this on, but fear of actual happiness with someone. He tilted her chin up so that he could look into her beautiful amber eyes.

“It makes perfect sense,” he told her.

Fenlin wrapped her arms around his neck hugging him tightly.

“Ar lath ma Solas,” she whispered against his neck.

“Ar lath ma sul bellanaris ma vhenan,” he told her as he held her tightly.

*****

The early light filtered through the glass while I lay snuggled against Solas. Through heavy-lidded eyes, I watched the sun slowly peak over the tips of the snow covered mountains changing the deep,
dark blues to purples as the sun rose. The sky is a painting of vibrant pinks, and fiery oranges, highlighting the clouds before the sun finally crests the top of the peaks and the sight is breathtaking.

Solas’ hand slipped over the curve of my hip and I stretched like a lazy cat with the caress. His lips pressed against my shoulder in greeting, bringing a smile to my face.

“Morning,” I mumbled my voice still slightly husky from sleep.

He moved my hair out of his way and I felt his lips trail lazily down my back causing my skin to hum in pleasure. Slowly, I turn towards him and his blue eyes meet mine. The intensity of the gaze, the way his lips are slightly parted, even the small flare of his nostrils, all of it sends my body into a shaking frenzy for him.

Captivated by his gaze, he pressed a kiss to my stomach and I worry at my lip watching him, relishing the sensation of lightning racing over my skin. Still holding his gaze, his tongue traces the outline of my stomach muscles and the action makes the muscles clench and I can’t keep the soft moan from escaping. My magic is humming just beneath the surface waiting for him to bring it out.

He slid his hand over my hip; his fingers gently glide along the planes of my stomach. The cool touch of his aura sliding along my skin seductively making my breath quicken with the action. Everywhere his fingers caressed, my magic followed with anticipation and the stimulating awareness of him having complete control over me is quickly stealing my breath.

Reaching out, caressing his jaw lightly, it amazes me at how completely head over heels in love with him that I am. Holding his gaze, I am in awe of the overwhelming feelings his love conveys through his aura that slides deliciously over my sensitive skin.

Kissing my cheek, trailing his lips over my jaw before his blue eyes held mind tenderly. A soft moan escapes him as I arch my hips up to meet him when he slides into me. My body is already racing and the slow thrust of his hips brings a pleasurable cry to my lips.

I couldn’t stop the soft, mewling cries from escaping, or my nails from scoring down his back as my body hurtled towards that cliff of perfect pleasure he was designing. His aura sliding over my skin, pulling my own to the surface excited me. The intimacy of the connection was beautiful and I tightened around him, milking his thickness in a driving need that he pulls me towards.

That blissful moment of oblivion has me crying out his name in pleasure as I spun over the edge of completion. The low growl that left him as he followed me into that pleasure filled obliviousness, echoed through the room.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan” he whispered against my neck before taking a playful bite.

“Lathan na, Solas,” I replied taking a playful bite of his shoulder as well.

Laughing, he rolls over pulling me with him.

“What is on your agenda today?” he asked while slipping my hair behind my ear.

“I am meeting with Cullen about Sampson, you?”

“I will take Raj for a run and introduce him to the pack outside the walls.”

I lean up a bit and glance to where Raj is sleeping and look at Solas. I can’t help that my instinct was to not want him to grow up and leave or find a new pack of his own to run with.
“Is he ready for that?”

He looked at me patiently and I let out a sigh, dropping my chin to his chest.

“Okay fine, I know he has to interact with his own kind. He is not a dog but a wolf…I know, you’re right.”

Solas’ rumbling laughter filled our room and I shook my head at him.

“What is so funny?”

“You, vhenan; without a word from me, you lectured yourself. I found it quite entertaining,” he said still chuckling.

“I’ll show you entertaining, wolf,” I muttered swiftly tickling his sides.

Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma - I love you
Ar lath ma sul bellanaris ma vhenan - I will love you for all eternity my heart
ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you my heart
Lathan na - I love you
I left the stables running up the steps towards Cullen’s office. Opening the door he glanced up from his papers and smiled.

“I am glad you’re here, I think we have him, Fenlin. We’ve found Sampson’s lair,” Cullen said as soon as I shut the door.

“Good, where do we need to go?” I asked walking towards his desk smiling.

Cullen pushed away from his desk as he spoke.

“We will take a ship out of Jader. Sampson has established his base in an old shrine to Dumat, across the Waking Sea about a day’s journey from Val Royeaux.”

“We?” I said watching him suddenly glance around his office before looking at me.

“My duties usually keep me here, but for Sampson, I’ll make an exception and accompany you.”

My eyebrow rose as I realized that Cullen was serious…he wanted to accompany me and my team.

“Sampson still has that red lyrium armor, Cullen. Can you withstand to be near so much of the tainted lyrium? I know the shit gives me a damn headache,” I replied.

“I will endure the discomfort of the blighted lyrium. That Sampson is wearing that armor is all the more reason for me to go,” he replied. With a heavy sigh, he glanced down at his desk, tapping his finger almost nervously and then looked at me again. “I would…sleep better if you would allow me to accompany you with the others.”

*Well, this could prove interesting having him along with us.* Shrugging my shoulders, I nodded my head in agreement.

“Okay then,” I said.

“Good, we’ll depart at dawn,” he said.

I left his office still slightly confused about why Cullen wanted to go with us but pushed the thought back when I saw Bull waiting for me outside his door.

“Boss, there you are,” he said with a large smile.

“You need me for something Bull?”

Two Inquisition soldiers came through the doors at the opposite end of the battlement, holding
missives and clearly heading for Cullen’s office.

“Yeah, there is something I’ve been meaning to tell you about.”

My eyebrow rose in question. It is never good when he wants to talk alone…ugh

“Okay,” I replied waiting for him to continue.

Bull turned with the sound of a blade being pulled from its sheath startling me. Grunting as he punched one of the men that I had completely ignored thinking they were only messengers, I jolted at the sound of Bull's large fist connecting with the man's jaw.

“What the hell is...Bull?” I said worriedly taking a step towards him.

“I got it,” he said angrily.

Flinching with the sudden piercing of a knife the other soldier threw; Bull stared down at his side and roared angrily. He pulled the blade out, and flipping it in his hand, he threw it back at the soldier, embedding it into his eye with the force of the throw. The assassin that Bull had punched first, was now slowly getting up glaring at him with disgust.

“Ebost isalla, Tal-Vashoth!” he spat at him.

Bull grabbed him by the chest plate and threw him over the side of the battlement.

“Yeah, yeah, my soul is dust. Yours is scattered all over the ground though, so…” he groaned and grabbed at the stab wound in his side.

Running towards him, I looked at the jagged wound with obvious worry and Bull shook his head at me.

“Sorry Boss, I thought they might actually send someone worthy enough that I would need back up. Guess I’m not even worth sending professionals for.”

I glanced up at him as I placed my hand over the wound and focused, using what little healing magic I knew to knit the flesh back together.

“So you knew this was going to happen?” my tone was laced with frustration.

Finished with the healing, I stepped back and stared at him with annoyance.

“Little change in the guard rotation tipped me off,” he replied.

“Why didn’t you tell me about this before? You’ve obviously known it was coming for a little while,” I said with frustration.

“Because Boss, you’re a horrible liar. You didn’t go through years of training to hide facial expressions like I did. If I’d warned you, they would have been tipped off,” he said plainly.

I shook my head and then rubbed my face angrily before looking at him.

“I had hoped they would just let you go,” I said.

“They did,” he replied. “Sending two guys with blades against me? That’s not a hit, that’s a formality. Just making it clear that I’m Tal-Vashoth.”
Shaking his large head, his one eye closes and I could feel his dismay with his current title the Qunari would give him.

“Tal-va-fucking-shoth,” he muttered.

Stepping towards him, I grabbed the belt of his harness that went across his chest and yanked him down to my eye level as he stared at me in surprise with my anger.


Bull started laughing, and with his laughter, my anger slipped away as I broke into a large, impish grin.

“I can live with that,” he replied.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I hugged him tightly. His large arms wrapped around me and hugged me back. *He will be okay, I know it.*

“Damn Boss, Dorian was right. We do need to shove some cake in you,” he said teasingly.

Slapping his shoulder, Bull laughed as I pulled away from him.

“Mythal’s mercy, you two are worse than a damn sewing circle,” I teased. "Oh, and before I forget," I said quickly seeing that he was heading towards the stairs. "We are leaving in the morning for Sampson’s hideout. Cullen is coming along,” I told him.

Bull looked at me for a long second before just nodding his head.

“I’ll tell Dorian,” he said heading towards the stairs.

*What the hell was that look for? Ugh…these men and their cryptic looks.* Taking a steady breath, I ran across the battlement for the door to the rotunda. Pulling the door open, there he was sitting at his desk, surrounded by open books and writing something. I let out a small little sigh at the sight of him so obviously focused, and poked at him with my aura.

His mouth softly curved at the side with my action.

“How was your meeting?” he asked not looking up from what he was writing.

“Cullen has located Sampson’s base and will leave with all of us in the morning. The sooner we can get rid of the guy, the better” I replied.

His eyes came up from the paper and he stopped writing, fully focusing on me.

“The Commander is accompanying us? Did he explain why?” he questioned calmly.

I shrugged my shoulders and shook my head *no.*

“Not really, but I am leaning towards it has something to do with the attack on Haven and everything that we have found.”

Solas gave me a skeptical look and went back to writing. I knew what that look was about, but I was sure that Cullen wanting to come with us had anything to do with me and everything to do with getting revenge against Sampson. Curious now with what he was writing, I walked closer to take a peak and he turned the paper over. My eyebrow rose with the action and he gave me a cheeky grin.
“They are to be my words of promise for our Bonding Ceremony, you will hear them soon enough,” he said.

_Oh…crap! I still have to write mine…oh my god, I completely forgot._ My face must have told him that I had yet to start mine because he started laughing.

“I believe you still have time,” he replied still chuckling at me.

I rubbed my forehead and gave him a playful glare.

“Okay, hardy har har, enjoy my obvious embarrassment at always being so unprepared.”

Solas chuckled as he stood; caressing my cheek lightly, he tilted my chin up to look directly into his tender gaze.

“It is not that you are unprepared, vhenan. It is that you have far too many responsibilities because you refuse to delegate. It is quite understandable that you might have forgotten something, I am astounded that you have not forgotten more,” he lightly teased.

I softly snorted.

“It is not that I _refuse_ to delegate, it is that when I do, it gets fucked up and I have to fix it. So – logically speaking, if I do it the first time, I won’t have to fix it a second time.”

Solas shook his head at me before placing a soft kiss on my forehead.

“Do you not trust your Council to do their jobs?”

I thought about it a moment and realized that I was in the middle.

“That is an excellent question,” I said with a soft laugh. “I do and don’t if that makes any sense. It is not that they are incompetent, it is that…I just don’t trust people easily.”

“To delegate a task to someone it is not a matter of trusting them as a person, it is a matter of do you think they can do the task. If you delegate a task to be done, and it is not done correctly, then you require that person to do it again until it is done correctly. I believe that it is not just trusting, that troubles you, but you do not like being the one in charge of it all and telling someone what to do is not in your nature.”

I chuckled gazing up at him.

“Ooh wise one, teach me your ways” I teased making him laugh.

Hugging him tightly, I kissed the middle of his chest before letting him go.

“How was Raj’s meeting with the other wolves?”

He crossed his arms behind his back and shook his head at me and I internally groaned waiting for the lecture to begin.

“Joke as you will and change the subject you may, but you will have to face the truth in the end,” he said calmly with a knowing smile.

He turned back to his desk and I crossed my eyes and stuck my tongue out at his back _God, I hate it when he is right!_
“Our run this morning was pleasant and his meeting with the others went well. I believe he will enjoy learning from them, but we may discuss it further over lunch” he said answering my earlier question.

“Okay,” I replied a bit sadly.

I knew that Raj would need his own kind at some point; I had just hoped it wouldn’t be so soon. He must have heard my sadness because he glanced at me tenderly.

“It is never easy to let that which you love go,” he said softly.

I held his blue gaze and nodded silently agreeing with him.

“No, it isn’t,” I said puffing my cheeks out before letting the air go with a loud whoosh. “I better get moving; I have more people to tell about leaving tomorrow for Sampson’s lair.”

*****

Solas and I arrived at the barn as the sun was just peaking over the mountain tops. I glanced around and saw Varric rubbing his face trying to wake up, with Cassandra prodding him to get a move on. It was almost laughable because it appeared Bull was doing the same with Dorian, only Dorian was doing a lot more glaring than Varric.

I opened the gate for Inansha, stroking his large neck as he passed while Cullen led his Ferelden Charger from its stall. I barely restrained myself from rolling my eyes at the look Solas was giving him as he walked by. Slightly shaking my head, I adjusted my pack and staff that I had strapped to my back. *This is going to be a long ass trip, I can see it already.*

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
On The Road

Chapter Notes

As always, thank you, everyone, for your continued reading and support. You guys are awesome!

Your sweetheart calls you by another’s name. His eyes linger too long on your best friend. He talks with excitement about a girl at work. And the fire catches. Jealousy - that sickening combination of possessiveness, suspicion, rage, and humiliation - can overtake your mind and threaten your very core as you contemplate your rival.
~Helen Fisher

The weather was really pleasant as we rode down the mountain pass. Summer was finally here which meant that only the tallest peaks of the mountains kept their snow. The trees were full of lush leaves and the birds flew from one branch to another busy doing whatever they did. I could smell the scents of dirt, pine, clean mountain air, and flowers floating on the breeze. With the sun shining brightly overhead, I was feeling quite blessed.

Cullen rode silently next to Cassandra and Varric in the front. He was probably enjoying himself finally getting out of the castle and away from all his paperwork, I know I did. Solas’ aura slipped against mine and I glanced over, smiling tenderly at him.

“Perchance will we have a day in Val Royeaux, Fenlin?” Dorian inquired from behind me where he rode next to Bull.

Turning on Inansha’s back to look at him, he smiled pleasantly at me.

“Yes, there are a few things I need to pick up in Val Royeaux. I take it so do you?” I replied ignoring Solas’ curious look.

“Yes, there is a book by Genetivi that the University is willing to allow me to borrow. Somehow, our adorable little Ambassador convinced them to part with it,” he said.

My lips twitched seeing Solas was now looking at Dorian giving him his full attention.

“Oh, which book?” Solas asked curiously.

“Fade and Spirits Mysterious,” Dorian told him excitedly and both Bull and I rolled our eyes.

“Excellent,” Solas replied with the same level of enthusiasm as Dorian.

Bull groaned and I started giggling, already knowing what was coming. I knew these two had a list of at least three pages long, with names of books they have been begging the University to allow them access to. Josephine may be a pain in my butt a lot of the time, but the woman did know how to talk to people and get what she wanted.

“Did you two not spend enough time in the Fade when we were all there?”
I couldn't stop the giggle at the patient expression on Dorian's face as he looked at Bull.

“Amatus, that is exactly why Solas and I want the tomb. After all, no one wants to read, 'Willy toiled for many a year to perfect the curious mechanisms that would send a sharpened spike up the arse of the unwary intruder,’” he replied smartly quoting Genetivi.

“Well, I would,” Bull responded smiling.

Laughing at his comment, I shook my head. For Solas, I knew it was a curiosity to see what Genetivi wrote about the Fade. So far, most of what has been written on or about the Fade has been, and to quote him after he had chucked the last book from our balcony, ‘This is complete literary nonsense.’ For Dorian, it would be for the sake of more knowledge and… he tended to idolize Genetivi.

“Hey Boss, does Solas stay up late reading like this one does?” he said gesturing at Dorian with his thumb.

“Nope, he’s too busy to read,” I replied without thinking.

Solas’ eyes glanced at me with a wicked grin and my face turned immediately beet red. Oh my God, why? Why do I keep doing this to myself? Slapping my hands over my face as everyone was now laughing at my thoughtless remark, I wanted to find a hole and hide in it.

“Damn Solas, you dog you,” Bull joked turning me impossibly even redder.

Solas’ ears were pink with color even as he laughed and shook his head at me while I peeked at him through my fingers.

*****

Arriving in Jader, I helped with loading the Hart’s onto the ship while Solas took our packs onboard. The temperamental creatures were known to bite people, and it saved me from getting a headache later when some ship hand came to complain about the animals. Once I was satisfied that our mounts were secure in the cargo hold and they had treats, I made my way topside to find the others. Taking the long corridor that towards the ships eating area, I found everyone sitting around the largest table while Varric shuffled a deck of cards. I am already internally cringing at the sight because I completely suck at Wicked Grace.

“Hey Sketch, grab a seat and I’ll deal you in,” he said with a large smile.

“Perhaps I should just save you the time and dump my money on the table now,” I replied walking towards the table.

Varric chuckled as he dealt me in.

“I promise we’ll take it easy on you Sketch,” he said with a mischievous grin while crossing his heart.

“My ass you will,” I mutter grabbing the cards while the others laughed.

After an hour of playing, I had already lost ten sovereigns to Solas, and the smug ass was only smiling at me.

“Vhenan, the game is based on deception and cleverness as much as pairing the suits together. Your
expressions and body language give away what you are holding,” he said after my loss…again.

My eyebrow came up while I stared at him contemplating what he was telling me.

“So, what you’re saying is: ‘I am a lousy card player and should never try to play Wicked Grace again’, do I have that about right?”

Solas laughed, as did everyone else around the long table.

“Precisely,” he replied.

There were soft crinkles around his eyes as they sparkled with good humor. I ran my finger down the bridge of his nose and tapped the end softly.

“Ass,” I said softly laughing.

“I’ll grab us another round of drinks,” Bull called out standing up.

“I’ll help you, Bull,” I said following him to the built-in bar area of the eating room.

Solas watched her leave not missing the way the Commander’s eyes following her as well, and his jaw clenched. The wolf in him growled warningly, and he resisted the urge to get up and yank the Commander to his feet and hit him. He had known for some time that the Commander was in love with Fenlin. His presence on this journey was an annoyance he could do without. Taking a drink of his ale, he watched her laughing with Bull over at the little bar area of the ship and his stomach slightly clenched at the site of her tilting her head back with the action.

It astounded him that Fenlin could not see the Commander’s obvious infatuation with her. The only thing that kept him even marginally calm with this situation was the Commander’s manners around her. He had witnessed him conduct himself professionally and always politely towards her, never an improper action or unwelcome advance.

He eyed the man silently, finishing the last of his ale before standing to help her as she came back to the table holding two mugs in each hand. Taking the two in her left hand she smiled at him, and it never stopped surprising him how easily she made his heart skip with the simple action.

“Thank you,” she said before handing Cassandra and the Commander a mug.

Bull came back with the others and she grabbed two from him and passed them out. Sitting back down, he handed her a mug, and the wolf part of him calmed instantly as she placed her hand on his leg while she took a sip of her ale.

This is going to be a very long trip, he thought as he took a drink of his ale.
The Shrine of Dumat

Chapter Notes

You guys are awesome!

Thank you so much for the comments and kudos, it truly is inspiring.

I began rubbing my head as the steady throb that grew in pressure as we got closer to The Shrine of Dumat. The path was littered with lyrium shards growing everywhere. I glanced over at Cullen, and I could tell that the sensation of the lyrium was upsetting him as well. My eyes found Cassandra’s and giving her a soft nod, she went to walk with him. The loud, disjointed music that was currently pounding in my head was actually louder here than it had been in Emprise Du'Lion.

Solas walked beside me and I saw the small lines around his mouth telling me he was also growing a headache as bad as I was. Lacing my fingers with his, his eyes found mine and gave me a soft smile.

“Maker! I feel as if I have a horrible children’s band playing in my head,” Dorian muttered rubbing his temples.

I slightly smirked at his muttered comment and focused on the path. The sooner we get this over with, the sooner we can burn this shit down and get the hell out of here.

The shrine’s entrance had large shards of red lyrium growing from the ground on each side. The blood red pillars made all of us slightly flinch at the loud, bad disjointed music that came from it. My mind instantly strayed to my time in the future Redcliffe and worrying my lower lip, I rubbed my neck pushing the nightmare away. Solas’ aura slid against mine reassuringly, and I took a shaky breath glancing at him before walking between the horrible pillars through the entryway.

“This is it, the heart of Sampson’s command,” Cullen said in a hushed tone.

“I don’t see him anywhere, or hear him,” I replied quietly.

“Nor I, Maker, tell me he hasn’t fled” he replied with disappointment.

The air was thick with smoke, obscuring the Red Templar’s from sight until it was too late and they were upon us. The loud growl from a Behemoth had me wrapping the Fade around us quickly in the form of a barrier as we were attacked.

Casting ice mines to go with Dorian’s fire mines, Solas cast Fade meteors with enough force to make the ground shake as they hit the Templars. Bull, Cassandra, and Cullen ran towards the large Behemoth.

Using my staff, I wrapped and snapped the Fade in a manner that pushed the air like a gust of wind, clearing the smoke out of the courtyard. Cole slipped into stealth and moved behind a Templar warrior that was quickly advancing towards Cassandra’s back and slipped his blades beneath his helmet into his neck, dropping him.
I slipped a barrier over Bull hastily when a Red Templar with a large shield bashed into him from his blind side. Falling he looked up at the warrior getting ready to charge at him again. Leaving his ax on the ground, he jumped up and lowered his shoulder, running at the warrior knocking the shield from his hand. Grabbing the Templar by the throat, he threw him into the spiked barriers that lined the courtyard. Picking his ax up from the ground, he went back to where Cassandra and Cullen were fighting the Behemoth.

We made quick work of tearing down the Behemoth and with the fighting over, I walked towards Cassandra and Bull making sure they had no wounds made from the blighted lyrium.

“Commander, have you sustained any cuts?” I asked him after seeing that Cassandra and Bull were fine.

Cullen was staring at the entrance into the actual shrine before turning to look at me. He checked himself over and shook his head.

“No, Inquisitor,” he finally replied.

Nodding my head, I motioned for everyone to follow us up the stairs that would lead inside.

Bull pulled the doors open, and smoke billowed out. Coughing and tearing up from the acrid smoke, we stood outside for a moment letting the majority of the smoke out before entering.

“This place is already half destroyed,” I said when I was finally able to look around without crying or coughing.

“Sampson must have ordered his Templars to sack his headquarters so we couldn’t,” Cullen replied glancing around the room.

“Sorry, Curly, someone tipped off Sampson you were coming,” Varric said.

"It would appear so," he said.

Cassandra threw up her shield with quick reflexes as an arrow came flying at her from the other end of the antechamber.

Varric loaded a bolt and shot back, hitting the archer right in the forehead.

"Right back at ya, asshole," he muttered angrily.

We didn't have to wait any longer before more Red Templars came running out of the lower floor. Fighting through more Red Templar guards and horrors that shot red lyrium at us, we made it to the next door that would hopefully lead us to Sampson’s inner sanctum. Cullen opened the door and I glanced around, noticing the drapes with the Templar symbols hanging on the walls, and the enormous red lyrium shards growing along the walls. My eyes landed on a slumped man in mage robes, leaning against a stone wall and I wondered if that was Sampson’s tranquil.

Walking towards him, thinking him dead, his eyes opened at my approach.

“Hello, Inquisitor,” Maddox said in his monotone voice.

“You know me?” I said kneeling down.

“It’s Maddox, Sampson’s tranquil. Somethings wrong, I’ll send for the healers” Cullen said.

“That would be a waste, Knight-Captain Cullen,” Maddox said his eyes growing heavy. “I drank my
entire supply of Blightcap Essence, it won’t be long now.”

“We only wanted to ask you questions, Maddox,” I told him.

“Yes, that is what I could not allow. I destroyed the camp with fire. We all agreed it was best, our deaths ensured Sampson had time to escape.”

I shook my head at him, while Cullen stared at him in surprise.


The blank expression and monotone voice as he slowly died, was very disturbing and likely not a scene I would soon forget.

“Sampson saved me even before he needed me. He gave me purpose again. I…wanted…to help,” he said finally slipping into death.

Cullen shook his head and rubbed his neck as we stood up.

“We should check the camp. Maddox may have missed something,” he said glancing around at the destroyed room. “Dismal place to die. It can’t have been much of a place to live, either, under Sampson’s command.”

“What else can you recall about Sampson?” I asked him.

“Does it matter? ‘He used to be kind’ only carries so far. Yet Maddox died to help him escape, Sampson does command loyalty.”

I glanced around the room unsure of what or where to even begin looking.

“Do you see anything in the camp that could help? Or point us to Sampson?”

“It’s hard to tell, all I see is smoke and ash. If this is Sampson’s idea of remaking the world, I prefer yours.”

I chuckled glancing up at him.

“Me too,” I replied before looking back at Maddox.

“I don’t want to leave Maddox here, he should be properly laid to rest,” I stated while looking at the Tranquil sadly.

“I’ll have someone take care of it. If even Sampson did his best for Maddox, we can do no less” he replied.

We made our way around the room that held a bed with large, red lyrium shards growing up the corners of it. *Even the four poster bed is sick with disease;* turning away Cullen stood by the nightstand holding an empty potion bottle.

“Lyrium bottles – licked clean,” Cullen said holding up a bottle.

“Drinking it, wearing it, growing it – you can’t say Sampson isn’t committed,” Varric muttered.

“When a man starts licking the bottles is usually when he stops, and takes a good hard look at his choices,” Bull said eyeing the multiple empty bottles that littered the floor.
“How much red lyrium is Sampson taking? His resistance must be extraordinary,” Cullen said.

I walked towards the desk in the middle of the room that had papers strewn over its surface and found a letter folded with Cullen’s name written on it. Handing Cullen the letter from Sampson, he looked at warily.

“How much red lyrium is Sampson taking? His resistance must be extraordinary,” Cullen said.

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“Sampson left a message, for me?” his surprise clear as he finally took the note.

“Well, what does it say?” I asked curiously.

Cullen unfolded the note and his eyes started scanning the contents.

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“Well, what does it say?” I asked curiously.

Cullen unfolded the note and his eyes started scanning the contents.

“Drink enough lyrium, and its song reveals the truth. The Chantry used us, you’re fighting the wrong battle. Corypheus chose me as his general and his vessel of power. And other such nonsense,” he replied shaking his head. “Does he think I’ll understand? What does he know?” he said angrily.

After we had searched the room thoroughly, we went back out to the antechamber where everything was heavily burnt.

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“This must have been Maddox’s room,” I said sifting through some partially burnt papers and looking at a large metal chamber of some sort.

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“The fire couldn’t destroy these entirely, whatever they are,” Cullen said looking at the metal case.

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“They are implements for working lyrium safely. The craftsmanship is remarkable,” Solas answered moving towards us.

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“Tranquil often design their own tools. Dagna should be able to make sense of them. If Maddox used these to make Sampson’s armor, she could use them to unmake it. We have him,” he said.

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Camping

Chapter Notes

Happy Friday!

Thank you, everyone, for your wonderful comments, they are awesome! I hope you enjoy the chapter because great things are coming down the road!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

We left the shrine with orders for the Inquisition soldiers to destroy the red lyrium and take Maddox’s tools back to Skyhold for Dagna to look at. We rode until dusk before making camp. I was just glad that the further we got, the less my head pounded. Solas helped me down from Inansha and moved his hands towards my head.

I smiled at him gratefully, closing my eyes as his cool magic soothed my pounding headache.

“Have I told you lately how wonderful you are?” I asked him with a small lift to my lips.

Solas bent and pressed a soft kiss to my lips before answering.

“I believe you have,” he replied.

“Hmm, good, I don’t want you to think I don’t appreciate you,” I replied softly.

Pressing my lips to his again, I went about helping set up camp for the night.

I listened to the easy chatter while sitting around the fire with Dorian, Cullen, and Cassandra.

Veggies were boiling while we waited for Varric, Bull, and Solas to return from hunting. I had no idea where Cole had gotten off to; my only hope was that he did not return with another animal he wanted to bring back to Skyhold. I opened up my sketchbook and turned towards the sound of Cullen’s soft chuckle as he watched me. I looked at him questioningly, and he pointed at the book.

“I now understand why Varric calls you Sketch,” he said.

Cassandra chuckled at him.

“It is always within her grasp,” she said.

I stuck my tongue out at her, ignoring her laughter at me, and focused on drawing Inansha.

“The red lyrium deposits are being destroyed, and we’ve cut the Red Templars down to the core. It’s a pity Maddox thought his sacrifice was the only answer. But that leaves Sampson with a severely curtailed army, and enchanted armor he can’t maintain. You did it,” Cullen said smiling.

I shook my head as I kept my focus on the drawing.

“We both fought to make this happen, don’t sell yourself short, Cullen, you had a hand in this as well,” I tell him.
“Well, I – thank you, but my work’s not done yet.”

The silence was pleasant with the only sounds coming from the crackling of the fire or the owls overhead waking up. That peacefulness was soon crushed with the sound of Bull’s horn echoing through the forest. Everyone’s head snapped up with the sound and my pulse started to race.

“Was that…” Cullen looked at me.

“Bull,” Dorian, Cassandra, and I said together as we scrambled up and started running.

My stomach was clenched in fear as I ran uncaring that branches whipped against my face harshly. I knew Bull didn’t use the horn unless something terrible had happened or was happening. Hearing his loud yell and the clash of steel, my adrenaline rushed through me. My feet skidded to a halt as everyone else rushed past me and my heart stopped at the sight of Solas’ unmoving form lying on the ground while Red Templars closed in on them. No, no, no, no, this is not happening.

The change to my animal form came swiftly as I leaped from the forest with a loud, earth-shaking roar knocking Cullen and Cassandra out of my way. With my fear fueling me, my feral nature took over, and it was as if I was watching the nightmare from outside of myself.

My power raced through me as fast as my fear and when I felt his aura weakening, my magic went wild towards the Red Templars blowing them back, including my own people away from him. My movements were automatic as I attacked, my animal focus was reaching his side. I grabbed one by the head with my large jaws and ripped it from his shoulders while leaping over him to the next one. A Templar archer took aim at me as I ran by, and the arrow bounced away after hitting my barrier. My rage roared out of me as my magic burned the Templars where they stood with Fade fire.

Finally reaching Solas’ side, I saw the jagged cut in his throat and bent quickly to lick his neck to seal the wound. The creature that I changed into was on automatic, and my magic poured into him like water into a glass with my fear of losing him fueling it. The animal in me caught Bull’s movement from the corner of my eye and I snarled at him angrily. My whole body hunched, preparing to attack if he took one more step.

“Get away from him,” I growled pushing his body away with the magical power I wielded before staring back down at Solas.

“Maker’s breath,” Cullen uttered staring at the large animal standing over Solas.

“Fenlin?” Cassandra murmured unsure if it was truly her.

“Don’t anger her,” Dorian called out to Bull when he saw the large cat-like creature stare at his lover menacingly and speak.

Dorian felt her voice rush over him with the magical power she was wielding with a frightening strength. He had known something had changed with her, but he would never have thought it was anything like this. Not many mages had the ability to shift into an animal form and those that could, scholars had shown that they couldn’t usually use magic while in the form. Even the witch Morrigan was not so talented as this.

“Not moving,” Bull said flinching at the sound of her growling words vibrating the bones in his large body pushing him back a few feet.
“She is healing him,” Cole said quietly beside him.

Dorian glanced at Cole in surprise.

“Fenlin doesn’t know healing except for minor cuts,” he replied quietly.

Cole shook his head.

“She is not the same but the same, Ras’Salladin can heal him,” he answered cryptically.

Dorian stared at him a moment completely confused, before turning his gaze back towards the very large creature emanating enormous levels of magical energy. He saw that the creature, who he hoped was still his friend, was easily two feet taller than his lover at the shoulder.

Dorian felt his mouth fall open when the creature’s body started to glow a soft mint green forcing a magical barrier, unlike anything he had ever seen before. The green intensified in brightness as the color grew darker. He could hear soft words coming from the creature where Solas lied, that vibrated the area around them pulling the fade to her. He glanced over at Cole who had started to fidget as he listened to Fenlin’s thoughts.

Cassandra gasped as she witnessed the barrier and the soft green glow. She had seen this before, but it had come from Solas in the Storm Coast when Fenlin had fallen. She saw that Cullen flinched with the magical energy that swirled through the small clearing and grab for the hilt of his sword.

Quickly, she placed her hand on his, staying the move.

“No Cullen, don’t,” she whispered shaking her head.

Cullen stared at her in surprise and then looked back towards Solas on the ground glowing with the magic that the creature poured into him.

“She is afraid she is too late,” Cole said moving from one foot to the other in agitation before walking towards the large creature.

“Are you crazy kid, get back here,” Varric called out to him.

“It’s okay, you’re not too late, you did it right,” Cole said gently as he approached.

She roared in his face, and Cole did not flinch, he knew she would not hurt him.

“He slowly wakes, he follows the connection, he did not leave,” he said staring into the large amber eyes that were narrowed on him.

“Help him,” she growled shaking the ground around them.

Solas’ eyes slowly opened and he saw that it was Fenlin’s animal form that guarded him. Her aura and her spirit were tethering him to her not unlike what he had done to her in the Storm Coast.

“Vhenan,” the weakest whisper reached her ears and her large head swiveled towards him away from Cole.

Solas gazed up into her large feline face, her amber eyes held him intensely. He could feel the untamed vibration of her aura that hummed dangerously as it surrounded them. He felt her almost throat choking, fear, realizing she was not in control of her animal form because of it.

“Peace vhenan,” he whispered.
The soft sound of his voice sent a wave of relief through me that my anger left me and I had control over myself again, allowing me to change back into my elven form. Falling to my knees with tears streaming down my face, I gently grasped his face with my trembling fingers.

“Don’t you ever try to die on me again,” I told him, my voice shaking.

“Ma nuvenin,” he replied weakly closing his eyes.

I placed my trembling lips to his pale ones before pressing my forehead against his.

“Well the cat’s out of the bag now,” I whispered.

His eyes held mine and he reached up weakly trying to touch my cheek. I grasped his hand and pressed it to my face, closing my eyes just grateful he was alive. There was a sound of someone clearing their throat behind me and I looked over my shoulder and saw it was Bull, his eye watching me warily.

“You need me to carry him back to camp, Boss?”

I nodded my head ‘yes’ ignoring Solas’ slight grimace with the suggestion.

“Please Bull,” I replied thickly moving out of his way.

I watched Bull as he picked up Solas carefully, ignoring the looks from everyone, I followed him back to camp.

Washing the dried blood from the side of his face and neck, I could feel his aura gaining strength with each breath. His eyes followed my actions as I concentrated on what I was doing. *I do not have time to break down right now.* His hand grasped a hold of mine stopping me, and I finally looked at him.

His eyes were full of tenderness and understanding and I couldn’t stop the tears from starting, and my forehead dropped to his chest. His arm came around me as I cried, rubbing his hand over my back soothingly until the tears abated and I lifted my head.

“I was not me, Solas…I…couldn’t control myself,” I whispered cringing at the frightened wobbly tone.

“It is alright vhenan. We cannot have light without the dark. Fear, Anger, these are powerful emotions that elicit strong reactions. In time, you will be able to keep yourself from being overcome by those emotions,” he answered calmly.

I gave him a wobbly smile.

“Practice makes perfect then,” I replied.

Solas’ lips slightly lifted at the corners in an answer and I pressed a gentle kiss to them.

“They will want an explanation,” I whispered against his lips.

“Yes, and you will give them one – in time. For now, you will keep me company. You were not the only one who was frightened at suddenly losing what you loved the most.”
I gazed at him for a moment as my heart swelled with his soft admission and curled up beside him pulling him closer towards me. His arms came around me and I felt his unsteady breath as his head lay against my breast, listening to my heartbeat. Running my fingers over his head, I held him and the fear from earlier slipped away with the sounds of his breathing.

“Ma nuvenin,” I whispered before kissing the top of his head.

His arms slightly tightened as he took another shaky breath, and I rubbed my hand soothingly over his back.

Chapter End Notes

Ras'Salladin - This is going to be Fenlin's Evanuris name, it means Shadow Soul
Vhenan - my heart
ma nuvenin - as you wish
Leaving my tent with Solas still asleep, I went to gather him some broth for him to drink and Cullen stood up with my approach. His conversation with Cassandra and Bull interrupted.

“What the hell was that all about?” he asked sounding like I had betrayed him.

Raising my eyebrow at his tone, I stopped and took a calming breath. Thankfully, I wasn’t the only one who looked at him oddly for his attitude. Just keep calm and don’t get angry, he is just frightened by what he doesn’t understand and I took another calming breath.

“Which part? The part where I shifted into a very large animal or the part where Solas didn’t die?” I replied trying to keep my calm.

I could tell that Cullen was unquestionably frustrated and confused by what happened with the Red Templars but he also seemed to be angry about something.

“How about the part where you start at the beginning,” he said his tone laced with annoyance and sarcasm.

I walked towards the fire and took the bowl of broth Dorian held out to me. He gave me a wink and a small smile and I gave him a grateful smile before turning around to look at Cullen.

“Right this moment Commander, I am going to focus on getting Solas back to health and push your need for answers to the very bottom of my list of things to accomplish today. I will answer everyone’s questions once I know that Solas is going to recover completely. So, until then Commander,” I said coolly walking back towards my tent.

Cullen grabbed my elbow as I passed and I glanced at his hand and then up at him and my anger flashed. How dare he try to keep me from taking care of Solas, this is ridiculous.

“Let go of me or you’ll pull back a bloody stump,” I said with a menacing snarl while my voice vibrated with anger.

Everyone heard the powerful vibration of my voice and Cullen released me quickly, taking a step away. I continued towards my tent and ignored the look of hurt that had dashed across Cullen’s face.

Cullen watched her walk away. The threatening tone that vibrated through him sent shivers of fear racing through his body with the sensation. Even her eyes had changed with a flash of silver in the
depths of her amber eyes as she had looked at him with anger.

“She is not angry at you, she is scared what everyone will think of her now,” Cole said quietly from beside him.

Cullen looked at him, unsure if what he said was true or not. He was uncomfortable around the spirit with its constant meddling and stared back at her tent. Cullen let out a heavy sigh and turned back towards Cassandra and Bull who had picked the conversation back up.

“So you say it was a rogue?” Cassandra asked him again.

Bull nodded his head.

“It happened all very fast. One minute we spotted a small ram and in the next moment a bandit rogue had slipped behind Solas and cut his throat. Then before I could even finish blowing my horn for help, we were getting attacked by Red Templars.”

Cullen mulled the information over as Cassandra picked out the part quickly that she found curious.

“You say it was a bandit rogue, not one of the Templars?”

Bull nodded his head.

“Yeah, that guy was no Red Templar and a real professional. As soon as he had sliced his throat, he was gone,” he replied.

Dorian cleared his throat and folding his arms, looked at the three warriors in annoyance.

“Are none of us going to discuss the pink Druffalo wearing a tutu in the room? She changed into a bloody cat,” he said.

“Could it be possession,” Cullen asked quietly praying to the Maker that was not the case.

Cassandra looked at him sharply.

“If it is possession, it is unlike any I have ever seen before. I have never known a demon to protect another, only itself,” she replied.

Dorian expelled a scoffing noise as he stood and moved to sit closer to Bull.

“Oh pish, that was not possession, Commander. Whatever it was, it was pulling and warping the veil in a manner that has not been recorded since ancient Tevinter. She can obviously shapeshift, what I find curious is that she was actually more powerful in that form than she is in her natural form,” he said looking at them.

Cassandra bit her lip and shared a knowing look with Varric and Bull before she cleared her throat.

“I have experienced something similar before when Fenlin was shot on the Storm Coast. Although Solas did not change into an animal or anything like that, the magic he wielded was very similar.

Varric sat quietly with Cole next to him rubbing oil over his crossbow. He didn’t care what they discussed, he knew that Sketch was still on their side, no matter how weird shit got. He had always known, even from the beginning that Sketch and Chuckles were a love for the ages. What she did today, was nothing different than what Solas did for her on the Coast. He didn’t know what it was, but whatever it was, it was not magic that any of them had ever seen before.
Cullen thought about what Dorian said and tapped his knee while his mind thought how this new development could possibly turn the tide in their fight with Corypheus.

“So you are saying that she could possibly defeat Corypheus in that animal form?”

A humorless laugh escaped as Dorian looked at him shrewdly.

“You are like the wind Commander. One minute you are the caring, tragic man loving a woman you will never have, and in the next, you are wondering if this change in her could be exploited for the Inquisitions benefit. Did I miss anything?”

Cullen’s body stiffened with Dorian’s words.

“That is not true at all,” he spat at him angrily.

Dorian’s eyebrow rose at the sudden anger and baited him even further.

“Which part Commander, loving her or wanting to exploit her for the Inquisitions benefit?” he said sarcastically.

Cullen stood up quickly, glaring at Dorian before turning and leaving for his tent.

They watched him retreat, and Dorian felt Bull’s elbow jab his side.

“You shouldn’t have done that,” he said quietly.

Dorian looked at him and waved his comment off and stared at him with a raised eyebrow while he stroked his mustache making sure it was straight.

“Someone had to say something. He is a fool if he believes Solas doesn’t know why he came on this trip in the first place. Plus, would you sit back and let him talk our little princess into using that form for battle?”

Cassandra sat quietly listening and slightly jolted when Varric sat next to her, taking her hand.

“He couldn’t talk Sketch into anything, Sparkles. If you haven’t noticed, she runs the show and does exactly what she wants even if they don’t like it. A good example is the kid,” he said.

Cassandra snorted and nodded her head in agreement.

“She fought with Cullen about him for weeks, refusing to ask Cole to leave. Some of those arguments were quite heated,” she said with a laugh.

*****

I left the tent with Solas behind me, his fingers laced with mine and walked towards the fire where everyone was seated. Solas and I had discussed how we were going to explain my change, and chose to keep it to a simple answer that I could explain without truly having to lie. Especially since I sucked at lying and it would be obvious that I was.

I could feel the tension between them as we approached as all eyes were on us.

“Chuckles, good to see you upright,” Varric joked trying to lighten the mood.

“It is good to be seen upright, Master Tethras,” Solas replied with a smile before sitting down.
“You are recovered?” Cassandra asked sounding completely surprised.

“I am, Seeker. It is my understanding that we will be leaving today for Val Royeaux,” he replied taking the offered bowl of porridge from Varric.

“Not before I get some damn answers,” Cullen said angrily.

I felt Solas stiffen next to me with Cullen’s demanding tone. I opened my mouth to speak and Solas placed his hand on my knee and shook his head and I snapped my mouth closed. His aura was a swirl of anger and I let a knowing sigh out. Well, this is going to go just fucking swimmingly.

“She does not owe you answer’s, Commander.

“She damn well does,” he replied hotly standing.

Solas dropped the bowl of porridge, spilling it on the ground as he stood. His mouth a hard slant, his aura vibrating with anger and I stood quickly as did Cassandra.

“Or what commander? She is not yours to command,” Solas replied angrily.

“Enough you two,” I said quickly holding my hands up.

Looking from Cullen to Solas as they had their silent staring contest, I placed my hand on Solas’ arm. He finally looked down at me and my eyes pleaded with him silently to stop.

“He has no right to demand anything from you. I will not allow it. This infatuation has gone on long enough,” he replied in rapid elven.

“I won’t argue with you, he doesn’t have that right, but having a pissing match in the middle of camp isn’t helping either. They all deserve an answer, and the one we have prepared will work. He is just frightened at the unknown, nothing more. As for his infatuation, that is his problem, not ours…let it go, my love,” I replied just as quickly pleadingly.

Solas snorted and gave me a look that said he didn’t believe that this would be the end of it and shook his head at me. My eyes went to Cullen’s, and I was angry with his posturing and I was quite sure that my own posture reflected that.

“He is correct, Commander. I don’t owe you an explanation as to what happened. I came out here this morning prepared to tell everyone about when this development manifested, and you chose to act as if you had the right to demand the explanation from me and you don’t. You are on my council, not my fucking King,” I responded holding his gaze steadily.

Shaking my head, I did nothing to disguise my anger with him or my disappointment in him.

“What I choose to share with you is my choice, not yours to demand. Now sit your damn ass back down, so I can try to explain it to everyone,” I told him.

Cullen stared at me for a moment angrily before he finally sat back down. I sat down and glanced at the fire. Taking a deep breath, puffing out my cheeks, I released the held air and began.

“The animal form manifested on our way to the Storm Coast to meet with the Qunari contact. Solas has been helping me learn to control the shifting and the use of my magic with it. As you all witnessed, I am still working on controlling my emotions that would affect the way my power is used in that form.”
I saw them all trying to digest the information and I knew it would be Dorian that spoke first, and I was not disappointed.

“You are not a healer, and yet you were able to heal Solas completely. How was that possible?”

I shook my head unsure myself and grateful that I didn’t understand it yet either.

“I honestly don’t know how I did it, Dorian. I wasn’t in control of any of it. I just know that I was scared that he was going to die, that is all I remember to be honest,” I replied.

I felt Solas’ aura slide against mine reassuringly, and I smiled at him.

“You know, that what you have accomplished has not been seen since before ancient Tevinter. Even lady Morrigan cannot boast such a feat,” Dorian pointed out.

I looked at him and I could see that he had a million questions he wanted to ask. I knew that Dorian would ask them – in due time. He was so much like Solas in learning new things. He would approach it almost like a scientist, short of trying to dissect me.

“Perhaps you will allow me to witness this change again. Obviously not in a life or death situation,” he said with a smile.

I glanced at Solas and then back to Dorian.

“And think I can arrange for something. just keep in mind I’m not a party favor,” I teased him.

I ventured a small glance towards Cullen and noticed him staring at the fire mulling over my explanation. Well, that went well. Digging into my own breakfast, I listened to some of the simple conversations that flowed around the fire before we broke down the camp and left for Val Royeaux.
After getting our animals boarded at the livery, we walked quietly into Val Royeaux. I couldn’t help notice that Cullen was keeping to himself, and I kept my internal sigh silent. I don’t know what has gotten into him lately. Our silent walk was wordlessly oppressive so I suggested that we go to the small bakery next to the alienage, the Gods knew I could use a little sweet treat to make me happy after the last couple of days I've had.

“How about we get ourselves a little treat before we retire to our rooms to freshen up before dinner? You know…celebrate a job well done and all,” I suggested.

Cullen adjusted the pack that he had over his shoulder and shook his head at me.

“No thank you, Inquisitor, I would prefer going to my room. I will see everyone at dinner,” he said before walking towards the Val Jerdavain.

Cassandra and I watched his retreating back as she slightly shook her head and I internally cringed at him calling me Inquisitor. Well if he wants to have his little pity party for one, he is welcome to it. Turning towards the others, I pasted a large smile on my face and rubbed my hands together in expectation.

“Well then, I guess it’s just us. Come on, this place is the best with its desserts,” I said turning to lead the way to the bakery.

You could smell the delights when we were still on the other side of the courtyard, that Solas looked down at me with a small glint of excitement. I refrained from shaking my head at him. I knew he would never admit it, but he had a voracious sweet tooth. Entering, we moved towards a table closest to the wall when the elvhen woman moved towards us looking at me and then my companions curiously.

“My name is Rayna, how may I help you today.”

Everyone glanced at me curiously as I looked up from the small menu she handed me and ordered for everyone. Solas smiled excitedly at the sweet he would soon be able to enjoy and Cassandra and Varric stared at me curiously as did Bull and Dorian.

“Trust me – you will love this, this place is amazing,” I said as I handed the small menu back to the elvhen waitress.

When everything was delivered, Cassandra stared at a blueberry sticky bun and Varric had a small raspberry tart placed in front of him. Bull had a slice of apple cobbler with a cream whip on top of it and Dorian looked at the slice of what resembled French silk pie. Solas and I had two small frilly cakes with chocolate and strawberries placed in front of us and I am sure everyone could see how we barely held back our excitement. It did not take long for everyone to start diving into their desserts.
and around the table, small little happy sounds were made with each bite.

Cassandra wiped at her face after she took a small drink of her tea and smiled at me.

“I have not had one of those since I was a small child Fenlin, how did you know I liked those?” she asked curiously.

I laughed as I forked the last bite of my frilly cake. Smiling, I enjoyed the divine taste of chocolate and strawberries flavors mixed with a smooth cream bursting on my tongue.

“I didn’t, I have just grown accustomed to understanding your likes and dislikes,” I said wiping crumbs from my mouth with the napkin.

Varric smiled at me as he swallowed the last of his tart and wiped his own face.

“Sketch that was a good guess, and I’m not one for sweets, but this was like my mother used to make. You sure you can’t read minds now?” he said jokingly.

Before I could answer, both Bull and Dorian agreed.

“I am unsure how you knew exactly what I liked, Boss,” he said as he also wiped his lips with his napkin.

“This was superb,” Dorian commented licking his fork of the last of the chocolate.

Giggling as I set my own napkin aside, I gazed at them.

“I can only say that if you listen to your friends, it is not hard to figure out what they might like.”

Everyone was laughing at me and my uncanny ability to figure out what they liked as the waitress came back to collect our empty plates.

“Ma serannas lethal’lan, this was wonderful and exactly what we needed,” I told her.

The young elvhen woman bowed her head slightly, smiling at me as she gathered everyone’s plates.

“My mother, father, and my three sisters make everything fresh daily. We are pleased that you enjoyed them, Inquisitor.”

Ignoring the title, I watched the young woman move away, my thoughts rolling on how we were in desperate need of a baker at Skyhold and I still needed a cake for our bonding, I spoke up stopping the young woman.

“You and your family make these daily?” I asked her before she could retreat back to the kitchen.

Rayna glanced back at me and nodded her head.

“Yes, we are up early and make everything fresh daily, your Worship.”

Internally flinching with the most hated title I am saddled with, I pressed on.

“Are you bonded yet Rayna or have a significant other perhaps?” I asked curiously and elbowed Solas softly as I heard him chuckle next to me.

“No m’lady. I am the youngest and have not yet found – the right one,” she said with a shy smile.
I smiled and then laughed understandingly.

“Perhaps I could talk you into working for the Inquisition then. We are in dire need of a good baker and I know Francois would love having another professional in the kitchen. Of course, I would make sure that you are compensated handsomely, would this interest you Rayna?” I asked pleasantly.

The woman looked at me surprised with the offer.

“You are offering me a job?” she asked disbelief lacing her tone.

“Yes, I am. We have many nobles that come to Skyhold that would sing your praises with these delightful creations you serve. But honestly, forget about them and their likes, we would enjoy your delectable creations.”

Cassandra shook her head at me softly laughing and I winked at her before returning my focus back to Rayna.

“You would need to talk to my mother and father about this offer before I could say anything,” she said nervously.

I stood and gestured for her to lead the way.

“I would be pleased to meet your parents and discuss the needs of the Inquisition. I am sure they want to make sure that you are not taken advantage of,” I replied and followed her into the kitchen.

I returned to our table after talking with Rayna’s parents rubbing my hands together in delight, completely ignoring everyone’s laughter at me.

“Rayna will be arriving in Skyhold in two weeks,” I told them with a large smile on my face.

Bull shook his head and glanced at Solas.

“How does she do that? She always gets her way,” he muttered getting Solas to laugh.

“Most times,” he replied smiling at me tenderly.

I took the small box of cookies that Rayna handed me when she came out of the kitchen.

“Inquisition soldiers will escort you to Skyhold, Rayna. I am so excited you are coming, and I will make sure our Ambassador has your accommodations prepared for your arrival.”

Rayna nodded her head excitedly.

“Thank you again for the opportunity, Inquisitor,” she said.

I handed the box to Cassandra and she looked at it curiously then looked back at me.

“They are for the Commander and his self-induced, pity party for one,” I replied and Cassandra smiled.

“I will make sure he receives them,” she said with a small chuckle.

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"Let's don't get too sidetracked today everyone, I want to leave early in the morning for Skyhold," I remind them.

Solas bent and kissed my cheek before looking at Bull.

"Make sure she doesn't anger anymore Chevaliers while here," he joked with a straight face.

"Pfft...I am the picture of diplomacy, you were the one causing all the trouble," I grumbled and he bent and kissed my forehead.

"Hmm," was his reply and I slapped at his arm.

"Venavais," I replied smiling at him.

Splitting up at the Pavilion, Solas and Dorian left for the University to get the book by Genetivi, Cassandra and Varric left for the bookstore and Bull and I left for the antiquities shop. We moved through the shopping district, drawing more than one curious look while I led him towards the shop that housed the jeweler Josephine had contacted for me.

“Uh, Boss, have you noticed the Chevaliers following us?” Bull said quietly from beside me.

I smiled up at him and nodded my head.

“I have, and I wouldn’t worry about it. They are assigned to make sure I don’t get into any trouble,” I said with a cheeky smile.

Bull chuckled and grabbed the door to the shop so I could enter.

I looked around at the medium sized shop and started to giggle when I saw all the porcelain and pottery that lined the shelves. Bull looked at me curiously and I shook my head at the mental funny. I just brought a Bull into a china shop…a new fit of giggles took over and I covered my mouth moving towards the shop owner.

“I am here to meet with Master Uvun. Please tell him, Inquisitor Lavellan is here,” I requested my voice still laced with humor.

A lithe, blonde elven man wearing June’s vallis’lin, walked from the back room after a few moments. He had green-brown eyes, long tapered ears, and his blonde hair was pulled back into a single braid that ran down his back. I smiled at him as he approached and he took a look at my face and ears and I could see the slight disapproval for my lack of facial markings.

Hiding my irritation, I kept my smile plastered on my face. As long as the man had what I paid for, he could dislike my lack of slave markings all he wanted.

“Inquisitor Lavellan?” he inquired as he approached and I held back the sarcastic urge to point at Bull and say he was Lavellan.

“Yes, I am Fenlin Lavellan,” I replied politely instead.

He looked from me to Bull and nodded briefly before continuing.

“I have finished what you ordered, give me one moment to get it for you,” he said turning back towards the back room.

Bull looked at me curiously and I smiled impishly up at him.
“You can keep a secret can’t you?” I asked him.

Bull laughed and gave me a sarcastic look and I softly laughed.

“It is Solas’ bonding ring,” I whispered to him.

Bull shook his head at me.

“I take it he doesn’t know you are getting it?”

“Nope – I had to measure his finger while he slept so it could be a surprise,” I replied as Master Uvun came out holding a small box.

“I hope it meets your expectations, your design was quite specific,” he said.

Opening the box, I let out a breath of excitement. The thin, flat Silverite band had runes inscribed underneath the band that I would charge later for protection that would lie against his skin, the outside of the band was inscribed with Var lath vir suledin with soft scrollwork around the edges of the band.

“It is perfect Master Uvun,” I finally told him closing the lid on the box and pulling the last instalment from my pack and handing it to him.

“Thank you very much,” I said slipping the box into the small pack at my hip.

He nodded at me, and we turned to leave as he spoke again.

“Your Ambassador said you were Dalish, but you do not have the markings of the people,” he said his tone displeased.

I let out a sound of annoyance as Bull and I shared a knowing look before I turned back around.

“I did not want them,” I said calmly not missing his surprised expression.

“Didn’t want them? But they are our heritage, who we are…” he said indignantly.

My eyes narrowed at him as he babbled on and I shook my head.

“They are not my heritage, nor is it who I am. I am me, not some damn vallis’lin,” I replied and glanced at Bull. “Let’s go, Bull, I tire of this conversation,” I said turning away from the sputtering Uvun and pulled the door open.

Standing outside, I took a cleansing breath with my eyes closed. Bull’s rumbling voice talking beside me made me sigh with the unpleasant interaction with the jeweler.

“Why didn’t you tell him they were slave markings?”

I opened my eyes and glanced up at him.

“Because Bull, not all the people are going to appreciate having that knowledge without proof or seeing what I have seen in the Fade of our ancestors. It is their belief, and they have made it their own, who am I to tell them they are wrong?” I replied simply.

“Good point,” he replied.

We left the antiquities shop for the tailor’s shop that Helene’s sister worked in so I could get the cloth
for my gown and Solas’ suit.

“Come on, let’s get the rest of my goodies from Helene’s sister, Bull. I got a gown and a suit that need to be made,” I said with a smile.

Chapter End Notes

Venavais - stop
Var lath vir suledin - Our love will persevere
vallis'lin - blood writing/facial tattoo
Back At Skyhold

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone! You guys are the best.
Have a wonderful weekend and enjoy the new chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The loud blare of the horn announced our arrival, and I was never so glad to just be back. I knew I would have to address the rest of my counsel about what happened during Solas’ attack since it was in the report but even that didn’t damper my mood at being back.

I knew Dorian had a zillion questions running through his mind at how Solas was fully recovered from such a wound with only a thin, pale scar as a reminder. I was just glad that he seemed to be holding all of them in for the moment. I was prepared for his questions, it was everyone else’s that I was concerned about. I glanced over at Solas and poked him with my aura teasingly. His eyes moved towards me with a soft little lift to the edges of his mouth and poked me back and the flutters in my stomach buzzed.

I didn’t care what they asked me, they would still get only one answer, ‘I don’t know how I did it’.
And if push comes to shove, I would inform them that I didn’t care about the particulars, he was alive and with me and that was all I cared about. Not everything has a damn answer, and if they didn’t like it they could just fuck off.

I rode Inansha towards the barn and Solas helped me off as Riley moved towards us holding a small missive.

“I thought you might want to see this,” he said leading Inansha to his stall.

I opened the note and saw it was from Master Dennet.

Riley,

*Hope you are taking care of my animals like you would your own children. I appreciate the letter you sent keeping me informed of the goings-on. My wife has recovered and I will request that she return with me to Skyhold now that my daughter is wed and can manage the farm. With luck, I should be back in Skyhold in a fortnight.*

*Dennet*

I smiled at the information in the letter as I handed it back to him.

“Thank you, Riley, I will talk with Josephine about making that happen.”

He nodded his head at me with a bright smile while Solas looked at me curiously.
“Master Dennet’s wife is well and he would like to bring her back with him to Skyhold,” I told him.

He grabbed our packs and I followed him from the barn towards the stairs that led to the kitchens. I waved at Francois and the other ladies as we passed, and I kept my eyes averted as we passed the warded room for the stairs that would take us to the main hall. Someday we are going to have to address the eluvian and what he is planning on doing with it. Letting a little sigh out, we crested the top of the stairs and walked through the door to the main hall. As soon as we stepped through we were descended on by Josephine and Leliana and I held my hands up.

“We have just returned, and I will give everyone a full report – tomorrow. Now if you will excuse me, I hear a bath calling my name.”

Ignoring the frustrated expressions on both Leliana and Josephine face, I followed Solas through our door that would lead us up the two flights of steps towards our chamber. Turning towards the main door, I used the ward that was on the door across from the kitchen not wanting to be disturbed.

Solas’ eyebrow rose at my use of the familiar ward and I smiled at him impishly.

“How did you think I knew the mirror was in there, hmm?”

I saw him shake his head just slightly before continuing up the steps.

“Perhaps you will indulge me how you figured it out?”

I laughed at his back as we trudged up the steps.

“Your personal library in the Vir’ Dirthara, Fen’Harel. You are if anything – very thorough,” I teased him and heard his responding laughter.

“Hope and Harmony,” he replied knowingly.

We crested the top of the stairs where he dropped our packs and looked at me.

“Yes, and curious wisps that pointed out other treasures I might surely have missed along my journeys,” I said with a playful smile.

He pulled me into his arms and kissed my lips.

“Perhaps, I will show you how thorough I can be when completely focused on a single task.”

His voice vibrated around me with promise, sending shivers of desire coiling through me. Reaching up, I ran my fingers over his jaw, my eyes scanning the thin pale scar on his neck before I glance up into his beautiful blue eyes.

“Perhaps – we shall see,” I replied with a wicked smile and slipped from his arms.

Walking towards our bathroom to start a bath, I heard his husky laugh and glanced at him over my shoulder.

“We shall see indeed,” he replied and I gave him a throaty laugh before entering the bathroom.

*****

My eyes slowly opened as the early dawn was just beginning while his fingers traced the patterns on my arm lazily. Stretching, his hand moved to pull me closer to him and I snuggled into the heat of his body. He nuzzled his nose along the back of my neck, his breath heating the skin teasingly.
“Mmm, I do like waking up with you,” I said my voice still thick with sleep.

“And I you,” he replied placing a small kiss on the nape of my neck.

“Do you think they would leave me alone if I just wanted to snuggle in here with you all day?”

I felt his smile against the skin of my shoulder before I heard his soft laughter.

“I do not believe they will leave you to me all day, vhenan,” he replied pressing a kiss to my shoulder.

“Humph,” I replied making him laugh.

“You are wanting to avoid your meeting with them,” he said plainly before pressing another kiss to my shoulder.

“Oh, yeah – I know Leliana will ask questions that I will not want to answer?” I replied.

Solas placed another kiss to the middle of my back and I felt the sizzle of desire curl through my veins with a slow burn.

“Then don’t answer them,” he replied before pressing another kiss now between my shoulders.

“So just plead the fifth?” I replied.

“I do not understand,” he said pressing another kiss a little further down my back.

“Just be silent,” I replied a little breathless as his lips sent little licks of flame everywhere.

“Yes, you do not have to answer questions that you believe are too invasive,” he answered.

“Mmm,” I said sounding more like a moan than an answer as his tongue slid slowly down my spine.

I could feel his lips smiling against my back and I softly laughed.

“I can feel your smug smile, wolf,” I said a bit breathlessly.

His deep laughter blanketed my senses, and I moaned softly as his teeth gently nipped at my hip.

“It is not a smugness that makes me smile, vhenan. It is that little sound you make when I know you desire me as much as I do you,” he said slowly rolling me onto my back and looking up at me from my hip his eyes full of playfulness.

I softly moan again as he nips at my stomach.

“You don’t hear that little sound all the time? Because I want you all the time,” I replied breathlessly.

He laughed softly against my stomach, pressing small kisses as he moved further down my body.

“Yes,” he said softly before his tongue tasted me.

“Is that so,” he said softly before his tongue tasted me.

“Yes,” I cried out at the tantalizing touch arching my hips.

His mouth devoured me pulling me towards the edge of that blissful cliff. Gripping the covers tightly, my body rocketed while I cried out his name.

He moved over me and holding my gaze, slid into me slowly as my body still trembled from my
release. Wrapping my legs around him tightly, I brought his lips to mine and kissed him deeply.

“Ar lath ma bellanaris,” I mouthed against his lips.

I gazed at everyone around the large table, noticing that Leliana was studying me curiously. Cullen cleared his throat and finally looked at me.

“We’re getting recruits by the hour. There are more than a few ex-Templars among them. We’ve struck a blow and given people hope, this is a true victory.”

The door opened suddenly and Dagna came hurrying in, her cherub face full of excitement.

“Fenlin, I finished it! Are you having a meeting? Sorry, have it anyhow,” Dagna said with a rush as she handed me a palm-sized, round, flat rune with the templar emblem embedded in the middle of it.

“You mean this rune?” I said taking it from her and looking at it carefully hearing the soft disjointed music from it.

“It’s not just any rune. I made it with red lyrium and what’s left of poor Maddox’s tools. The rune acts on the median fissures of lyrium to—” she saw my look of confusion and giggled. “Doesn’t matter, it’ll destroy Sampson’s armor. He’ll be powerless,” she finished excitedly.

Glancing from her back to the rune I smiled.

“We should render our enemies powerless at a stroke more often,” I replied jokingly.

“Maddox covered Sampson’s tracks thoroughly, but wherever Sampson’s retreated, we’ll find him. Your army stands ready, Inquisitor,” Cullen said.

I did not miss his use of Inquisitor and refrained from sighing at his sudden need for formality. If he needed to do that and it helped him, then so be it.

I caught Leliana’s curious look at him before she looked at Dagna.

“Thank you Dagna, if you would please excuse us we have a meeting to continue,” she said politely.

Dagna nodded her head and with a large smile left the room, closing the door behind her.

I held Leliana’s stare calmly as I laid the rune down on the table.

“Before we get into all of your questions, there are two things I need to address first,” I said and saw Leliana’s nod of agreement and I looked at Josephine.

“I have hired a baker named Rayna from Val Royeaux. She will arrive in a week and I would like to make sure her quarters are furnished and ready for her arrival. I promised her that her wages would be five sovereigns a week, and trust me, she is worth it,” I told her smiling.

Josephine was busy writing everything down and nodding her head in understanding as I continued.

“The next item of business is Master Dennet. He will be returning with his wife Elaina now that his daughter is married and able to manage the farm with her new husband. I would like to get some of
our soldiers over there to escort them back to Skyhold and of course, send his daughter a wedding gift.”

Josephine nodded her head again and smiled at me.

“I believe that Hawk and Fenris are still in the Hinterlands. I will reach out to them and perhaps they will escort Master Dennet and his wife. For his daughter, I have the perfect gift in mind,” she replied smiling.

“Great,” I said and looked at Leliana.

“Okay, what part of the report do you have questions about?” I asked her.

Her eyebrow rose in understanding that I would only discuss the report, and nothing else. I did love how quickly Leliana caught the subtle sides of my meaning.

“In your report, you stated that this – change occurred while traveling to the Storm Coast to meet with the Qunari,” she began and I nodded my head yes waiting for the question.

“Yet no one else saw it?”

“No, I thought I was going to be sick in my tent. Solas carried me out of the tent and away from camp so I wouldn’t be embarrassed by getting ill, I believe Bull was on watch at the time. Solas was the only one to witness the change until the altercation outside of Val Royeaux,” I answered simply.

Leliana held my gaze and nodded her head.

“Dorian said in his part of the report that you were magically stronger in that form than in your Elven form, is this true?”

“I am unsure what he meant by that, but I can tell you that I was terrified. Fear is a dangerous emotion for a mage, so if I was *magically stronger* than it was the fear coursing through me at the time.”

Leliana nodded her head in silent agreement and placed her hands on the table looking at me carefully.

“I would like to witness this change,” Leliana requested and I saw Cullen flinch.

My eyes narrowed at Leliana and I shook my head no, placing my own hands on the table.

“No, two reasons. One, I cannot fit in this room in that form. Two, I am not some fucking party trick. Have I answered all of your questions to your satisfaction?” I replied deceptively calm holding her gaze steadily.

“Yes you have,” she finally replied.

“Good,” I said pasting a smile on my face and picked up the rune. “Let me know if any of you need anything, in the meantime, I will be catching up on paperwork.”
How did he get in? If he can get in, can we now get out? She felt for a weakness in the Veil as she did every moment of every day, searching for her release from this prison that her mother and Fen’Harel made and felt no weakening.

Andruil stared at the Forgotten One’s emissary carefully as he spoke. What if this is another trap? She pondered.

“There is a way for you to leave this place, have you not felt the veil thinning in places? Or have you been so busy with your plotting of revenge that you have been unaware.”

Her bright, yellow eyes narrowed at him.

“Careful how you speak to me Imshael or I will return you to your owner in pieces,” she spoke warningly turning away from him.

Imshael laughed at her, crossing his arms knowing she would do nothing because he knew her weakness and his appearance here had her curiosity.

“You would kill me before I tell you that your heart’s desire has his love returned to him?”

She turned quickly and stared at him coldly.

“That isn’t possible, she is dead, I killed her myself,” she said with certainty.

Imshael smiled beguilingly, knowing this was exactly the position he wanted her in. She would bargain her own soul to him if he played this right.

“No, my lady, I can assure you, Banal’ras is quite alive and with Fen’Harel.”

Andruil’s anger boiled knowing it would be her mother’s doing if it were true. Pacing away from Imshael she ran her hand through her long golden hair. It cannot be…I killed her. He was to be mine; never hers…her thoughts ran in circles over the possibility that Assan was indeed alive.

Imshael felt the cool anger radiated from her as she paced. He could barely hide his excitement. It is not every day an Evanuris will willingly work with one such as I, but soon, soon she would take what he offered gratefully.

Andruil’s eyes narrowed again at Imshael.

“How did you get in here?”

Imshael smiled and folded his hands together excitedly.

“Shouldn’t your question be about how I can get you out of here?” he replied smoothly.

Andruil’s eyes widened ever so slightly but just enough for Imshael to know he had her.

“What do you want in return?” she asked slightly breathless with the idea of finally being free of her prison.

“I am sure we can come to some agreement,” he said with a toothy grin.

Andruil stared at the creature, the points of his canines visible and folded her arms. Whatever its demands were going to be, she would gladly pay it to get out.
vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma bellanaris - I love you for eternity
Chapter Summary

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support. You guys are awesome!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After leaving the war room, I walked through the main hall towards my chambers and had a hold of
the door to head up when I heard my name.

“Fenlin”

I turned and saw Cassandra walking towards me and gave her a bright smile.

“There is something I wish to discuss with you,” she said as she came to a stop in front of me.

“Sure, follow me,” I told her opening the door to my room.

We crested the top of the stairs and Cassandra moved towards my desk shaking her head at the
stacks of papers.

“I do not envy your responsibilities,” she said turning to look at me as I walked around the desk and
sat down.

“I don’t envy my responsibilities,” I joked. “So what is it you wanted to talk about?” I asked.

Cassandra sat down, glancing out the large window for a moment before looking at me.

“There is something that has been troubling me about the attack on Haven,” she said.

My eyebrow rose as I silently waited for her to continue.

“We know that Corypheus corrupted the Templar order with Red Lyrium. This should have been
impossible under the watchful eye of the Seekers. But they, and particularly, Lord Seeker Lucius,
was not seen during this attack. In fact, no Seekers have been seen anywhere in the past two years, it
is as if they have vanished.”

I tilted my head slightly as I thought about it, realizing that she was right. We hadn’t seen or heard
anything about the Seekers since this all started.

“Do you think Corypheus has corrupted them like he did with the Templars?” I asked her.

Cassandra shook her head.

“No, Seekers do not need lyrium to use their powers, thus it would be impossible to corrupt us. No, I
believe he has imprisoned them,” she replied. “I had Leliana’s agents look into where they could
have gone, and after months of searching, everything points towards Caer Ostwin.”

I could tell that Cassandra was worried about her order and I leaned slightly forward.
“Perhaps we should look into it then. Red Templars are bad enough, I don’t need infected Seekers after my ass too,” I said and saw the relief flood Cassandra’s face.

“Thank you,” she replied. “I may have left the order, but they are still my family,” she said softly.

“I understand Cassandra,” I told her standing up. Cassandra bit her lip, looking at me uneasily.

“I know we just returned, and I hate to ask you to leave again especially after -” she began and I held my hands up wanting her to stop.

“If only everything went the way I wanted it to, Cassandra. Besides, it’s my job to make sure we take away any advantage Corypheus might have. Give me a few days and we can head out,” I said reassuringly.

Cassandra nodded her head and left my room. As soon as I heard the door close, I sat back down and leaned my head back to stare at my ceiling. *When it rains it pours.*

I stared at a correspondence from Keeper Dishana describing Wycombe’s treatment towards them and I rubbed my face in aggravation. I knew we had sent agents and an Ambassador to the area to find out what the hell was going on.

Digging through the pile looking for the reports, I saw the report beneath the letter and smiled at Josephine’s thoroughness.

“Damn, I love that woman,” I said aloud reading the agents reports and the Ambassadors.

My eyes grew as I read that the agents found red lyrium in the town’s water supply. *Well, now we know what was making them sick.* Reading further, the agents had removed the red lyrium but the townsfolk still harbored ill will towards the elves because they eluded getting ill. Sighing in annoyance with the noble twats, I already knew I was going to have to send more agents to the Free Marches to protect the elves and screw Josephine’s ideas of diplomacy.

I started tapping my pencil against my head as I thought about my options when I opened my eyes hearing my door open. Slightly surprised, it was Leliana that crested the top of my stairs and walked towards me holding a letter out to me.

Placing the report down, I looked at the letter addressed to her from Divine Justinia.

“Well this is disconcerting,” I said looking up from the letter to her. “Are you alright?”

Leliana wore a small smile as she nodded her head and sat down.

“Thank you for your concern, but I am. This message was written months, perhaps years ago, to be delivered to me if she died. I’ve heard of such contingency plans. A sudden death often leaves loose ends,” she said. “I’m to go to Valence, a small village on the Waking Sea. There is something hidden there that I am to retrieve,” she told me.

*Of course, there is,* I thought, dropping the letter onto my desk I began to rub my face.

“Do you know what you are looking for?” I asked her.

“The Divine was a powerful woman who used her position to obtain all sorts of things. Whatever
she hid in Valence would very likely benefit the Inquisition and must be kept from falling into the wrong hands. If I’m lucky, she will have instructions for me,” she said.

“Why Valence, what’s so special about it?” I asked her curiously.

“Justinia was Revered Mother at the chantry there for many years before she became the Divine. It is a place that holds great meaning for her,” she replied.

I nodded my head in understanding and handed her the letter back.

“If you are seeking permission to leave and go to Valence, you don’t need to Leliana,” I told her as she took the letter from me.

“Actually, I would appreciate it if you would accompany me to Valence,” she replied.

She smiled at my surprised expression. Leliana was not known to need anyone, for her to ask me to go with her meant there was something more to it.

“If you need me, then I am there,” I replied.

Leliana stood.

“Wonderful, I will make arrangements for travel,” she said before leaving my room.

“Leliana,” I called out to her quickly before she could leave.

She turned back around and I held out the letter from Keeper Dishana. Her eyes scanned the contents and her lips flattened into an angry line while her brow furrowed before looking at me.

“I shall handle it,” she replied.

“Thank you, I know all of their Halla were killed, perhaps we could send them some other animals to pull the aravels until they can get more Halla. Regardless, they need to get away from Wycombe before those noble tits get the idea to try and kill them.”

Leliana nodded her head in agreement before turning on her heel and leaving. At the sound of my door closing, I slumped into my chair and slapped my forehead.

“How in the fuck am I going to do both?” I said aloud sighing in frustration. Staring out the window, I pinched the bridge of my nose. “I really got to start putting wards on that damn door,” I muttered before focusing back on the paperwork strewn over my desk.

The soft caress of his aura was much needed after I had finished with one weeks’ worth of paperwork. I heard my door open and the sound of Raj’s paws bounding up the steps made me smile and I moved out from behind my desk.

“There’s my boy,” I said kneeling as he ran towards me pushing me over with his enthusiasm.

Giggling as he licked my face softly whining while he wiggled, then flopping onto his side, he rolled onto his back for me to rub his belly. I could smell the forest on his fur and buried my face in his neck.

“I missed you too,” I whispered and he calmed while I rubbed my face along his neck.
I glanced up noticing that Solas stood silently watching us and smiled at him.

“So while I have been busy trying to catch up with paperwork, you two were off frolicking in the forest?” I teased him.

Solas’ laughter slid over my frayed nerves like a warm bath. I gave Raj one last scratch before getting up from the floor and walking towards Solas.

“I believe that one wolf has greeted me, but the other is remiss in his duties,” I teased him walking my fingers up his chest as I gazed up at him.

“I shall remedy this grievous error presently,” he replied before pressing a kiss to my lips.

I leaned into him taking the comfort our simple greeting always gave me, and his eyes held mine as he pulled away.

“What is troubling you?” he said searching my face.

I gave him a lopsided smile not surprised at his uncanny ability to read me so well and let him lead me towards the couch to sit.

“Is it because of your meeting this morning?” he questioned me and I shook my head.

“No, that wasn’t horrible – unpleasant, but not horrible,” I said with a sigh before continuing. “Cassandra approached me with her concern over the absence of Seekers and would like to investigate Caer Ostwin where Leliana’s agents have tracked them to.”

He sat quietly listening while rubbing his thumb over my knuckles silently urging me to continue.

“Which that is not a concern really, it wasn’t until Leliana met with me a short while after Cassandra with her own need to go to Valence and wants me to accompany her to retrieve something the Divine left behind.”

He gave me an understanding look at my dilemma.

“Would you like me to escort Cassandra to Caer Ostwin while you attend Leliana?” he asked me.

“NO,” I said emphatically gripping his hand tightly.

His stunned expression made me realize how loudly that had come out and I softly laughed, shaking my head at myself for my fears of losing him that I had yet to get under control.

“Sorry, that was a bit overdramatic even by Dorian’s standards. I just…” my eyes fell to the thin pale scar on his neck and a small shiver ran through me as the memory replayed in my mind and I dropped my head. “I can’t Solas, I would be a mess,” I said softly.

His fingers slipped beneath my chin and lifted my face so his eyes could gaze into mine. His eyes held a warmth of love and understanding as they stared at me.

“There is no shame in feeling this way. It is still very fresh in our minds and if I recall, I did not stray far from your side after the Storm Coast,” he said with a small smile.

I leaned forward and pressed my forehead against his and closed my eyes.

“How did you get to be so wonderful?” I asked him softly.
His fingers slid over my cheeks and he held my face.

“You, vhenan,” he replied pressing a soft kiss to my lips.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
The fire crackled and popped as I sat between Solas’ legs while dinner boiled and I drew in my sketchbook. Since our trip to Adamant, I had not traveled with Leliana and even then I couldn’t say I actually traveled with her. Cassandra sat next to her discussing the letter from the Divine while sharpening her sword. Varric rubbed oil into the mechanics of his crossbow silently listening as he sat beside her.

Dorian was writing something down in his notebook while Bull sharpened his ax, and oddly enough, Sera was quietly making arrows while Cole sharpened his daggers.

I was indebted to Cassandra for chosen to go with me to Valence first before trekking across Ferelden to get to Caer Ostwin. Honestly, I think it was because she was curious to what the Divine would leave for Leliana, as was I. I knew Leliana had been the Left Hand of the Divine, but what was that really? Was she the Divine’s spymaster?

“Leliana, what did you actually do for the Divine as her Left Hand?”

Her blue eyes looked at me over the fire and it was always a bit disconcerting that her face betrayed nothing of what she thought unless she wanted it too.

“I did many things,” she replied simply holding my gaze.

I softly smiled at her none answer and closed my sketchbook signaling I was not giving up.

“I heard she Marjolaine’s pet for a while. Definitely pretty in places for sure. Swear I’ve seen you around too,” Sera said finishing up with one of her arrows and then looks at me. “But really Fenni, what’s to know? She kills people,” Sera said giving Leliana a cheeky smile.

I sighed shaking my head at Sera while Leliana shook her head at her and turned towards Cole when he spoke quietly from next to Sera.

“The Left Hand remembers a knife slipped to her in the darkness, and wonders why the flower blooms,” Cole said softly and Leliana looked at him sharply.

Leliana’s obvious discomfort at Cole’s insight, I cleared my throat grabbing Leliana’s attention again.

“So your position with the Inquisition is no different than what your position entailed for the Divine – hopefully with less…killing,” I said drawing her gaze.

I saw Leliana’s look of resignation flutter across her face as she decided to answer me – at least a little.

“A Divine always has enemies. And Justinia had more than most. I protected her. I watched, had an
ear to every door. I identified threats, and I dealt with them,” she finally answered me.

“Did she really have that many enemies?” I asked her.

“There were many who felt she was unfit to be Divine. She had a past, a worldly life. Unlike many, she wasn’t given to the Chantry as a child. She chose it, and somehow that made her unworthy. And because they thought she was unworthy, they wished her harm.”

The simplicity of the answer was not surprising but disheartening.

“It is sad to think they thought her unworthy because she had a past. They only thought that of her because she wanted to instill change into the Chantry. She actually wanted to help the people who believed in the Maker and Andraste, not just pay lip service while getting another gown made. We all have a past – hell, even I don’t think myself worthy to run the Inquisition but I want to help. I want to do good for those around me, and that was all the Divine wanted – to do good, to be an inspiration of change for the betterment of everyone.”

I felt Solas’ gentle squeeze around the back of my neck and I tilted my head back to smile at him.

Leliana watched our interaction before looking at me pointedly.

“Even you have many enemies, Fenlin,” she said.

I pulled my eyes from Solas’ and looked at her laughing softly and nodding my head in agreement ignoring Solas’ slight stiffening behind me.

“Oh I know, Leliana. I supported free mages and tearing away the control the Chantry had over both the Templars and the Mages. Even my own people dislike me because I helped the Empress of Orlais who is not exactly known for her ‘elf friendly’ policies. Then there is the Qunari that would see me collared and leashed or killed because I exist. The Chantry wants me dead because I undermine their authority…shall I continue, because the list continues?”

Everyone around the fire silently stared at me and Leliana slowly shook her head. I let out a small sigh and felt Solas’ aura glide along mine reassuringly.

“My point is, Leliana, is that you are my Spymaster, and I know you look out for me, but you are not my personal assassin,” I told her holding her gaze steadily.

Cassandra looked at me with a soft smile and nodded her head in agreement as Leliana’s gaze fell to the fire. Jesus, if that is what she has been used for all this time, no wonder she is so closed off. And I thought I had trust issues.

We disembarked from the boat and after leaving our mounts at the livery, we walked up a steep and narrow path towards the Chantry that overlooked the water. The small Chantry in Valence reminded me of something straight out of a Gothic architecture book, and it was breathtaking. I glanced at Solas when we got to the doors and he bent and placed a gentle kiss on my cheek before I followed Leliana inside while he waited with the other’s outside.

It had the three architectural features that were typical of the Gothic period. This small Chantry had pointed arches, a ribbed vaulted ceiling, and flying buttresses. The sharply pointed spires and intricate sculptures of Andraste outside and inside the building where spectacular. The building was a stone structure with large expanses of stained glass windows that depicted Andraste’s struggles or travels. Huge, clustered columns lined the walkway inside, draped with the heraldry of the Chantry. I
stared around in awe at the multiple marble statues that filled the corners.

Leliana walked towards the large statue of Andraste that held center and knelt.

“It’s just as I remember it,” Leliana said softly.

I moved towards a large statue of a man holding a pitcher of water on his shoulder and reverently touched the soft, cool marble.

“You didn’t say anything about you having been here before,” I replied marveling at the craftsmanship of the statue.

“After the Blight ended, I came here to see Justinia. She was just Dorthea then, a Revered Mother,” she said glancing at me.

I moved away from the statue towards her.

“It’s peaceful here. You must have good memories of this place.”

Leliana nodded her head in agreement and gave me a gentle smile before looking back at the large marble statue of Andraste.

“It was a place of comfort; it is good to see it still untouched by Corypheus.”

As we stood in silence, a chantry sister walked around a corner and Leliana smiled at her.

“Leliana, is that you?” the woman said walking towards us.

“I thought you were in Val Royeaux?” Leliana replied.

I quietly watched the interaction between them. After a couple of years working with Leliana, I had learned a few things about her. Everything about Leliana’s posture expressed her surprise and what appeared to be genuine friendship towards the woman. Her smile open and welcoming, even her eyes were soft, but her shoulders – they were stiff and on guard.

I studied Leliana for a moment. She is a beautiful woman with copper, red hair that is kept in a bob where the ends dance just over the tips of her shoulders. Her eyes are bright blue and intelligent that missed nothing. Her peaches and cream skin have a soft dusting of freckles over her nose and cheeks. Not to mention her soft Orlesian accent that brought to mind sex on silk sheets whenever she spoke and she was possibly closer to five foot ten…oh yes, totally jealous about her vertical achievement. It was then that I started having a moment of sudden clarity, an epiphany of sorts. This is why she is good at what she does – she appears gentle and open, unassuming, like a Venus flytrap.

Sister Natalie stopped in front of us and shook her head.

“No, I’ve been here since Justinia died,” she replied.

Leliana leaned in and gave her a hug. Looking at me from over Sister Natalie’s shoulder, she barely shook her head no, signaling to me that Sister Natalie was lying.

“This place makes me feel like – like she’s still with us,” Sister Natalie said as they broke apart.

“Inquisitor, this is Natalie, a trusted friend,” Leliana said and I pasted a smile on my face.

Well then, I guess we play the Game…yuck.
Natalie looked at me with surprise.

“Wait, Inquisitor? You brought the Inquisitor here?” she said in surprise before suddenly kneeling. “My lady, forgive me for not recognizing you earlier.”

I smiled at her and gestured her to stand.

“Please get up Natalie, I wish more people didn’t recognize me,” I replied.

Natalie stood and looked unsure.

“Oh – I see,” she replied glancing at Leliana.

“Natalie, listen. There is something hidden here, something Justinia left for me,” Leliana told her.

Natalie looked at her with obvious curiosity.

“Oh, really? What is it?” she replied.

Leliana shook her head and slightly shrugged her shoulders.

“I don’t know, but we’ll find it,” she said looking at me. “I’m curious to see what brought us all here.”

Natalie nodded her head in agreement.

“Justinia’s letter came with instructions for me,” Leliana said sighing. “They were a little cryptic.”

“Oh, what were her instructions?” Natalie asked.

Even as Leliana just smiled pleasantly, her eyes sparkled obviously pleased. *And like the Venus flytrap with a fly landing on its mouth-like petals, it snaps shut – trapping its prey.* I listened to her repeat the instructions from the letter and felt a bit sorry about comparing Leliana to a bug-eating plant.

“Always remember that faith sprung from a barren branch. That light has no fear of darkness. Above all, that strength lives in an open heart.”

Natalie tapped her chin as she thought about it.

“She must be hinting at something in here. Let’s look around,” she said.

While Leliana spoke with Natalie, I absently listened to them and went to look at the many pieces of art hanging on the walls.

“Do they still sing the Benedictions on Fridays? That canticle was one of Justinia’s favorites,” Leliana asked Natalie as they slowly followed behind me.

“Yes, of course,” Natalie replied slightly hesitant.

I walked towards a picture of a soft, white rose growing on a barren branch and smiled. *Justinia wasn’t being cryptic, she was being blunt.* I began searching around the painting, then behind it and found nothing. Sighing with a bit of annoyance, I tapped my chin and saw a small copper cylinder drilled into the wall just beneath the painting. *Hmm, well what the hell.* Pushing on the small raised nob, I heard a soft click and smiled almost excitedly.
Moving away from the painting, I thought about the next instruction. ‘That light has no fear of darkness’. Staring at the many pictures, none of them depicted anything showing light and dark. Walking into the next small chamber, I stood in front of the statue of Andraste surrounded by large braziers that sat on the floor.

I walked around the small room looking at all the other pieces of art and none held what I was looking for. Turning back towards the statue I caught the metal glint on the platform of the statue just behind the brazier. No fear of darkness if you have a flame. Walking towards the statue, I pressed the small copper cylinder and heard the soft click of the mechanism inside.

Two down and one more to go; I think the next one was ‘strength lives in an open heart’. Moving around the room studying each painting, I came across one that depicted Andraste being stabbed through the heart by the Archon of Tevinter while flames danced around her feet. Damn, that is just fucking brutal. Glancing to beneath the painting, I recognized the small copper cylinder and pressed it, hearing the soft click of the mechanism.

A loud click echoed through the silent room and Natalie looked at Leliana.

“What was that?”

Leliana glanced at me curiously and I smiled at her brightly.

“I do believe we opened something.” I told her.

Moving through the round room, I found a large picture of Andraste, the Archon, and Maferath, her human husband. The picture had split into two, and I smiled realizing that it was doors. Pushing them open, it revealed a larger painting of Andraste standing between the two different Divines. On the right side of the painting was the female Divine for all of the Southern countries, and on the left side was the male Divine that they have in Tevinter.

The painting started to slowly move upward revealing a hidden room with a small, golden, ornate box that sat in the center of a small wooden table with a large lotus flower carved into the top.

Leliana stood next to me and glanced at the box before turning towards Natalie and slamming her against the Andraste statue with her blade pressed against her throat.

“Sorry to keep you waiting,” she said menacingly and I felt cold shivers run down my spine with the tone.

Swallowing my discomfort at the mercurial change, I walked towards them.

“Leliana, what are you doing?”

“I’m protecting us,” she replied barely sparing a glance at me over her shoulder. “They never sing the Benedictions here on Friday’s, Natalie. Something so simple, and you got it so wrong. I wanted to believe, but you were lying from the start.”

Natalie’s face changed from anxious to angry and her lips flattened making it obvious that she was not going to talk.

“Keep that pretty mouth shut if you must, dear. You’ve already told me everything I need to know,” Leliana told her. “The prickweed burs on your hem, talking about the sun rising through the Breach. It all points to a single place: Morelle in the Dales, Grand Cleric Victoire’s bastion. She sent you, didn’t she? Victoire was always an opportunist.”
I watched Natalie’s eyes narrow at Leliana coolly.

“Who is this Grand Cleric? I don’t think I’ve heard about her?” I said watching Leliana carefully.

“An experienced Cleric, she never agreed with Justinia but kept her ideas to herself. I suppose now, with Justinia dead, she thought she could make her move.”

Looking at Leliana for a moment, I then looked at Natalie.

“So, what was the Grand Cleric planning by sending you here?”

Natalie’s lips stayed sealed and Leliana smirked at her.

“It is obvious, Inquisitor. She sent Natalie to see what Justinia was hiding, no?”

Natalie looked at Leliana angrily and finally broke her silence.

“The Inquisition has turned Thedas away from the true Chantry. It must be stopped.”

Leliana laughed at her without humor.

“Stop us? You must be joking,” she replied.

“Mother Victoire is well loved by many. The Inquisition has more enemies than you know,” she replied coldly.

“And Victoire thinks she can ally with them?” Leliana said her tone laced with disbelief.

I rubbed my face with annoyance at the whole situation.

“The Inquisition and the Chantry never had to be at odds, Natalie. We just wanted to close the damn Breach, remove the Ancient Tevinter Magister trying to tear apart Thedas and bring some semblance of peace to Thedas. Why can we not work together to accomplish this?”

“I was called to serve the Grand Cleric. This is her decision and I will not betray her. Kill me then if you must, I am not afraid to die for my beliefs, at least I still know what I believe,” Natalie replied staring at me angrily.

“No,” I said looking at her. “You will not die by our hand, let her go Leliana,” I said turning away from her.

“No, I must protect the Inquisition, she is an enemy,” Leliana replied angrily and I turned back around and walked towards her.

Laying my hand on her shoulder, I shook my head.

“No Leliana, she is but one woman and a zealot fool. Let her go,” I said gently holding her cool blue gaze.

Leliana dropped her blade and stepped back from Natalie.

“The Inquisitor has spoken. Run, and tell your Mistress she has a choice. The Inquisition is coming,” she said holding Natalie’s gaze coolly.

Natalie looked from her to me and nodded before leaving the room for the main doors. We watched Natalie leave and when the doors closed, Leliana turned to the hidden room and moved towards the
small, ornate box and opened it.

“No! This can’t be it, there’s nothing here,” she said in surprise.

I looked at the box and was just as frustrated. *All that and for what? An empty damn box?* Sighing I glanced at Leliana.

“Maybe it’s not what you expected, but her letter to you was odd as well. So possibly this too isn’t nothing but has a hidden meaning.”

Leliana picked up the box and looked at it carefully, her fingers running over the lid.

“There’s a message carved into the lid,” she said softly her eyes slightly squinting to read it.

“The Left Hand should lay down her burden,” she read aloud.

Leliana’s head came up slowly as she stared at the empty stone wall.

“She’s releasing me,” she said with surprise. “A Divine has a long reach but it is always her left hand that stretches out. A thousand lies, a thousand deaths – her commands but my conscious that bore the consequences.”

I stood silently listening to her and felt sorry for the things she had had to do in the name of duty.

“That’s why she apologized in the Fade and said ‘she failed you’, this is what she meant,” I said gently.

Leliana turned towards me with a soft half smile.

“All this time Justinia carried the fear that she was using me, just like I’d been used in the past. But Marjolaine’s games were trifles, Justinia gambled with the fate of nations. She needed me, and no one else could have done what I did. She knew that” she said.

“Then it’s time for you to let it go – let her go, Leliana. You don’t owe her anything anymore,” I told her.

“If it were not for you, I would have killed Natalie and called it a good thing. Thank you for showing me what was right when I could not see it for myself,” she said before hugging me.

Pleasantly surprised, I hugged her back.

“Come on, I have a couple of bottles of wine with our names on it,” I said to her and Leliana laughed.

“Yes, I believe we have earned a glass – or two,” she replied with a large smile.
Now - We Are Off To Caer Ostwin

Chapter Notes

Thank you for being awesome readers!

I hope you enjoy the new chapter and have a fabulous weekend.

We docked in Jader as the sun was just peaking over the Frostback Mountains and everyone shuffled off the boat sleepily in the early morning fog. Men from Skyhold met us at the docs with wagons of supplies that were shipped from Orzammar, Nevarra, Antiva, and Orlais. Solas and I unloaded our Hart’s from the ship’s cargo hold as an Inquisition agent waited for me at the end of the pier.

“Inquisitor, I was asked by Ambassador Montilyet to make sure that you received this for your journey to Caer Ostwin,” he said holding out a medium wrapped package.

Taking the package from him I nodded my head while Solas looked at it curiously.

“Thank you…Brian, isn’t it? You are her personal assistant?”

His face broke into a large smile and he nodded his head enthusiastically.

“Yes, Inquisitor,” he said with barely contained excitement.

Bull walked by shaking his head at me with a large smile as he patted the kid on the shoulder when he passed. What?

“Well, tell Josephine thank you, for whatever it is,” I said slipping the medium sized package into my pack.

“Yes, Inquisitor,” he said straightening his shoulders and standing at attention.

We continued down the pier and I looked at Solas unable to comprehend why Bull had that silly look on his face when he had walked by us.

“I can't figure out why Bull gave me that look,” I said as we continued down the pier.

I heard Solas softly laugh and glance at me.

“It is the way you interact with each person you meet and make them feel important. It is quite astonishing to watch,” he replied smiling at me.

I blushed and felt his finger glide over my cheek and I glanced up at him smiling. I saw Leliana shaking Cassandra’s hand and then look at us as we approached and Cassandra led her mount away.

“Inquisitor, I will be leaving with our soldiers taking the supplies to Skyhold,” she informed me.

“If I could, I would hurry back to Skyhold where my bed and indoor plumbing was too,” I teased her.
Leliana laughed and patted my shoulder before winking at me.

“That is true,” she replied. “But there is still much for me to do.”

“Yes, the ‘no rest for the wicked’ is a very real reality for all of us,” I said softly chuckling.

Leliana laughed and grasping my shoulders, she pressed a kiss to each cheek in a true Orlesian fashion and said softly before moving, “thank you Fenlin.”

I smiled at her as she rose back up and nodded just slightly before patting Inansha on the shoulder and continuing away from the bustle of loading and unloading of ships. Meeting up with the others away from all the action, everyone mounted up and Solas helped me up onto Inansha before slipping onto Siugen.

“Well let’s get moving and see if we can’t make it to the small river before dark,” I said.

Cassandra started off with Varric while we all followed behind. It was hours of blessed silence as most were still trying to wake up. It surprised me that Solas was the one to finally break the silence as he spoke to Bull.

“How do you feel, Bull? Do you need a distraction to focus your mind?”

I glance at him curious to where this was going and saw the mischief sparkling in his eyes and mentally sighed. What is he up to now?

“Well, this area's low on dancing girls, sadly,” Bull replied winking at Dorian.

Solas smiled wickedly at Bull’s back.

“King’s pawn to E4,” he said.

Bull turned in his saddle and looked at him.

“You're shitting me. We don't even have a board!” he said sounding surprised.

Solas held his one-eyed gaze and gave him a smug smile.

“Too complicated for a savage Tal-Vashoth?” he questioned.

Bull’s one eye narrowed at him as he turned around mumbling unintelligently.

“Smug little asshole. Pawn to E5,” he replied.

Solas smiled pleased that Bull was up for the mental acrobatics and I shook my head at him.


Bull shook his head and rubbed his chin before turning to look at Solas.

“Accepted. Pawn takes pawn. Give me a bit to get the pieces set in my head. Then we'll see what you've got,” he tells him.

Solas nods his head and finally notices me looking at him.

“Bored my love?” I ask him.

“As he said vhenan, there is little to see on this stretch of our journey to keep one's attention.”
I laughed and shook my head.

“He mentioned dancing girls were missing, is that what you want to see on the sides of the trail too?”

His eyes slide over me and I felt the subtle caress of his aura touch my skin as he finally raised his eyes back up to mine and my body heated with the intense gaze.

“My tastes in diversions would not be so easy or simple,” he replied.

My face slowly began to blush with his meaning.

“Wicked, wicked man,” I replied softly blushing hotly.

Solas laughed while I ran my hands over my face trying to cool the sudden flush of desire that raced through my system. *The man is a catalyst for my hormones... ugh*

I watched as Solas directed Siugen closer to Bull and shook my head at his antics. It was funny to see that he may not appreciate the Qun and what it does to their people, but he did respect Bull. I think he just liked the way his mind worked. He had said once in the privacy of our tent one evening when we were in Emprise Du Lion, that Bull’s intelligence proved that the Qunari were not mindless beings, only them following the Qun made them such.

Dorian raised his eyebrow at me and I just shook my head.

“I have no idea,” I muttered.

“So, where were we? Ah, yes. Mage to C4,” Solas said.

Bull looked at him curiously.

“A little aggressive; Arishok to H4, check,” he replied.

Solas smiled excitedly and tapped his fingers against his leg.

“Speaking of aggressive, I assume Arishok is your term for the Queen? King to F1,” he replied.

“Pawn to B5,” Bull said with a large boyish smile at the challenge.

“All right, you have my curiosity. Mage takes Pawn,” Solas replied looking at him curiously.

“You call your Tamassran’s Mages? Ben-Hassrath to F6,” Bull said.

“You call your Knights Ben-Hassrath? Incidentally, Knight to F3,” Solas replied.

“Ben-Hassrath makes more sense than horses. They're sneaky, and they can move through enemy lines. Arishok to H6,” Bull said simply.

“Pawn to D3,” Solas answered with a slight shrug.

“Ben-Hassrath to H5. Hah! All right, take some time. Think about your life choices,” Bull said looking triumphant.

Solas smiled at him before nodding his head to think about his next move while Bull held a smug grin.
We set up camp while Sera and Varric hunted. I was brushing down our mounts when Dorian came up beside me and I smiled at him as I continued brushing.

“I have written down some theories and thoughts on your ability to change into that large animal,” he said.

Glancing up at him I started shaking my head as I laughed.

“I wondered when you would break,” I said before hobbling the horse and moving on to the next one.

“Whatever do you mean?” he said with feigned surprise.

I raised my eyebrow at him and he let out an annoyed sigh.

“Okay, yes, I am beside myself with curiosity on how you are able to do it and still cast magic. The immense magical power you wielded was...you healed, that is not in your normal tool bag my dear, aren’t you the slightest bit curious to the extent of your abilities?” he said slightly huffy.

I continued brushing the horse as I listened to his frustration. I knew what my abilities were and were not. Since my ascension, I was capable of a great many things and a great many terrible things. Just like Spiderman’s uncle said, “With power comes a great responsibility.” I finally looked at Dorian and gave him a soft smile.

“I also threatened Bull with that immense power,” I reminded him.

Dorian looked at me and his nose slightly scrunched up with the reminder.

“Yes, there was that,” he replied tapping his chin.

I sighed, resigned to the fact that I could only evade Dorian’s questions for so long.

“Solas and I are working with this change in the Fade since I am uncomfortable doing it awake. My emotions are more intense in the Fade, so I have made great strides in learning control. Perhaps the best way to answer your questions, and help you understand, would be to bring you with me on my next training session.”

Dorian’s eyes grew a bit before suddenly grabbing my shoulders and kissing me square on the lips with his excitement.

“Brilliant! I can’t wait,” he said before letting me go and walking away.

I watched him act as giddy as a kid with a new toy as he walked back towards the fire. Solas came up behind me and wrapped his arms around my waist.

“What was that all about?” he asked softly.

“I invited him to one of our training sessions in the Fade,” I replied and heard his soft chuckle.

“You will not be able to keep what you are from him,” he said knowingly and I turned in his arms to look up at him.
“Does this bother you?” I asked him.

Solas shook his head and pressed a light kiss to my lips.

“No vhenan, I believe that he will understand,” he said.

He held me to him while I thought about what we were to face in our future together. We would need allies, and like it or not, we would need someone in Tevinter. I heard Bull call out to Sera and Varric as they returned and I slowly moved out of Solas’ grasp.

“Well let’s get our dinner going,” I said giving him a soft smile.

Solas suddenly looked at me curiously and tilted his head.

“Have you opened your package from Josephine yet?”

I shook my head and moved towards my pack to pull out the medium-sized package. Removing the thin twine that held the package securely closed, I peeled the paper away and was instantly hit with a smell I had not smelt in over two years. Coffee!

Ripping into the paper with gusto now, I revealed the cloth bag of coffee beans and wanted to cry.

“Coffee,” I said reverently holding it to my chest.

“Antivan Coffee,” Solas replied smiling at me.

“This is the most beautiful…” slightly choked up I ignored Solas’ surprised look.

“I have not had coffee in over two years, give me a break. I didn’t know they had it here and was afraid to ask for something that didn’t exist, alright?” I whispered towards him in a huff.

Solas laughed at me and shook his head.

“Will you be making this before bed then?” he asked me and I immediately shook my head no.

“Hell no, I will never go to sleep if I do that. I will make it in the morning and that way we can all enjoy the caffeine buzz,” I replied with a large smile.

Grabbing my pack and holding my precious beans close, I went towards our tent while Solas continued to laugh at me.

*****

“That is what you want, to serve me and you will help me escape this never-ending nightmare?” Andruil listened to Imshael’s request.

“Anaris is no visionary, you on the other hand are, so yes, that is what I want in return,” he replied internally giggling with glee.

He watched as her yellow gaze narrow on him chillingly. She had tormented their kind as she hunted the void for centuries. This would be his time to hunt and torment them. His kind would revere him and he would ascend to a Forgotten One with his deeds, one that would rival Anaris herself.

Andruil gave him a chilling smile before nodding her head in agreement.
“So be it, you will make the unbreakable vow then, Forbidden One,” she answered coldly.

Imshael held his wrist out towards her and watched with giddiness as she wove the spell marking him as hers. As the seal of Andruil burnt into his flesh he felt the magic she used to lock his will for her to command as she held his gaze.

“Now get me out of here,” she said with a clipped tone.

Imshael nodded his head and led the way towards the weakness in the barrier.

“This way,” he replied.

Andruil followed him closely through the corridors of their gilded prison and once they stopped in front of the wall beside the Eluvian, she stared at it and felt nothing, no weakness, and pulled her dagger with a hiss of anger.

Imshael held his hands up, holding her angry gaze.

“Wait – it is here my Queen, let me show you.”

Andruil gave him a quick nod and stayed her hand as she watched him weave a spell only the Void-ridden could accomplish that ripped a hole in the barrier just long enough for them to leave. Slipping her dagger back into its sheath, she followed him through the rip before it closed.

Standing outside of the barrier, she took a deep breath and stared up at the darkened sky. Everything felt - heavier, less even. She looked at Imshael with a calculating smile and laughed.

“Finally,” she breathed.

Imshael folded his arms behind him and waited as she glanced around carefully before finally looking at him again.

“Find them, I want to know what they are doing and where they are,” she commanded.

Imshael smiled and nodded his head.

“As you command,” he replied.

Andruil watched Imshael change into his raven form and fly off as she stared up at the sky again.

“You will pay for this Fen’Harel; I will not fail a second time in killing that slave. As for you, mother, you will share her fate,” she swore towards the night sky.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
While I pulled out the pan to make coffee, I realized I would have to draw up an old-fashioned camp coffee pot with a makeshift mesh filter for Master Harritt to craft for me. In the meantime, I didn’t care. I set the breakfast porridge to cooking as I ground my beans carefully, meticulously until I had enough for a pot, or in this case, a pan of coffee.

I listened to the sound of Solas leaving our tent from behind me just as I set the pan over the fire to boil. Dusting my hands, I turned towards him smiling.

“Good morning handsome, sleep well?”

His soft smile and starved gaze set my blood immediately pumping and I softly blushed as he walked slowly towards me.

“It would have been a much better morning had I awoken next to you as I had anticipated,” he said with a hungry growl. Grasping my hips, he pulled me into him before nipping at my lower lip.

Wrapping my hands around his neck, I smiled against his lips.

“Oh, did you have plans,” I mouthed before he hungrily kissed me.

Softly moaning into his mouth he pulled me just a bit closer and my knees grew a bit week with the demanding glide of his tongue over mine that expressed his plans implicitly.

“Oi! You two take that somewhere else. No one wants to see all that this early in the morning,” Sera yelled from behind us.

The sound of her voice broke our kiss apart and he laid his forehead against mine gazing into my eyes with a small gleam of annoyance. Gently kissing him again, he let me go with a small sigh as I turned towards Sera who stared at us with her face scrunched up as if she ate something sour.

Laughing at her expression, I went to check on breakfast and my coffee. I could sometimes throttle Sera; she was the perfect bucket of ice water to an otherwise pleasant moment. Her voice could be a great form of birth control. That thought made me giggle and she looked at me curiously.

“What’s so funny?” she said rubbing her face.

I shook my head at her still smiling.

“Nothing,” I replied.

Sera looked at me closely and shook her head.

“Nah, you got somethin you wanna say,” she said pointing at me.

“No,” I said shaking my head and laughing. “No, I most definitely do not.”

Just as she opened her mouth to say something else, Cassandra walked out of her tent and smacked her in the back of the head.
“Ow,” she said rubbing her head quickly looking up at her.

“Sweet Maker, Sera, it is too early to have to listen to you. At least them,” she said pointing towards Solas and I. “I couldn’t hear. You, I could hear if I was dead,” she grumbled moving towards the fire.

Laughing at Cassandra’s not so typical morning behavior, I saw Varric exit her tent with a displeased expression on his face as he glanced at Sera in annoyance and I laughed even harder realizing what had Cassandra so grumpy. Varric had the same look Solas got every time Sera had disrupted one of our morning lovey sessions.

Dorian exited his tent and glared at Sera while Solas sat down behind me.

“Maker’s breath, does anyone in this fucking camp know how to sleep past dawn?”

I could barely catch my breath laughing so hard now that tears were falling from my eyes. I fell back into Solas just as Bull exited his tent with a similar dissatisfied expression as Varric’s.

“Oh…ouch,” I gasped holding my sides.

“It’s not funny,” Sera said looking at me.

I shook my head trying to gather my breath. She obviously ruined more than one person’s lovey moment.

“I can’t help it Sera…” gasping for another breath and wiping at the tears, Sera glared at me.

Solas softly laughed behind me and I felt his arms slip around my shoulders before he kissed the top of my head.

“Perhaps your gift will brighten everyone’s mood, vhenan,” he said.

“Oh,” I said moving from him quickly to check on the coffee.

“Everyone, grab your mugs, I have got a treat for us today.”

Everyone looked at me slightly curious but moved to grab a cup while I dug through our supplies and pulled out the honey and some of the milk we got at the Inquisition camp outside of Jader. After I had poured everyone a cup, I doctored mine with some honey and milk and took a slow sip. Leaning back between Solas’ bent legs, I closed my eyes moaning with the pleasure of the flavor bursting over my tongue. Solas softly laughed. Glancing up at him, I winked at him before taking another sip of my delicious brew.

Cassandra took a small sip of her black coffee and looked at me in surprise.

“Antivan coffee, how did you…” she started as Dorian interjected.

“If I didn’t love you before my dear, I absolutely do now,” he said taking a drink of his with only a bit of milk.

Everyone was making their own grateful noises and I saw Cole was the only one without a cup and I motioned him to sit next to me.

“I like mine sweet with milk, would you like to try a taste?” I offered him.
Cole looked at it for a moment before taking the cup from my hand and taking a small sip. I saw his eyes widen as he tasted it and looked at me in surprise.

“It is good,” he said.

I smiled, giggling and motioned towards the pack of eating utensils.

“Get a cup and I will make yours like mine so you can have some,” I told him.

Cole left to get himself a cup and when he came back, I showed him how I made mine. He sat next to me sipping his coffee as everyone swiftly developed a better mood with the unusual treat.

We had been riding for a few hours when Solas broke the momentary silence beginning his chess game with Bull again. Sera groaned and rolled her eyes at them while I giggled at her displeased expression.

“All right, Bull. If you are prepared: Knight to H4,” he said.

Bull glanced over at him and chuckled.

“Arishok to G5. So, you're giving up the Tamassran at B5 or the Ben-Hassrath at H4?” he questioned.

“Neither. Knight to F5,” he said with a smug grin.

Bull laughed.


“And you, your Knight. Or Ben-Hassrath, if you will. Pawn to G4,” he replied quickly.

“Ben-Hassrath to F6,” Bull replied quickly.

“Hmm. Tower to G1,” Solas finally said after a few moments.

Bull looked overly excited and about to jump out of his saddle on the Druffalo.

“Hah! Pawn takes your Tamassran - or Mage, or whatever it is.”

Solas somewhat frowned at him.

“I get the idea.”

Bull laughed shaking his head.

“Too much time playing with spirits, Fade Walker,” he poked.

Solas’ eyebrow rose as he looked at him calmly.

“We shall see,” he replied.

I softly chuckled and shook my head at the two big children.
After an hour Solas looked at Bull.

“After careful consideration: Knight to D5,” he said.


“Mage to D6,” Solas replied with a smile.

“Arishok takes Tower. Check. What are you doing, Solas?” Bull asked him surprised.

“You shall see,” he said calmly. “King to E2.”

Bull looked at him and shook his head and shrugged his massive shoulders.

“All right, Tamassran takes Tower. Your last Tower, by the way.”

“Pawn to E5,” Solas replied.

“Really. I've got my whole army bearing down on your King, and you're moving a Pawn? Are you even trying anymore?” Bull questioned looking at him.

“Think about it, my friend,” Solas replied holding his gaze.

Bull’s eye narrowed at him for a moment before nodding his head.

Solas and Bull had been quiet for the rest of our trip until we were almost to our stopping point just below Caer Ostwin, and Bull glanced over at Solas.

“All right, Solas. I've thought about it, ready to finish this? Ben-Hassrath to A6.”

Solas smiled and nodded his head.

“Knight takes Pawn at G7. Check,” he replied calmly.

Bull almost looked bored.

“Uh-huh. King to D8.”

“Queen to F6, Check,” Solas replied looking very pleased with himself.

Bull shook his head as he gazed at him.

“And now my Ben-Hassrath takes your Queen. You've got no Towers. You're down to a single Mage. Too bad you wasted time moving that Pawn to... to...” his eye narrowed at him. “You sneaky son of a bitch.”

Solas laughed triumphantly as he held Bull's gaze.

“Mage to E7, checkmate.”

Bull grunted and shook his head.

“Nice game, mage,” he said jokingly as we arrived at our next campsite.
“And you as well, Tal-Vashoth,” Solas said with a slight smile sliding off of Siugen.

I watched him walk towards me with a very satisfied smile on his face and I shook my head at him as he grasped me around the waist, helping me down. Wrapping my arms loosely around his neck, I pressed a quick kiss to his lips.

“You ever throw me under the cart like you did that queen, I’ll kill you myself, ma lath,” I said holding his sparkling gaze teasingly.

He chuckled as he put me down and pressed a quick peck on my nose lovingly.

“Vhenan, you would never be endangered, I cannot live without my heart,” he said smoothly making me melt.

“Damn your good, we really need to start writing these down,” I teased and felt his hand swat me on the ass as he gave me a cheeky smile. Blowing him a kiss from over my shoulder, I walked away to begin helping set up camp.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
ma lath - my love
Finding Seekers

Chapter Notes

Over 12k hits! Every single one of you is freaking fabulous!

Thank you!

All of the comments, kudos, the general outpour of support has made writing this story so much fun. Thank you, everyone, for sharing in my journey.

We arrived at Caer Ostwin moving up the steep path towards the door as Cassandra glanced around the area.

“It is odd that the trail led us here. Bann Loren is a pious, unassuming man. What has he become involved in?” she said.

“Crazy – everyone is losing their damn minds lately,” I replied as we stopped in front of the door.

Cassandra snorted as she looked at me.

“No truer words could be said, let’s see what lies within,” she said pushing the door open.

As the door swung open, it revealed what I thought at first was a Red Templar but quickly saw that it was a Seeker who stood surprised at our entrance.

“Honey, we’re home,” I called out making Bull chuckle as he grabbed the man by the throat before he could call out or run.

As Bull held the man dangling in the air by his neck, I spoke quickly before Bull killed him.

“How many of you are in the building?”

The Seeker just stared at me with disgust and clenched his jaw. I held his gaze for a moment before looking up at Bull.

“Oh well, I tried,” I said before looking at Cole and he nodded his head before disappearing to get a head count of the small area.

Bull tightened his grip as Cassandra ended him quickly with her sword through his chest. She stared down at the dead man looking confused when Cole returned after a few moments.

“Four in the next room three in the one after that.”

We moved through the small room, barriers up and at the door, I cast ice glyphs on the floor so we could get this over with quickly and as quietly as possible.

I noticed as we fought they were not really Seekers either and I felt a bit of confusion myself as to the men dressed in Seeker armor but not fighting as Seekers should. Looking over at Cassandra her face was a map of anger.
“Promisers, I should have known,” she said spitting at the body of one on the ground. “The Order of Fiery Promise is a cult with…strange beliefs about the Seekers. They’ve hounded us for centuries”

“Cultists…well sure, why am I not surprised?” I replied looking around the room.

“Their fanatics, drunk on whatever forbidden magic they find to make themselves “true” Seekers. This explains why the Seekers might be here, but not the connection to Corypheus.”

I shook my head and followed her through the next door down a flight of stairs that led to another long hallway. I saw the dead possible Seeker in the middle of the walkway and grimaced. As we got closer to the body, I could tell that the man had been obviously tortured by the rope burns around his wrists and neck.

“Damn,” Bull muttered as he looked at the dead warrior.

“A Seeker…did they torture him to death?” Cassandra questioned quietly before narrowing her gaze at the opened doorway that led to the courtyard. “The Promisers will pay for this,” she said angrily heading out the door.

I glanced at Cole and he followed after her quickly to protect her flank. When very angry, Cassandra tended to rush in without proper preparation. In the courtyard, there were seven Promiser’s waiting for them, four of them archers. As everyone exited the doorway, I saw quickly that there were no stairs leading to the actual courtyard below but just a narrow walkway with a large drop and I stuck to inside the doorway.

Casting barriers and ice magic from my vantage, the archers were killed quickly while Bull and Cassandra along with Varric and Sera took out the warriors of the group from the ground. When the fighting was over, Solas stood on the edge of the narrow walkway and glanced back to where I stood in the doorway.

I know my face is pale and just watching him stand so close to the edge made my stomach clench with fear.

He walked towards me and my look of embarrassment clear before dropping my gaze and my head, shaking it with anger at myself.

“Some Inquisitor I am – scared of fucking heights,” I mumbled disgustedly.

Solas shook his head and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“Maybe someday you will tell me how you came to be frightened in this manner,” he said before picking me up.

Clenching my eyes shut, I pushed that memory as far away as possible and focused on the colors of my aura, ignoring the sounds of his steps as they creaked over the wooden boards of the walkway. I felt him pass me down to large arms and knew they were Bulls before feeling my feet hit solid ground. Taking a deep breath, I opened my eyes and looked around the courtyard getting my bearings.

“Thanks, Bull,” I said watching Solas swing down from the walkway anxiously.

Walking towards Cassandra, she was knelt next to a dead Promiser, holding a note and glanced up at me as she read aloud.

“As the Seekers of Truth have proven resistant to the effects of Red Lyrium, the Elder One has seen
fit to place them in your care. Reclaim your destiny, and know that the Elder One expects your devotion as repayment. Signed by Lord Sampson, Commander of the Red Templars.”

She stared at the paper for a moment before crumpling it up and throwing it towards the dead Promiser on the ground in anger.

“Does Corypheus not realize the Promisers want the world to end? What use are they to him?”

“So Corypheus sold the Seekers to these cultists?” I asked.

Why should anything surprise me anymore? Rubbing my face, I watched Cassandra slightly pace.

“And they leaped at the chance, of course. But this doesn’t explain how he captured the Seekers in the first place, or what’s been done with them. We must keep looking,” she said.

“You sound worried,” I said.

She looked at me and nodded her head.

“I am,” she replied before turning towards the stairway leading up into the next building.

We entered the next building and there was a small group of Promisers. Casting a barrier, Cassandra charged into the room full of anger, shield bashing the first warrior so hard she knocked him almost across the room. I glanced around and realized that this was the main hall of the castle with its long tables and large throne on a small dais.

The small group did not last long and we hustled past the throne up a flight of steps off to the right. The next room was another dining area and it was empty. Cassandra opened the next door that showed a large foyer type of room and a Seeker was laying half dead on the steps, panting for breath.

I heard Cassandra’s gasp, sheathing her sword as she rushed forward.

“Daniel! Daniel, can you hear me?” she questioned as she knelt next to the Seeker that was clearly dying.

“Cassandra?” the man’s raspy voice croaked out sounding surprised before opening his pain-filled brown eyes wider.

“It…is you. You’re alive,” he said breathlessly.

I knelt on the other side of him and his eyes glanced at me before focusing back on Cassandra.

“As are you. I’m so glad I found you,” she said.

He coughed and shook his head.

“No, don’t be…they put a…demon inside me. It’s tearing me up,” he gasped before groaning and holding his stomach.

Cole stood behind me and spoke softly.

“I’m all red, it’s wrong, no light anymore, hurts – Maker, it hurts, please make it stop.”

Cassandra looked at him and shook her head.
“That’s impossible, you can’t be possessed,” she replied.

“I’m not possessed, they…fed me things. I can feel it growing,” he said sounding scared.

Cassandra looked at me in horror and squeezed her eyes shut. After everything we had witnessed in Emprise Du Lion, we knew what he spoke about.

“That is…” swallowing past the bile that rose in my throat, I shook my head.

They fed him red lyrium…what kind of fucking monsters, are they? “How did this happen to you?”

“Cassandra, the Lord Seeker,” he began slightly wheezing trying to catch his breath.

“We’ll find him if he still lives, we’ll…” Cassandra’s voice tapered off at Daniel’s adamant head shake.

“No, Lucius betrayed us, Cassandra. He sent us here, one by one. ‘An important mission,’ he said. Lies! He was here with them all along. He’s still working with them.”

I looked at him and saw the blackened veins of red lyrium mapping up his neck. He won’t be here much longer.

“So the one we met in Val Royeaux was a fake,” I said and Daniel looked at me.

“It was an imposter. The Lord Seeker you met was an Envy demon, disguised as the Lord Seeker.” Cassandra’s expression held shock.

“But how can that be…”

“He let it, Cassandra, so he could get us here,” he said angrily causing a coughing fit.

I shook my head with his information. I always wondered if my assumptions had been correct in thinking it was Envy that went to Val Royeaux and not the real Lord Seeker. I shared a look with Cassandra and slowly stood.

“Wait! Don’t leave me like this, Cassandra…please,” he begged. Grabbing Cassandra’s arm tightly as he stared at her.

Cassandra sighed heavily and held his gaze.

“You should have come with me. You didn’t believe in the war any more than I did,” she said bowing her head and closing her eyes.

“You know me, I wanted that promotion,” he said with a small smile before coughing a wet, painful sound.

“Go to the Maker’s side, Daniel. You will be welcomed,” she told him as she pulled her dagger from her back.

He smiled at her gratefully.

“Thank you,” he whispered before she slid the dagger directly into his heart.

Cassandra’s head was bowed and I saw her shoulders slightly begin to shake. Varric walked towards her to stand next to her silently, placing his hand on her shoulder, she reached up and gripped it. For a few moments, we waited and Cassandra finally stood and cleared her throat.
“He was my apprentice, I have never known a finer young man,” she said her voice thick with emotion.

Clearing her throat again, she finally looked at me, her eyes red with tears, her lips a flat line of anger.

“Now we find Lord Seeker Lucius,” she said before turning towards the steps.

We went through another courtyard that led to another door and when Cassandra opened it there stood Lucius waiting for us. Cassandra’s face wrinkled with disgust.

“Lord Seeker Lucius.”

“Cassandra…with a woman I can only assume is the new Inquisitor,” Lucius replied calmly with a smile on his face.

The man walked towards us like he had not a care in the world and I could see his lacksadaisy attitude was already pissing Cassandra off.

“You must be extremely proud of yourself, Lucius,” I said sarcastically.

Lucius looked at me as if he were bored, instantly pissing me off.

“I presume you know we Seekers of Truth were once the original Inquisition. Oh yes, we fought to restore order in a time of madness long ago, as you do now. And we became proud. We sought to remake the world – to make it better. But what did we create? The Chantry, the Circles of Magi, a war that will see no end,” he said.

I shook my head at him and narrowed my gaze.

“You didn’t just become proud you arrogant fool, you became power hungry. We are not the original Inquisition; power is not our goal – ridding our world of a would-be God is our goal.”

“Of course you say that now,” he replied.

Cassandra looked at him disgusted.

“So you did all this because you hate our order?”

Lucius shook his head and pulled out a very old looking tome with the Seeker’s emblem on the front.

“We Seekers are abominations, Cassandra. We created a decaying world and fought to preserve it even as it crumbled. We had to be stopped. If you don’t believe me see for yourself. The secrets of our order, passed to me after former Lord Seeker Lambert was slain. The war with the mages had already begun, but it was not too late for me to do the right thing.”

“Seeker Lambert was a very evil man, he deserved to die,” Cole said quietly in a cold voice.

I looked at him curiously for a moment before looking back at Lucius.

“And you don’t think this reeks of your conceit and superiority, your own arrogance – your pride. You think this was the right thing to do? You’ve lost your fucking mind,” I spat angrily.

Cassandra nodded her head in agreement.

“Lord Seeker, what you’ve done…”
“I know. What Corypheus did with the Templar order does not matter. I have seen the future. I have created a new order to replace the old. The world will end so we can start anew – a pure beginning. Join us, Cassandra, it’s the Maker’s will.”

Cassandra roared her anger. Pulling her sword, she slammed into Lucius with her shoulder knocking him to the ground and stabbing him through the throat with a loud, angry shout before anyone could stop her.

Casting a barrier over us, we immediately took out the last of the Promiser’s that were in the small courtyard surrounding the former Lord Seeker as they stood a bit stunned with how quickly Cassandra had killed Lucius. I turned towards Cassandra and saw that she left her sword buried in Lucius’ throat and picking up the book he had shown her that lay next to him on the ground.

“Come, let’s get out of here,” she said stepping over his body without a second glance and walked towards a stone staircase that led to a lower courtyard.
Thank you so much for all your support and beautiful comments. Every one of you makes this endeavor a labor of love that I am enjoying immensely. Thank you!

Loss and possession, death and life are one, There falls no shadow where there shines no sun.  
~Hilaire Belloc

It was quiet around the campfire while dinner cooked. On our return trip, Varric had led Cassandra’s horse while she read from the tome taken from Lucius. I heard her heavy sigh as she closed the book and stared at the fire. The fact that everyone was silent and lost in their own thoughts wasn’t surprising really, everything we had witnessed at Caer Ostwin, and the things that Lucius had said… shaking my head, I leaned forward and stirred the stew.

“You’re sad about the Seekers,” Cole said sitting down next to Cassandra.

She looked at him before giving an unladylike snort.

“That takes no magical gift to understand, Cole;” she replied staring at the crackling fire.

“The room with the candle, it wasn’t a lie. Your faith was real; you found faith, not just a feeling. It was a spirit,” he said.

Cassandra shook her head and Cole tilted his head listening to the knots he must hear inside of her.

“It’s you, Cassandra. Breathing from the belly, cold air warmed, stones beneath me, candle before me, Maker all around. Then nothing, empty. I’m cut, cauterized, then caught, cleansed by a light that carries me home. You’re thinking backward. You don’t have faith because of the spirit. The spirit came because of your faith. It’s you,” he said calmly.

“Thank you, Cole. I appreciate that, but the same could be said for Lambert or Lucius. A single moment of perfect faith does not make one immune to fault.” Cassandra looked at him and tilted her head curiously.

“You said Lambert was an evil man who deserved to die, how did you know Lord Seeker Lambert?”

“I killed him. He cared more about stopping mages from existing than protecting people,” he replied easily.

Everyone’s expressions were of shock including Cassandra’s.

“You... killed Lambert?” I asked him.

Cole looked at me and then his eyes took on that faraway look he got when he remembered
something or was reading someone’s mind. His voice was cold, bitter, and angry as he spoke.

“Pathetic mages; crush them at Andoral’s Reach or starve them out. Doesn’t matter which, I need an example, Seekers succeeding, seizing power. Overthrow the Divine, triumphant in the eyes of the Maker.”

Cassandra’s expression expressed disbelief and discomfort as she shook her head.

“I…am uncertain whether to believe you,” she said studying Coles’ face.

Cole turned his head and looked her directly in the eye.

“You believe I killed him though.”

I knew that Cole didn’t lie, he had no purpose to. Even demons didn’t lie, they would tell you true, and it was just always up to you to hear the double edge to what they told you. Cole’s answers were always true with no double edge, and I knew that Cassandra also knew that as well. I could tell she was mulling over Cole’s words when she suddenly spoke again.

“Do you have any proof of what you claim Lord Seeker Lambert did?” she asked him.

“I was there. I didn’t need proof,” he said simply.

Cassandra sighed in frustration.

“But he could have been brought to justice, Cole. There are rules against...” she began.

I watched Cole’s face turn to an expression of disgust like the time he tried toast.

“He used rules to hurt people. He always found a way to be right, even when he killed my friend.”

“Your friend? Was she a mage?” Cassandra asked him.

“A pretty Templar who wanted to help mages; She died protecting Rhys and me, but she got better,” he replied.

Got better? I glanced at Solas and saw his expression of disbelief and then he shook his head. Okay then, I’ll ask later.

“If everything you have said is true, it need not have been you that killed him,” Cassandra told him trying to get him to understand.

“He would have hurt more people, I stopped him,” Cole replied looking at Cassandra.

“It’s not that simple, Cole.”

I saw the frustrated look cross Cole’s features that usually was reserved for me and my stubbornness.

“Why not? He made templars see monsters instead of mages, made them push until it all fell down.”

“Is this why you went to Therinfal?” I asked him.

“I wanted them to stop me from harming innocent people, but I had to stop them instead,” he replied.

I glanced around the fire and saw that everyone looked at Cole with quiet surprise, for some reason this did not surprise me. Everything I had learned so far about Cole was that he just wanted to help.
In the beginning, when he first took his human form, he thought he was helping mages when in fact he was not. He learned from that, he grew to understand that what he did was wrong. Once he understood, he didn’t do it again but it was something that he would never want to have happened again. I had a feeling he sought out the Templars only because he thought that with all the killing he had done, that he had turned into a corrupt spirit.

“You wanted them to kill you…are you nutters?” Sera said looking at him surprised.

Cole looked at her and shook his head.

“No, I didn’t want to hurt people – they would stop me from hurting people,” he replied.

The only sounds that could be heard through the camp were the sound of the crackling fire, the animals chuffs, and the crickets in the woods.

“And on that note, dinner is ready,” I said puffing my cheeks out before blowing out the air I held.

In the darkness of our tent, I stared up at the ceiling and thought about all the things Cole has possibly seen. How Cassandra was feeling about her order and would she be okay? A heavy sigh escapes me and I feel Solas’ arms tighten around me.

“You are worried about Cassandra,” he said.

His deep voice is thick with sleep and I curled into him just mentally purring at the sound of him as I relaxed against him.

“I am. I know in the end she will be alright, it will just take time for her to come to terms with it all,” I replied.

His fingers ran through my hair and I felt his gentle kiss on the top of my head. I lay listening to the steady thrum of his heartbeat beneath my ear and thought he had gone back to sleep when I felt the rumble of his voice under my cheek.

“Will you tell me what caused you to be so afraid of high places?”

The flash of memory played through my mind at my brother’s laughing face mocking me behind my closed eyes and I felt Solas’ arms tighten around me. I realized then that my aura was churning through our tent with my inner turmoil and immediately calmed myself.

“I’m sor…”

“Don’t apologize, vhenan. It is obviously a traumatic experience or it would not affect you as it does today. If you would prefer to not discuss it, it is quite alright.”

I shook my head; I wanted to tell him and took a deep breath as I thought of the day it happened. I was only a child of twelve years when it happened. My brother was fifteen, and I thought he loved me as siblings ought to and found out only that he despised me, maybe that was why it was so difficult to think about.

“Where I grew up, my parents’ home was huge. Vaulted ceilings, carved German oak banisters with a grand curved staircase down into a receiving room like the ones at the Winter Palace. Our home was very tall and our bedrooms were on the top floor. I still remember running up the three flights of stairs to get to my room after school. Every room, including mine, had huge walk-in closets, their
own private bathrooms and...balconies.”

His fingers ran through my hair in a soothing motion as I continued.

“I was twelve at the time and used to straddle my balcony railing that overlooked the manicured fields and draw for hours. I wasn’t supposed to be drawing, my parents did not approve of such frivolous endeavors; ‘Waste of time,’ my father would say to me. On this day when Collin came into my room unannounced, it was he that caught me drawing on the balcony in defiance of my parent’s rules.”

I laughed humorlessly.

“Are you sure you really want to know this?”

“Only if you wish to share it with me,” he replied and I felt the soft rumble of his voice beneath my cheek.

“Okay, well anyway, I wasn’t concerned about my brother coming in my room and catching me. I believed that we were close, even with our three year age gap. That day I guess Collin had gotten into trouble with our parents when he got home from school. Something about fighting or failing grades, I don’t know, but until that day, I hadn’t realized how much my brother truly disliked me. He came storming into my room, angry at me for being ‘little miss perfect’, was what he called me. ‘Daddy’s pet never gets into trouble, always so perfect’. After yelling that at me, he stormed towards me and snatched my sketchbook out of my hands throwing it over the side of the balcony.”

I could feel my muscles tensing at the next part of the memory and I couldn’t stop the tremble of fear, the racing of my heart as dread filled me.

“Vhenan, you don’t need to…”

I ignored his words and continued.

“I watched my book hit the ground and turned to yell at him for being such a jerk. Collin had this excited smile on his face like he had just thought of the best idea ever. His smile never slipped when he took a step towards me and then he shoved me off the railing and I fell,” I said my voice wobbling. “He was leaning over the railing smiling down at me as I fell screaming.”

His hands rubbed up and down my back soothingly. I felt the swirl of his aura surround me, trying to bring me comfort and in a way it did.

“My brother almost succeeded in killing me that day. The gardener rushed to me when he saw me hit the ground and then went and got my parents. I was taken to the hospital and after months of extensive rehabilitative therapy and I was fully healed, my parents sent me off to a boarding school and my brother to a different, private school because of the rumors that circulated around the accident and I did not see him again until I graduated.”

I angled my head up to look at him.

“I actually did break my neck, along with both my arms, legs and seven out of the thirteen ribs, shattered my pelvis and ruptured my spleen. My brother told our parents that I tried to kill myself… and they believed him, so I never spoke of what happened to me that day to them. I let them believe it and I got to go to a school far from all of them where I could draw whenever I wanted. So now you know why I am afraid of heights and why I am not overly fond of my family,” I said softly.

*****
He perched on the limb low in the tree that hung over the group as they made camp. He had finally found them just as the group reached outside of Orzammar at the base of the Frostbacks. Where they had been he did not care, only that he had them in his sight now.

His black eyes followed the ancient Evanuris as he went about setting up his tent, never letting his eyes drop. He would return with information that would please her. He could gain her trust with what he could learn, and then his plans would come together. The real hunt would begin and Andruil’s trivial vendetta would be inconsequential in comparison to the wrath he would bring down on the Evanuris.

His eyes scanned the group as they went about setting up tents, preparing the fire and he mentally smiled at the other mage who showed too much flare when lighting the fire. *The Tevinter…he could be interesting to control if given the opportunity.* He watched as the two archers returned carrying rabbits and his eyes quickly saw his main quarry move from between the animals and focused on her with beady black eyes.

*Banal’ras…you will make her very happy.* He saw that she was moving towards the fire to help prepare dinner and then his eyes caught the ancient that came to sit beside her. He mentally giggled at the sight of the two completely unaware of what was to come. *The Forgotten One's time to rule is coming very soon Dread Wolf, my kind no longer listens to you and your cunning tongue and we will have our due.*

While he listened absently to the benign conversations his attention was quickly grabbed when he heard the words *Bonding Ceremony.* While he listened he learned that Fen’Harel and Banal’ras would bond within a fortnight. *She will want to know immediately,* he instantly thought and flew from the cover of his tree branch following the magical lead that was embedded into his wrist.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Preparations for the Bonding Ceremony

I pressed a slightly shaky hand against my stomach as I looked at myself in the mirror. The lacy wedding dress pooled around my bare feet, while Helene walked around me making adjustments.

The gown was similar to a Victorian, Bohemian crossover style. The bodice was fitted with a softly scooped neckline and a low backline that went to beneath my shoulder blades. It had an empire waist so the skirt part of it, so it started just beneath my breasts and hung straight down to the floor in loose, bunched layers.

The sleeves were made from lace and they were fitted, coming to a point just over the top of my middle fingers. There was a small lacy loop for my fingers to slip into to keep the points in place. I gazed at my arm and saw that Helene had been correct. The swirling leafy pattern of the lace disguised the scarring that stretched from my hand to about four inches above my elbow.

My eyes glanced towards Helene when she made little noises of disapproval. I noticed the small frown on her lips and waited for she to say what was wrong.

“You have one week to gain the weight you lost when I last measured you,” she said finally looking at me through the reflection in the mirror.

I bit my lip and snorted at her.

“I will try…”

“I cannot take this in any more than I already have, Fenlin,” she said with a raised eyebrow interrupting me.

I nodded my head in understanding and turned my gaze back towards the mirror. I stared at the woman reflecting back unable to comprehend that it was indeed me.

“You two are going to look so beautiful when you stand together in the garden,” she said softly looking at me through the mirror.

I glanced at her and swallowed the little ball of nerves that had suddenly lodged in my throat.

“He has been in?” I asked her my voice a nervous wobble.

Helene nodded her head and patted my shoulder.

“Yes, and he looked quite handsome. You will be very pleased when you see him in it,” she said smiling.
Helene helped me out of the gown and I slipped my clothes back on while she set the gown back on the padded mannequin. After pulling my boots on, I left Helene’s room and crossed the courtyard towards the keep as Master Dennet and his wife were arriving. Waving at them, I was glad to see them return. Not that Riley wasn’t a good stable manager, he was, he just wasn’t Dennet. The old man had become a father figure to me in a fashion and I had missed the gruff old codger.

Master Dennet slid off the Wagon and helped his wife down as I walked towards them.

“I am glad to see you are well, I hope your trip was not too trying,” I said as I approached.

Mistress Dennet shook her head absently as she gazed around the grounds.

“He never said anything about it being a bloody castle,” she muttered.

I softly chuckled and patted her arm before moving towards Dennet.

“I hope you will not mind, but we moved Riley into your old quarters and moved you to a much larger apartment that we built off of the barn for you and Elaina. I had the men dig up an area for her to have her own garden.”

Dennet looked at me slightly surprised.

“You didn’t have to do all that girl,” he replied gruffly.

I smiled at him cheekily.

“Well I know that, but I couldn’t have you and your wife trying to live in a damn closet,” I replied enjoying his laughter.

“Come on, I will show you two to your new quarters,” I said leading them to the new space we had built for them.

I stared at all my paperwork and crossed my eyes after blowing out a breath. I had completed over half of the correspondence on my desk when I felt the touch of his aura before hearing the door open. Smiling, I continued answering a letter to Lady Forsythia’s brother. I glanced at him as he crested the top of the stairs holding a tray and I shook my head at him.

“Ha! You didn’t catch me this time, I already ate lunch,” I replied with a cheeky smile before continuing my writing.

His laughter echoed through the room with my comment.

“I know vhenan. Francois expressed his pleasure at telling me that you requested lunch be sent up. This is dessert,” he replied pulling the cover off of the tray.

My eyes came up and I saw multiple little cakes on plates. Rayna…I sighed in delight at the sight of so many tiny cakes and finally looked up at Solas and pointed at the tray.

“There is no way we can eat all of those,” I said looking at him.

Solas had a large smile on his face as he walked towards me. Stopping next to me, he took my pen from my fingers, pulling me up.

“Rayna has made all of them for us to taste and decide which one we would like for the ceremony.”
“Ah…and the excited little grin on your face isn’t because there is a bunch of tiny cakes waiting for you to pop between those handsome lips of yours,” I said with a cheeky smile.

Solas bent and kissed me making my toes curl with the soft seduction of his full lips.

“There is that…and I had a plan of how we could build up your appetite again,” he mouthed against the side of my throat.

He moved behind me and slid my hair away from my neck. Sensations danced over my skin when his lips press to the sensitive skin, and my eyes slid closed while I shivered lightly.

“Oh, really, an idea you say?” I asked him huskily.

His soft chuckle danced over my senses as he wrapped his arms around me, pulling me into him. Gently nibbling on my earlobe, he growled softly and the vibration of his voice sent a slow wave of heavy desire flowing through me thick as honey.

“I believe you will enjoy what I have in mind,” he replied bending his head to kiss my neck again, making small bites and then bathing the marks with his tongue before moving along my collarbone and doing more of the same.

I slid one of my arms up to wrap around his neck. His aura seductively stroked my skin teasingly. Cupping my chin, he turned my face towards his and leaned in, kissing me deeply, coaxing a low moan from me to escape. Each stroke of his tongue against mine sent fireworks behind my closed eyes. I felt the barely controlled wolf in him yet the kiss was tender and set my blood on fire. Solas slowly pulled back and leaned his forehead against mine, taking a moment to gather his control while I stroked at the dimple in his chin.

“So far I am not disappointed, what else you got in mind,” I asked him huskily.

Solas groaned.

“I can never get enough of you,” he growled. His voice seductively pulsating through me and I felt the wetness gather between my thighs dampening my smalls in expectation.

Sliding his hands around to the laces of my breaches he deftly unlaced them. Slipping his hand inside to touch me, my head fell back against his chest while he caressed me finding me wet. Moaning, he slipped a finger inside and I bit my lip as a small whimper escaped. He slid his other hand beneath my tunic and cupped my breast, gliding his thumb over the hardened bud that begged for his attention. He was hammering my senses and I didn’t know if I could take much more.

I felt the small electrical pulse from the tips of his fingers that were slowly torturing me from between my legs and cried out. He was keeping me in a constant state of drenched arousal, and I growled my own need. My body started shaking from his onslaught and I couldn’t stop the ragged cries from escaping with each deft stroke of his fingers over me.

He growled against the side of my neck as he continued to bring me closer towards that blissful moment of release.

“I have thought of this moment all morning, vhenan. Ha’mi’in lasa em tua rosas’da’din.”

My body hurled over the edge, breaking into a million pieces within the circle of his arms as I cried out my release. Solas let out a low, pleased moan with my release, as my aura caressed him.

He pulled my shirt over my head and slipped my pants down over my hips. Slipping his arm beneath
my legs, he picked me up and carried me towards our bed and laid me down. I glanced up at him and gave him a naughty smile as I batted my eyelashes at him teasingly.

“You're far too overdressed wolf, lose the clothes and get in here,” I demanded of him.

His eyebrow rose with the commanding vibration of my voice and his eyes took on a challenging glint in the blue depths. I watched him rid himself of his clothes before climbing in and pressing his lips to mine. Everywhere his fingers touched me, lit little fires, and my breath left me as his lips traced down my chest. His aura was moving through me, caressing me everywhere causing little shivers and goose bumps to form.

Digging my nails into the coverlet, he settled between my legs and continued his worshiping assault upon my body.

“Ar isalan na vhenan,” I moaned breathlessly.

Each moan or soft cry I made only seemed to spur him to continue his skillful torture. When I came undone in his hands for the second time, he rolled me onto my stomach, kissing the skin on the backs of my knees, caressing my ass. Pressing kisses to the base of my spine and I was literally a puddle of goo for him to do with as he pleased.

Kissing his way up my spine, pressing kisses to my shoulders while I panted for breath still reeling from the last orgasm, he leaned back grasping my hips, pulling me to my knees. Sliding one hand around my waist, his fingers slipped between my legs to tease me, tearing another ragged cry from my lips with the sweet sensation of his pulsing electrical touch. Without a moment to catch my breath, he thrust into me then not allowing me time to recover.

I leaned back into him and wrapped my arm tightly around his neck as each thrust coaxed me closer to another orgasm. Solas stroked his fingers over my nipples roughly producing another ragged cry to escape my lips. Every deep stroke of him into me, kept me panting on a constant electrified edge of deliverance. My body screamed that I couldn’t take much more of this, my voice vibrating through the room when I spoke.

“Pala em elvar’el,” I commanded him.

Solas bit my shoulder roughly, snapping his hips, burying himself deeper and growled back.

“Ma nuvenin, vhenan.”

I let out a guttural, animal-like moan when the hands holding my hips tightened and his thrusts deepened. Scraping my nails along his shoulder with pleasure rolling through me with each sound of skin meeting skin, each hard thrust made. Everything went blank, clamping down on him tightly as I came with gasping moans. I heard his loud groan as he joined me with one final thrust, our magic swirling through the room chaotically. With his head lying on my shoulder, we both softly shuddered with the intensity of our lovemaking.

“I never thought it was possible to be this happy with someone,” he mouthed against my shoulder blades.

Turning my head slightly, he looked at me and I pressed a kiss to his chin, smiling at him.

“Me either, somedays I expect to wake up and find that this was all just a dream,” I replied as he rolled to his side pulling me with him.

His hand glided over my hip as he pressed a gentle kiss to my shoulder.
“As have I,” he replied pulling me closer to him.

I glanced at him over my shoulder, and I saw the haunted look in his eyes and reached up to run my finger down his jaw.

“All right, Solas,” I said softly.

His eyes lost the haunted expression as he pressed a kiss to my lips.

“All right, Fenlin,” he replied smiling against my lips.

****

“You are sure?” she demanded angrily.

Imshael kept his face devoid of expression as he took pleasure in Andruil’s anger.

“It is what I overheard, my Queen. Banal’ras discuss her plans with the elven archer. Her and Fen’Harel are to be bonded in the gardens of Terasyl’an Te’las within a fortnight,” he replied.

Andruil’s yellow eyes stared at him coldly before she began pacing the room while she thought about what she should do. *What can be done? If I expose myself to them, it will be too soon…think…it matters little if they are bonded or not, he will pay for what he has done once she is dead – again.*

Tapping the hilt of her dagger, she glanced down at it as a wicked smile spread across her features and an idea began to form.

“Then we must not appear rude and forget to send the happy couple a gift,” she said looking at him.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ha’mi’in lasa em tua rosas’da’din - Relax, and let me make you cum.
Ar isalan na vhenan - I need you my heart
Pala em elvar’el - fuck me harder
Ma nuvenin, vhenan - as you wish my heart
Ar lath ma - I love you
Terasyl’an Te’las - Skyhold
We reached the landing at the bottom of our steps and as I reached for the door handle, his hands grasped my hips and turned me quickly, pressing a hard kiss to my lips stealing my breath. When his lips left mine, my eyes slowly opened and I saw the small glint of mischief reflected in his gaze.

“Something for you to consider,” he said smiling at me.

I laughed and caressed his jaw lovingly.

“Like I could ever forget,” I teased.

Cradling my face, his lips pressed to mine again and I nipped at his lower lip coaxing a small moan from him.

“A promise for later,” I mouthed against his lips.

His eyes met mine and hot desire stared back at me.

“I shall bear that in mind,” he said thickly before releasing my face.

Opening the door, we walked out into an empty main hall and I stared around surprised at the lack of nobles standing around. Spotting Josephine by the door leading to her office, she greeted us with a large smile.

“Did we miss the fire drill,” I joked as Josephine stopped in front of us.

Josephine looked at me with confusion and I laughed.

“Never mind,” I said and glanced around the hall again. “Where did you put all the nobles?” I asked her curiously.

Josephine pressed her wooden clipboard to her chest, looking very pleased with herself.

“Seeing as it is your ceremony tomorrow and you have given explicit instructions that only those with invitations may attend, I may have implied that we would be doing renovations to the castle for the next month requesting them to leave until they were done.”

I stared at her with open-mouthed amazement while Solas softly laughed behind me. *I love this woman.*

“You got rid of them?”

Josephine smiled and nodded her head.
“Yes, for the time being anyway, but there is much going on that you were quite adamant they not attend.”

Wait…did I miss something? What is she talking about, there isn’t a lot going on, just the ceremony and dinner after.

“But it is just the ceremony and dinner, Josephine.”

Josephine tapped her manicured nail against her clipboard, smiling at me with excitement and I internally groaned. Shit…the party demon is back.

“As you were quite vague on the specifics of what is customary, I spoke with the elven population here in Skyhold. They informed me of the large feast the night before the ceremony. Afterward, you are both then escorted to your quarters separately and a guard is posted to make sure that you do not see each other until the ceremony. The candles, ribbons, and flowers have been set up in the garden for the ceremony…”

I held my hand up stopping her.

“Hold on a second, wait – what? Separated…candles…ribbons? What are you talking about, Josephine?” I asked looking at her in shock and focusing on the first and most important aspect of the whole conversation.

“You expect Solas and me to stay in separate rooms tonight?”

“I was informed that it is customary…” Josephine stammered her expression rapidly changing to discomfort.

“You are not incorrect, Ambassador. I think it is a reasonable expectation to follow tradition after all,” Solas said from behind me.

I swung around looking at him in surprise. Is he serious?

“You what?” I asked flabbergasted.

Solas looked at Josephine completely ignoring my angry, confused stare and smiled politely as he took hold of my cold hand unflinchingly while my aura swirled unhappily around us.

“Please excuse us, Ambassador, your hard work is very much appreciated. Fenlin and I will adhere to the customs of our people and look forward to this evenings feast and festivities,” he replied smoothly.

Josephine smiled at him and gave me a hesitant look before turning away from us and I silently seethed. I’m being railroaded – bamboozled – steamrolled – why is he just agreeing with this…this isn’t fair! Solas led us through the doorway leading to the Rotunda and I stared daggers at his back as I followed him into the circular room. As soon as the door closed, I yanked my hand out of his.

“What the hell…”

Solas’ eyebrow came up and his arms folded behind his back. The sight of his posture made me groan – loudly and my mouth closed with a snap. No, no, no – nope!

“The elves of this time are not incorrect in this matter, vhenan. It was something we practiced…”

I looked at him with my own eyebrow raised and rested my hands on my hips in frustration with his
sudden need to lecture me on ancient ways.

“I do not give a nugs ass what was practiced thousands of damn years ago. Courtship used to last a hundred years too, but you don’t see us doing that, do you? Damn it, Solas this is our time, our bonding,” I said.

He smiled at me patiently and I wanted to scream.

“It is but one night out of millions, perhaps a concession for not adhering to the rules of courtship entirely if you look at it from the perspective of your return in this form,” he said logically stepping towards me, touching my face tenderly.

All my frustration instantly evaporated with his gentle touch and my shoulders sagged as my chin dropped and I stared at the ground.

“I know it is just one night,” I whispered quietly. He tilted my chin back up to look at me carefully and cradled my face tenderly as his eyes searched mine.

“Then, what has you so unhappy?” he asked.

Sighing heavily, I leaned into his hands enjoying the strength I felt in them.

“I don’t sleep well without you…having you next to me…” I swallowed past the ball of nerves in my throat and holding his gaze, told him the truth to why I clung to him when we slept, especially after him being hurt. “You keep the nightmares away,” I finally whispered.

His face softened and he pulled me into his arms while I wrapped mine around his waist tightly.

“Vhenan,” he said softly kissing the top of my head. “They cannot keep us apart, not truly. We may still meet in the Fade, you need not truly be alone,” he reminded me.

I started feeling better about this forced night of separation, although it would not be the same…at all. He was right though, I would still have him there, and they couldn’t keep us from each other in the Fade. He pressed a kiss to my temple and I stepped back.

“Okay, you’re right. It’s just one night, I can do one night,” I finally said.

Solas tightened his hold on me and I snuggled into his chest.

Glancing at his small pack next to the stairs, I mentally cursed Josephine for her damn 'good intentioned meddling'. I sat down on the bed and slipped my soft, knee-high leather boots on while Solas wrapped his braan. I watched him work the straps of leather into crisscross patterns up his calf to just below his knee. There was something sexy about watching him don the traditional elven shoes. I mentally snorted at myself.

Is there anything I don’t find sexy about him? Yeah…didn’t think so, I mused with a smirk.

“Is there something that is amusing you, vhenan?” he asked as he finished looking at me.

I chuckled and shook my head.

“I was watching you put your footwraps on, and I thought it was sexy to watch and then I realized that there isn’t anything you don’t do that I don’t find a way to think it sexy,” I told him with a
cheeky grin.

He laughed and shook his head slowly before looking at me mischievously.

“Perhaps you are mistaken. There must be something you dislike,” he said as he slowly walked towards me.

The look in his eyes made my heart instantly race and I shook my head suppressing a small shiver.

“Nope, I even find you sexy when you’re lecturing me,” I said.

His eyebrow rose with my admission and I giggled.

“I know – pathetic,” I said.

Stopping in front of me, he pushed me back onto the bed and straddled my hips, pinning my arms above my head and all thought left my brain when his lips pressed a butterfly kiss to my jaw.

“Hmm, this seems very advantageous for me, I may exercise this new knowledge in future discussions,” he whispered next to my ear before sucking on my earlobe.

I moaned as his lips moved down the column of my neck.

“Oh come on – this is exploitation on the borderline of triggering masturbatory abuse later,” I panted.

His wicked laugh sent lightning racing through my bloodstream and dampness grew between my thighs. His gaze held mine and I saw the roguish grin and I squirmed beneath him.

“Masturbatory abuse, you say,” he said.

“Yes,” I panted. His other hand caressed the side of my breast teasingly, taking advantage of my lack of a breast band. The dampness between my legs grew as his thumb skimmed just along the side of my nipple torturously, and I moaned again.

“Meaning, I will be forced to touch myself later this evening since you will be on the other side of the castle unable to finish what you have started, you ass.”

He softly laughed again and pressed another kiss just beneath my chin and I moaned again. Changing his position so that he was now lying between my legs, I groaned at the hardness I felt pressing intimately against me and rolled my hips toward him in silent invitation.

“It is not abuse, vhenan, it is preparation,” he mouthed against my collarbone.

“Huh?” I replied unable to articulate any more words as my hormones actively screamed at me to jump him.

“It is in preparation for our bonding night, vhenan. It is customary to heighten the anticipation to a level of mutual craving for one another on the night before the ceremony. We must endure the needful pleadings of our bodies until we are ready to consummate our bond,” he replied nipping at my earlobe.

“Wha…you…hold on,” I replied panting and his head came up so I could look at him and see the mischievous sparkle in his eyes.

“You think you need to prepare me for that night? Seriously?!?” I asked him with a look of disbelief.
He laughed and then kissed me. My mouth parted, tasting him greedily, and his softly uttered moan is a sweet song to my ears.

“No, I do not believe I need to do this. But some traditions should be carried forward – and I wanted to,” he said against my lips making me groan.

Before I knew what he was about, it was over and I lie alone on the bed panting and wet with need while he stood holding his hand towards me calm as could be.

“I believe we have a feast to attend,” he said his voice thick and his smile wicked.

I stared at him for a moment realizing that he was serious and groaned. Rolling out of the bed, I slapped his hand away.

“Oh I believe you have touched me quite enough already, wolf,” I said straightening my shirt and the long peasant skirt I wore.

His throaty laughter only increased the wetness I felt developing between my thighs. This is going to be one long damn night...ugh.

Looking at him, I undid the next button on my shirt trying to cool my heated skin and his eyes followed the simple movement and I smiled wickedly. Wait...what am I thinking? Turnabout is fair play...make him just as...what did he call it? Oh yes, ‘prepared’.

“Well if it is tradition, and we seem to be doing the traditional thing this evening. I would be remiss if I did not adhere to the proper guidelines and get into the spirit of celebrating our shared culture,” I said gliding a finger over the skin of my chest as his eyes followed the lazy movements.

I watched him swallow suddenly before his eyes finally came up to meet mine. I knew mine were full of retaliation for the needy, churning feelings running through my body that he caused with his well-delivered manipulations of my hormones. His low groan with the realization when I walked past him was everything I had hoped for.

I stopped at the top of the staircase and looked to where he still stood next to the bed. His nostrils were slightly flared, his eyes hungry as they watched me while he clenched and unclenched his hands and every element in me clapped for being a woman because that one look from him made everything I was feeling worth it.

“We wouldn’t want to be late for our own party,” I said huskily and his eyes held mine.

“You are going to make certain I regret agreeing to this,” he said as he walked slowly towards me.

I laughed and smiled at him impishly.

“Oh you damn right handsome,” I replied laughing when I heard him groan again as I continued down the steps.

The main hall was filled with the inner circle and the people that helped run Skyhold. Mage lights floated through the air lighting the room in a soft glow, taking the harshness out of looking at stone walls and Inquisition banners. Tables of food and casks of wine and ale lined one of the walls. There was a table set in the center of the hall for Solas and me to sit at. It was decorated with candles, ribbons, flowers, and beautiful tableware I didn’t even know we had.
When I asked Josephine about the tableware, she informed me it was a gift from Antiva’s Queen Asha for our help with the Venatori along her borders. As Josephine spoke about the tableware, I slowly skimmed my fingers up Solas’ inner thigh stopping just short of the growing bulge I could visually see if I glanced down.

It was impressive that his facial expression did not change, nor did he flinch or move one muscle with the teasing touch. It was his aura caressing mine that conveyed how much the small touch excited him. I smiled at Josephine as she walked away from our table and I picked up my wine glass preparing to take a small sip when Solas bent to whisper in my ear.

“Vhenan,” he whispered warningly.

“Hmm,” I said taking a sip of the sweet red in my glass.

“Challenge accepted,” he said and I smiled as I took another drink of my wine before looking at him.

“This should be fascinating,” I said with an impish grin using his own words.

I held his gaze and saw the slow wicked smile form. His soft, deep husky laughter caressed my senses as he picked up his wine and took a drink.

Well, his confident look bodes poorly for me. Maybe this might not have been the best idea…but when have I ever had good ideas when it came to him? Taking another drink of my wine, I mentally shrugged. *Fuck it! It will be entertaining at least.*

Through dinner, the conversation is lively and entertaining. Solas had his arm around the back of my chair, his fingers just lightly twirling my hair with an occasional brush against the nape of my neck. To the casual observer, it did not seem overly intimate, more adorable, it could even be considered attentive. What they didn’t see was the way his aura caressed my neck, slipped secretly along my thigh causing me to focus on not moaning aloud. *I should never have thought this was going to be 'just entertaining'.*

His unseen manipulations made my heart race, my blood boil, and completely soak my smalls and now I am crossing my legs just for the friction. It was unfair, his experience in this way of seduction. It was not something I had expected nor had I learned yet, – but I was damned if I was going to let him get away with this. Somehow, I needed to learn how he was doing it and return the favor.

By all outward appearances, surprisingly enough, I looked calm, serene even, while internally I was a sopping, sobbing ball of need. I focused on keeping my breath even and steady even if my heart was racing at a hundred miles an hour and my body was screaming for him to just bend me over the table and take me. Picking up my wine glass while completely pretending to listen to Sera and Bull’s conversation, his aura slipped higher up my thigh and pulsed teasing the wet center that screamed the most adamantly for his complete attention.

I gripped my wine glass tightly, focusing intently on the tablecloth and breathing through my nostrils. Glancing at him as he held a conversation with Dorian over magical techniques, I wanted to clobber him. *This is a whole new definition of foreplay. He is about to turn this into a scene from ‘When Harry met Sally’, how is he doing this?* I took a cleansing breath and a drink of my wine, focusing on his aura’s path and trying to ignore his newest teasing caress between my thighs that was rapidly unraveling my calm façade by driving me out of my bleeding mind.

After a few moments of focused breathing and a few more healthy drinks of wine, I figured out the
pattern of the aura’s manipulation and mentally giggled with glee. Let’s see if you can handle the tables turning on you my love.

Focusing on the exact manipulation of shaping my aura to assimilate my touch, I slipped it under his tunic and caressed his stomach and up his chest, flicking my aura over his nipples playfully. I heard his conversation with Dorian slightly pause for a brief second before it continued, and I smirked. *Gotcha!*

Reyna arrived at our table with the small cake that we were to share and I smiled at her my gratitude as I watched Dorian head back to his table with Bull and Sera. Solas thanked Reyna and I heard the deeper quality to the tone of his voice and hid my smile behind my glass as I took a drink.

Just as Solas picked up his own glass, I moved in for the coup de gras and slipped my aura over the bulge between his thighs and pulsed like had been doing to me for the past ten minutes. The glass stem he had been holding suddenly snapped between his fingers and his eyes closed while he took a deep breath before looking at me.

*Oh yeah! Game – set-match!* I slid my glass towards him and he poured his wine casually into my glass before magically mending the glass stem he had just broken. I listened to him clear his throat before setting the now fixed glass back on the table while I continued my manipulations with my aura.

“Perhaps you would care to dance with me, vhenan,” he asked with an even, thick tone.

At this point, I would just about do anything to just be able to touch him.

“That sounds like an excellent idea,” I replied my tone smoky with my own desire.

His eyes flashed at me hungrily as he stood and held his hand out for me. Taking his hand, he led me to just behind our table and pulled me to him tightly, so I was flush against his body, his thick arousal pressed hard into my stomach. The instant I felt his body against mine, I glanced up at him, biting my lip trying to stifle the moan working its way up my throat. His eyes focused on the small action intensely before he dipped his head close enough for me to hear.

“Are you aware of what you are doing to me?” he said his voice softly growling.

The light touch of his breath over my skin, the small vibration of his thick voice racing through me dragged a small moan from me and his fingers tightened slightly where they held me at my waist.

“Yes, as you are aware of what you are doing to me. Just remember who started this,” I replied huskily.

I didn’t even realize he was moving us around the floor as I was busy soaking in his scent and the feel of him pressed against me until the music ended. Loud bells rang through the air and we pulled slowly apart glancing around the room at the many smiling faces.

“It is time for the couple to separate for the evening,” Josephine said addressing the crowd.

“Wait…” I said looking at him as two Dalish guards walked towards us, one for him and one for me.

I glared at my guard for a moment making the young man slightly flinch.

“I will have my goodnight kiss at least,” I muttered as the guard blushed and turned away embarrassed.
I glanced up at Solas’ smug face and crooked my finger at him to come closer. He bent closer and I pressed a chaste kiss to his cheek.

“Miss me,” I whispered before stepping away.

Without a glance backward, I opened my door to our chambers and shut it. Leaning back against the door, I took a deep breath to try and calm myself and my hormones. *It’s one night, I can do this.* Taking another calming breath, I climbed my stairs and when I got to the top I jolted in surprise.

“Surprise,” Sera yelled holding up two bottles of wine.

Dorian sat on the end of my bed taking the cork out of another bottle and gestured at me with it, his eyebrow raised.

“Drink, dear?”

I walked towards them with a silly, happy smile on my face glad I wasn’t going to be alone quite yet.

“Yes,” I replied before flopping onto the bed next to Sera on my belly.

Solas walked quietly towards his old room with the young man following closely behind him. He gave the boy a brief nod before entering his old room and shutting the door. He looked around his old quarters and a small spark of loneliness started to settle in his stomach. Rubbing his face, he shook his head at himself.

“Ridiculous,” he muttered moving to sit on the bed.

He stared at the floor with a feeling of loss at the touch of her aura that was usually so closely within reach and a heavy sigh escaped him at the realization of how long the night would actually be. His head came up at the sound of his door opening and he watched Bull and Varric walk in holding a few bottles of wine and a deck of cards with Raj jogging in behind them.

Raj sprinted towards him and he was surprised at how much larger he had grown running with the pack outside of Skyhold. The wolf rubbed his forehead against his as he ran his fingers through his thick pelt.

“You appear well,” he said to the wolf.

“Thought you might need some company, Chuckles,” Varric said as he shut the door behind him.

Solas looked up from Raj at them and there was a moment of surprise before he just nodded his head.

“You would be correct, Master Tethras.”

Bull pulled the table and the two chairs closer towards the bed and opened the bottles while Varric began shuffling the cards and Raj jumped onto his bed, curling up behind him.

“Diamondback, okay?” Varric asked.

Solas chuckled and nodded his head, taking the glass Bull offered him. He was suddenly very grateful for not being alone.
Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
braan - shoes
Bonding Ceremony

Chapter Notes

Thank you for being the awesome readers that you are.

Sentences in quoted italics are to be thought of as in Elven.
Quotes used:

In all the world, there is no heart for me like yours. In all the world, there is no love for you like mine -Maya Angelou
To be fully seen by somebody, then, to be loved anyhow—this is an offering that can only be thought miraculous -Elizabeth Gilbert
Some parts of the Wedding vows came from www.minted.com, and the spell work for the bonding ritual is a modified pagan handfasting from www.vowsoftheheart.com

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the Fade, we sat along the water’s edge. Leaning against him, I felt his lips press against the top of my head.

“I do not like that our only option to meet tonight is in the Fade. I miss the feel of your arms around me,” I said softly.

I felt the soft rumble of his laughter on my side and soon he was dragging me onto his lap.

“I believe I might have agreed to Josephine’s demands a bit prematurely, vhenan,” he admitted.

I chuckled, snuggling into him.

“Oh, now you see the error of your ways, how very astute of you if not just a bit late, wolf,” I teased.

His arms tightened around me as he nuzzled my neck softly chuckling.

“So what shall we do tonight, my love?” I asked pressing a kiss to his jaw.

“Perhaps a stroll through the markets of Arlathan shall take our mind off of our physical separation,” he said.

“Can we go to the bakery that was right next to the apothecary in the main thoroughfare?”

I stood, watching Solas as he stood with me and smiled up at him as he cradled my face and pressed a kiss to my lips, holding my gaze.

“Have I ever told you no when you ask to go to a bakery?”

I smiled against his lips and kissed him quickly again.

“Then what are we waiting for handsome, they used to make the best little cherry cupcakes with caramel and chocolate,” I said excitedly.
“Rise and shine, my dear,” Dorian said as I listen to him open my window drapes with a flourish.

Rubbing my face, I slowly opened one eye and saw my gown on the padded mannequin in the corner through the break in my daylight curtains that surrounded the bed. *Hmm, was that there last night?* I threw my arm over my eyes when I saw Dorian's shadow just before he dragged open my curtains around my bed open. I heard his snort of annoyance as he tied the curtain to the end poster, I'm sure staring at me with some sort of annoyed look at my lack of movement.

“Fenlin, this is not the time for you to lay there like a wart on a frog ass. We must prepare you for your big day, now get out of this bed. If those bags under your eyes are any indication, I will have my work cut out for me,” he said testily.

I groaned at his sarcastic poking. *How did I know? Ugh...it is to fucking early for this type of abuse.*

“Looks like I’m not the only one who didn’t get laid last night,” I grumbled as I threw the covers back shoving my hair out of my face.

Dorian’s laughter rang through the room as he brought me a beautiful cup of coffee made with just the right amounts of milk and sugar. *I love this man,* sighing with pleasure, I smelled the delicious mixture while watching him flutter around my room over the rim as I took a small sip.

“There’s my girl's spirit, now to be a good girl and drink that while I prepare your bathwater.”

"Okay, I forgive you for your abuse - but only because you brought me coffee," I replied and saw him wave his hand at me dismissively.

My eyes followed Dorian as he went to my bathroom. Taking another sip of my coffee, I felt a bit perkier and went towards the windows to look outside at the mountains. *Today is the day.* The flutter of nervous butterflies churned my stomach anxiously. *I wonder if he is even nervous.* I moved towards my desk and pulled out the small box that held Solas’ ring from the desk drawer.

“What is that?” Dorian asked walking towards me.

I opened the box and held it out to him. Dorian took the box and stared at the thin, flat Silverite band with runes inscribed underneath for protection, and the inscription on the surface with soft scrollwork around the edges of the band.

“What does this say,” he asked me curiously.

“Var lath vir suledin, it means our love will persevere,” I told him as I took the box back from him.

Dorian smiled at me as I placed the small box on my desk.

"Are you sure this is what you want?" he asked me studying me carefully.

I snorted and gave him a raised eyebrow.

"To be bonded to Solas? Without him I'm just an empty shell with no heart, so yes, to answer your question. He is what I want," I told him.

Dorian's eyes dampened and he pressed a kiss to my forehead.

"Alright, I had to make sure my best friend was not making the worst mistake of her life," he said clearing his throat laying his hands on my shoulders.
Turning me towards the bathroom, I grabbed my coffee quickly from the top of the desk.

“Let the process begin, now go and wash your glorious self,” he said with a gentle shove.

I chuckled as I walked into the bathroom and closed the door.

Solas slipped the note inside the box and closed the lid, handing the package to the agent.

“Please take this to the Inquisitor,” he said watching the man as he nodded his head before leaving.

"Right away Master Solas," he said.

Closing his door, he glanced at the wolf that had taken over his narrow bed, his blue-green eyes following him as he walked towards the bed and sat down. Solas looked at the braided lock of her hair wrapped around his wrist and touched it softly feeling the weight of its meaning and the immense love and trust it took to give it to him. He had never wanted a burden more than her loyalty, her complete faith she had in him to never hurt her. His attention was pulled with the sudden bump of Raj’s head against his side.

“Yes, you are quite right my friend, I must begin my preparations. She would not be pleased in my choice of today to be tardy,” he said rubbing the animals head.

I sat in the chair, wearing my robe while Josephine worked her magic and got my hair to cooperate. We heard the knock at the door and Dorian held up his hand to me.

“I will see who that is, you just continue looking beautiful,” he said heading down the stairs.

Laughing, I glanced at Josephine through the mirror’s reflection. She was busy wrangling my hair into a beautiful braid around the top of my head now that she had the rest of it tamed and curling obediently down my back.

“I don’t know how you do it Josephine but you definitely know how to get my hair to behave,” I said with a teasing smile.

Josephine laughed, shaking her head just slightly as her fingers worked the braid around the crown of my head.

“It is not a great secret really,” she said glancing at me. “My hair is just as stubborn,” she finally clarified making me laugh.

Dorian returned holding a parcel out towards me.

“The messenger said that Solas requested you get this,” he said with a grin.

“Well, it’s too small for him to be in,” I said humorously and took the box.

Opening the top curiously, I pushed cloth out of the way and found a circlet made from Silverite with a large moonstone in the shape of a teardrop in the middle that would sit on the forehead with a
matching necklace. My hand instantly covered my mouth, suddenly glad I didn’t have any makeup on yet because I was crying at his beautiful gift.

"Oh, my," Josephine said looking at the set.

Picking up the small note within, I opened it with shaky fingers while tears slipped over my fingers. Smiling behind my hand, I read the beautifully written elven.

My heart,
Today you will be my Queen and every Queen requires a crown.
I choose you. In a million lifetimes, in a million worlds, in any description of certainty, my spirit would find you and choose you. I love you and I will be waiting for you downstairs.
Solas

“That is beautiful,” Josephine said softly from behind me looking at the circlet and I nodded.

“It is,” I said thickly.

Smiling and laughing as Dorian held out his handkerchief to me.

“Get it out of your system now, because once we put your makeup on you are forbidden to cry,” he said trying to sound stern.

I laughed again and wiped my eyes.

“Yes, father,” I replied teasingly.

Dorian went to the side table and poured everyone a glass of wine. Returning holding a glass out to me and Josephine, I took it with a grateful smile.

"I would never have guessed he had it in him," he said with a smile.

I laughed and took a sip before I put my glass down on the table.

"What? You mean to be romantic or have good taste in jewelry?” I said chuckling still dabbing at the moisture in the corners of my eyes.

"Both," Dorian teased and I laughed.

"Never would have thought a Tevinter and a Qunari would fall in love either - hmm," I teased.

Dorian's eyebrow rose at me and he took another drink of his wine.

"Good point," he replied.

Josephine and I laughed as he waved his hand at us dismissively.

Solas turned toward the sound of the knock on his door and noticed Dorian leaning in the doorway
against the frame looking at him with a critical eye.

“I do believe she got you to wear something fashionable for a change,” he joked. “It is also time for you to make your way to the garden,” he said with a small grin.

Solas nodded at him and pocketed Fenlin’s ring. Taking a small, calming breath he heard Dorian laughing and turned to look at him again.

“Why Solas, I do believe you appear as nervous as your anxiously awaiting bride,” he teased.

Solas chuckled and rubbed the back of his neck.

“It is not nervousness you see Master Pavus but impatience to finally know she will forever be mine,” he retorted.

Dorian casually leaned up from the doorframe, smiling.

“I do believe she said something similar, shall we?” he said gesturing out of the room.

Solas smiled and nodded his head, softly whistling for Raj to follow.

“Yes, I believe I am beyond ready to finally take my mate,” he replied walking through the doorway.

I took one last look at myself in the mirror still unable to believe it was actually me in all this feminine silk and lace. I reached up and touched the moonstone in the center of my forehead with slightly shaky fingers. Josephine had weaved the circlet into the thick braid she made that ran around the crown of my head making sure it would not slip. Taking a deep breath that sounded shaky like my fingers, I turned towards the desk and opened the small box, removing Solas’ ring. Taking a thin leather tie, I strung the ring and wrapped it through the sash around my waist for the bonding ceremony.

Glancing back at myself at the mirror, I was grateful I had gained a couple of pounds back over the week like Helena had demanded. *Probably all the cake we ate.* Closing my eyes for a moment with a small smile, I took another calming breath and heard Josephine call from the doorway.

“Are you ready, Fenlin?”

“Coming, Josephine,” I replied walking towards the steps.

*Time to grasp your destiny and finally be happy with the man you have waited lifetimes for,* I told myself walking down the steps. As soon as I reached the landing, his aura caressed mine and I let out a breath I hadn’t realized I’d been holding. *I’m on my way, my love.*

I walked into the main hall and saw him waiting for me by the doorway leading to the garden and stopped to take him all in. He looked so handsome, my heart raced at the sight of him. The long, white silk tunic hung to his knees, with a slit up each side and cinched with an embroidered sash like my own. The collar was high enough to accentuate his neck and the cut of the tunic showed off his broad shoulders. It was embroidered with silver, threaded leaves, similar to the pattern of my lace along the length of his belt, the collar of his tunic, and the cuffs around his wrists. The pants were cut narrow, hugging his strong, runner's thighs beautifully from what I could see from the side slit of his tunic. He had on traditional elven braan made from a white leather that only accentuated his calves
and narrow feet. I too had donned the traditional elven shoes and I found them quite freeing in comparison to slippers or other types of shoes.

His eyes met mine and I saw them slightly widen as I walked across the main hall towards him. Reaching him, he took my hands, his eyes moving over me in silent surprise. His aura caressed mine conveying his love and his pleasure as I quickly swallowed nervously before his beautiful blue eyes held mine.

“You looking breathtaking, vhenan,” he whispered thickly.

“You don’t look so bad yourself,” I replied.

He pressed a kiss to my knuckles as the door to the garden opened and we could see everyone gathered out there.

“Are you ready to share your life with me?” he whispered tucking my hand into the crook of his arm.

I stared into his eyes for a moment, his aura nervously rippling with mine and knowing he was nervous as well brought a calming to my own nervousness.

“I am more than ready, you?” I said holding his gaze.

“I am,” he replied with a small smile pressing another kiss to my hand.

We walked through the doorway and I saw the candles and ribbons decorating the surrounding area. Candles lined the walkway while the sight of the silken ribbons dancing in the small breeze for luck and prosperity brought a smile to my lips. I glanced around at the small crowd as we walked towards the gazebo and saw Cassandra already dabbing at her eyes while Sera gave me a thumbs up.

We walked up the small steps onto the gazebo and there were candles decorating the inside giving everything a fairytale type of feeling. The archway is decorated with different colored ribbons, Crystal Grace, and Embrium flowers. The soft white and vibrant orange-red flowers were stunning against the wooden framing of the archway. The heady blends of flowers and herbs permeating the air of the garden, helped me relax with the natural earthy scents that surrounded me.

We stood beneath the archway turning towards each other, and my heart started to race with excitement. The small gathering surrounded the gazebo quietly, and I noticed no one but him. He smiled picking up my hands and rubbing his thumbs over my knuckles, his eyes wet in the corners and his voice thick as he spoke.

“To be fully seen by somebody, then, to be loved anyhow—this is an offering that can only be thought miraculous. I promise to love and care for you, and I will always try in every way to be deserving of your love. I will always be honest with you, kind, patient, and forgiving. Most importantly, I promise to be a true and loyal friend to you. Ar lath ma, Fenlin.”

I swallowed the lump of emotion that built in my throat while my eyes watered with his words. The heartfelt emotion behind them in combination with his aura is warm with the love he felt for me and it was humbling to be loved so completely.

“In all the world, there is no heart for me like yours. In all the world, there is no love for you like mine. Within a crowd of people, my eyes have only ever searched for you. You have been my best friend, mentor, playmate, confident, and my greatest challenge. But most importantly, you are the love of my life and you make me happier than I could ever imagine and more loved than I ever thought possible. You have made me a better person, as our love for one another is reflected in the way I live my life. Ar lath ma, Solas.”
I smiled up at him, watching him pull my ring out of his small pocket and slipped it back onto my finger, rubbing his thumb over it. I reached down and unwound the thin, leather tie from my sash and removed his ring. His eyes searched mine, conveying surprise as I slipped it onto his finger. His expression of love overwhelmed me as he read the inscription on the surface and he suddenly cleared his throat.

He gave me an emotionally wobbly smile which I returned before he moved behind me and untied the sash for the final part of our ceremony that would be in elven. He took my hand and laid the sash over the top of our clasped hands and looked into my eyes. At that moment, I would have sworn I could see forever in their blue depths.

“I promise to honor and respect you, and seek to never break that honor,” I said.

Wrapping one end of the sash around our hands once before looking at him.

“I promise to share in your pain and seek to always ease it,” he said wrapping the sash around our hands the second time with the other end.

“I promise to share in your burdens so that our spirits may always grow strong with our bond,” I said wrapping my part of the sash around our hands the third time.

I felt his hands tighten on mine, and I rubbed my thumb over his as we finished the spell.

“I promise to always share in your laughter and look for the brightness in life, and the positive in you,” he said.

Making the final wrap and holding the end, I gathered my end and together we tied it into a knot.

“As our hands are bound together now, so is our lives and spirits joined in a union of love and trust,” I said looking at him unable to stop the tears from leaking from the corners of my eyes freely now.

Solas reached up with his free hand and using his thumb wiped the moisture away.

“Above us are the stars, and below us the ground. The stars we love will forever be our source of light and guidance, and the ground beneath us, a firm foundation from which we may grow our life,” he said his voice thick with emotion.

Solas bent his head towards me and I reached up caressing his face with my unbound hand as his lips met mine. The spell completed, a soft glow began to emanate from our skin as our spirits joined, bonding us for eternity. I could feel the threads linking and strengthening between us as we kissed and when I opened my eyes to look at him his gaze reflected what I felt – finally, our halves are whole.

The loud applause from those gathered broke us apart. The curious look from Dorian, nagged at my brain. I knew exactly what he wanted to know; knowing him, it had everything to do with the magic that exchanged between Solas and I. Later – he can ask his questions later. Smiling at everyone, we walked back towards the main hall to begin our dinner.

Chapter End Notes
Ar lath ma - I love you
vhenan - my heart
We entered the main hall still decorated like the night before, and that was only because I threatened Josephine about changing it. We went to sit at our table that was now thankfully removed from the center and put with the others so it was now a large square of tables. Everyone was piling in, finding chairs, pouring wine and ale, and I was still in awe of the connected feeling I shared with the man beside me.

Closing my eyes, I could see it, focus on it, follow it, and tentatively, I gently brushed it with my own aura and felt Solas’ hand tighten around mine as his aura flashed brightly with the soft touch. Oh, shit, am I not supposed to do that…was that wrong? I opened my eyes quickly and looked at him nervously, afraid I had done something wrong.

Solas reached up and caressed my cheek with his untethered hand and smiled radiantly at me.

“Do not look so concerned, vhenan, you did nothing wrong. Our bond is an intimacy that only we may share. It can be used to soothe one another, bring comfort, even pleasure. We may use this bond to convey inner feelings we would prefer not to say aloud. It is uniquely ours and ours alone.”

Nothing in the books I read told me any of this.

“So we can have internal conversations using emotions without saying a word?” I asked him.

Solas smiled at me.

“In a matter of speaking, yes,” he replied his expression displaying his pleasure with my question.

“Can it also be used over a great distance…like if we were separated? I mean, could we use it to find one another if we needed to?” I asked him.

The bonded connection between us vibrated with my question and it was odd sensation the hummed in my chest. I was analyzing the feeling he was communicating when Solas tilted my chin so he could study my eyes. His expression bore nothing of his thoughts, and the bond is so new, I had no idea what I was feeling but it was now making my stomach knot nervously.

“It can but I am curious to what is the purpose of asking your question?” he answered me carefully.

I instantly knew what he was thinking and I shook my head and reached up to caress his jaw tenderly.

“I know what you are thinking and that is not the reason for my question. Although, there is still the
artifact hidden beneath our feet if you recall and you have yet to actually discuss with me what your plans are for it. Regardless, I would just like to know what this bond does for the bonded, for us. I understand that for each pair, it works differently."

He held my gaze for a silent moment before his face relaxed into a smile.

“We shall discuss both their uses later, for now, we will celebrate with our friends our bonding and then I will carry you to our chambers, ward the door so that we are not to be disturbed for many days,” he whispered before leaning in to kiss me and my whole body hummed with pleasure.

“I will hold you to that,” I whispered back thickly.

He lifted our tied hands, pressing kisses to each of my fingers before we untied the knot and unwound the sash. He stood so I could wrap the sash around his waist with the other. He turned around and I finished tying it. Bending to press a kiss to my lips, he pulled my chair out for me as Francois brought out our dinner. The soft hum that flowed through the bond was distracting and as I ate I found myself studying it.

Varric stood holding his mug and I shook my head as he smiled at us and I was almost nervous what the wordsmith would say.

“All of us here have watched you two from the beginning. ‘The romance of the ages’, I called it and many here agreed with me,” he said and there was a round of approving murmurs as Varric looked around at everyone. “I have only one piece of wisdom to impart that I have found very useful in my own relationship,” he said looking at Cassandra and I laughed as she slapped his arm playfully. “Chuckles, whenever you’re wrong, admit it; whenever you’re right, shut up.”

The room rolled with laughter and I shook my head at Varric as I lifted my wine glass towards him with Solas.

“Agreed Master Tethras,” he said before taking a drink of his wine.

I glanced at him and saw his mischievous smile and reached up to caress his cheek.

“Ar lath ma,” I said softly.

A few toasts were made from various people after Varric’s and then they died down until dessert was served and I watched Dorian stand, holding his wine up, commanding the room to quiet as he stared at me.

“You, my dear, have this way about you that none of us can say no to. You have talked each of us into doing things that none of us would have ever considered doing with nothing more than your beautiful smile and a flutter of your lashes,” he said glancing around at the others nods of agreement. “Did you know that most of us, who went with you to the Fallow Mire, on your so-called exotic vacation, spent the better part of our time in the water scraping the first layer of our skin off? It took a week to get that Maker awful smell out of my hair,” he said making everyone laugh. “Of course I am reminded of the time in Crestwood you got everyone to follow you deeper into a dwarven ruin all so you could activate one of those artifacts,” he pointed out and Bull chuckled. “But I digress, my dear. Today, your beauty is almost blindingly radiant because of the man beside you. Using nothing more than your smile and sheer adorableness, how could he not love you. I know I speak for everyone here when I say, we wish you nothing but joy, love, and many, many children,” he said raising his
“And we all pray to the maker each one of them will be exactly like you,” he joked before sitting down.

Covering my face groaning while everyone around us laughed, I looked up and finally blew him a kiss, casting away the small tears that had escaped. Solas and I shared our cake while others toasted and cheered while the night grew closer to a close and I couldn’t wait to get him alone. I saw Josephine stand and walk towards us from her place at the end of the table next to Leliana and I prayed her good intentioned meddling was done for a while.

“Fenlin, you and Solas have many gifts to open. Would you prefer to have them moved to your quarters to be opened at your convenience?”

I took the last bite of my cake and set my fork down.

“Please Josephine, I would like to get my wedding night started,” I said wiggling my eyebrows at her teasingly.

Josephine blushed but smiled at me understandingly.

“Give me ten minutes and I will have everything moved and then you may – retire for the evening.”

I chuckled and nodded my head watching as she walked away and directed some people to start moving the gifts from the table.

“She asked for ten minutes to put the gifts in our chambers,” I said to Solas when he looked at me curiously.

“Not a minute more,” he replied making me giggle.

“Agreed,” I replied smiling.

Josephine gave Solas a subtle nod that I did not see, so it surprised me when he suddenly stood and scooped me out of my chair.

“Wha…”

The loud whoops, whistles, and catcalls had me blushing.

“ELVEN GLORY,” Sera hollered out.

Pressing my face into the crook of his neck laughing, he turned and strode across the main hall towards our door. One of the guards opened our chamber door and when he closed it behind us, it shut out the loud laughter from the others. Solas glanced at the door and the flash of a ward blossomed over the door locking out the sounds of the others.

Kissing his neck, he softly moaned and I smiled.

“Are you in a hurry, wolf?” I questioned him, kissing his jaw.

“After your torment from yesterday – yes, I have thought of very little else since the moment you walked out that door today,” he replied thickly climbing the steps.

Laughing, I nuzzled his neck, bathing my senses in his scent.
“Good,” I replied.

We reached the landing and he put me down. Smiling at him, it was still hard for me to believe we were bonded.

“It’s all so – surreal,” I said to him in bewilderment.

His soft laughter sent a thrill through my veins as he cradled my face between his strong, hands.

“It is perfect,” he said before claiming my lips in a toe-curling kiss.

Breaking apart, panting, his hands moved to the large braid around my head and began releasing it.

“I prefer your hair free,” he commented placing the circlet on the table as he continued combing his long fingers through my hair.

“And here I thought you preferred me naked,” I teased and his eyes met mine, shiny with mischief and desire.

“I do, but I must start somewhere first,” he replied huskily.

I sighed at the feeling of his fingers running over my scalp, loosening the braid.

“Oh, well then, I should help you start,” I said unknotting the sashes around his waist.

His telling smile sent a sizzle of anticipation through me when he removed my necklace just as I was pulling the sashes from around his narrow waist. He knelt down and slipped his hands beneath my gown to remove my braan from my calves. His hands skimmed over the skin of each calf making goosebumps form on my skin. He moved to stand behind me and sliding my hair over my shoulder out of his way, caressed the exposed skin of my back with his fingers before following the motions with his soft lips.

“You are far too overdressed, falon’saota,” he mouthed against my shoulder.

Bond mate, the words sent delicious, tingles racing over my skin. His fingers traced my skin before gradually moving to unlace the ties down my back. The soft press of his lips against the side of my neck as his nimble fingers worked made me softly moan.

“I could say the same for you,” I replied a bit breathlessly.

The breath of his laughter caressed the pulse in my neck and my body vibrated with the sensation as he pressed a kiss on the throbbing pulse. His hands skimmed over my back to my shoulders, pushing the gown off to pool on the floor around our feet. The sound of his soft intake of breath when he realized that nothing was beneath the gown brought a small smile to my face.

“Had I known vhenan, we would have left our celebration much earlier,” he said thickly.

“Now who is the one that is overdressed,” I said teasingly looking at him over my shoulder before turning towards him.

Kneeling down, I unraveled his braan as he stared down at me hungrily. Placing the strips of leather next to my own, I stood and slipped my hands beneath his tunic, touching warm, bare skin while I held his gaze. Everything about him was mesmerizing to me. The small flecks of black and green in his blue eyes, his scent of parchment, elfroot and glacial ice ensnared me. As I peeled the layers of his clothing away, it was as if opening a precious, fragile gift.
The expression he gave me told me that he was feeling what I felt through our shared bond and when I analyzed it, I realized it was not just my feelings I was feeling but his. My eyes widened with this new revelation and my expression of surprise made him smile as he caressed my cheek.

Wrapping my hand around his neck, I brought his face to mine and pressed my lips to his. The low sultry moan that escaped him as I kissed him sent heat flushing over my skin.

“Will you take your mate to bed now, Solas?” I asked against his lips.

“Ma nuvenin, vhenan,” he replied with a desire thickened voice.

He picked me up and carried me to our bed, laying me down. I watched him as his eyes traveled the length of my form. My own body heated at the sight of his broad shoulders, sculpted chest, and stomach leading to narrow hips over strong thighs. I wet my lips in anticipation as he knelt on the bed.

His hand skimmed slowly from the inside of my ankle to my inner thigh, then up over my hip. The action made my heart race and my breath quicken into short panting breathes while my eyes followed his movements.

He picked up my ankle and pressed a kiss to the arch of my foot, his eyes watching me. The simple press of his lips against the skin of my foot sent exciting shivers up my leg extracting a small whimper from me.

“I have dreamt of this day my entire long existence,” he whispered against the skin of my calf. The effect of his breath on my skin and the vibration of his voice sent electrical shivers up my leg. His tongue glided slowly over the inside of my knee, his eyes holding me captive in their blue depths.

“Waited for it, for you,” he growled with a touch of impatience in his tone.

He pulled his gaze from me and slowly kissed his way up the inside of my leg, reaching my inner thigh biting softly on the sensitive skin. I shivered and arched my back when his tongue slowly tasted me. His low, feral growl vibrated across my sensitive flesh stimulating a reciprocating moan from me.

“Ana emma la’var ame mar,” he growls against my warm sex increasing the stimulation he was making. His needful groan reached my ears before sucking on my sensitive gem deeply and I grabbed the bedsheets tightly, arching my hips towards his torturous tongue.

Using his shoulders, he pushed my legs wider, sliding his hands beneath me, pulling me even closer to him. He devoured me with his tongue, feasting on every wet inch. His aura expanded in the room, caressing every inch of my skin and everywhere it touched, set my blood aflame with the dual stimulation.

A ragged cry escapes my throat with the merciless flicks of his tongue over me. Gripping the blankets tighter trying to keep my body from rocketing off the bed, his thumb slipped over my mound reaching the sensitive pearl and released a small pulse of electrical magic, stimulating the nerve-filled area. My moaning turned into a cry as his name left my lips, my body rocketed with intense pleasure over the edge of blissful release as my magic arced from my skin with my excitement.

“Mala sal,” he growled kneeling up and dragging my hips towards him.

Gazing into my eyes, he positioned himself at my entrance. Sliding deeply into my awaiting essence, he pressed against the nerves buried in the walls of my sex anticipating his attention. Biting my lip,
my eyes slid closed with the pleasurable fullness of him. Moaning softly, his aura moved through my body filling me as much as he was. My body quivering with small explosions from my previous orgasm and with each thrust, he set off ripples of pleasure rushing through me at greater speed.

The intense pressure he built with each precise movement against that mysterious nerve center had me begging and panting for more. Biting his shoulder hard, my body tightened around him and I came again almost crying my release. His lips latched onto mine possessively, his tongue demanding my participation while my body shook and aftershocks detonated through my system.

We broke apart panting heavily, his eyes holding mine he bent his head and nipped at one of my nipples wrenching a small cry from me before whispering against my sweat dampened skin with a smile.

“Mala sal, vhenan.”

I couldn’t repress the whimpers that escaped with the grazing of his teeth over my sensitive skin setting off little explosions of pleasure running through my body. Solas rolled me onto my stomach and slipped into my still clenching warmth from behind. Lightning flashed behind my eyes and rushed across my skin as this angle brought him into me deeply.

He pulled me up against his chest and I wrapped my arms around his neck as I felt his lips latch onto my shoulder. He slid his hands down the sides of my breasts and grasped my hips tightly, increasing the speed of his thrusts into me.

I cried out at his continuous stimulation to my hypersensitive body unsure how much more I could take. His lips pressed against the sensitive skin behind my ear, licking the outer shell and I moaned as shivers rushed across my skin. He skimmed a hand up my stomach to caress my breast, gently pinching my sensitive nipple while biting at the exposed flesh of my neck.

My ragged breaths and jagged cries of pleasure filled the room. His moans of pleasure mingled with mine as I felt my body racing towards that next pleasurable, mind-blowing release. His hand slipped between my thighs and nimble fingers caressed the overstimulated bundle of nerves and my body shuddered with his manipulations shooting me up the steep climb closer to release.

My body was no longer my own as the intensity of my next orgasm built. Turn my head, I latched onto his lips, biting his lower lip, wrenching a growl from him. Smiling against his lips, I did it again. Our magic was churning through the room building, my aura moved through him as much as his moved through me. His moan of pleasure against my lips with the sensation pushed my desire to the edge.

His thrusts built in pace as my body shuddered and tightened around him.

“Garun sul em ma’lath,” I demanded of him.

His mouth latched onto my shoulder just as I rolled my hips back into him and his loud moan of release filled the air mingling with my own cries.
braan - elven shoes
falon’saota - bond mate
Ma nuvenin, vhenan - As you wish, my heart
Ana emma la'var ame mar - You are mine, as I am yours.
Mala sal - Now, again
Garun sul em ma’lath - Cum for me, my love

**Quotes from other people**

Whenever you’re wrong, admit it; whenever you’re right, shut up. - Ogden Nash
Presents

Chapter Notes

"If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die? And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?"

~William Shakespear

The moment you all have been curiously wondering about. Thank you for your patience and I hope it was worth the wait.

Solas in only his leggings and me in his shirt walked down our stairway towards the main hall. It was three in the morning, and I was pretty sure that the hall would be empty. Solas removed the ward on the door and I peeked out carefully, scanning the torch lit room. Shoving my damp hair out of my face from our earlier bath, I turned to Solas.

Taking his hand, I smiled up at him impishly.

“There are two guards around the main door at the very end of the hall.”

Looking at his shirtless chest and down at my pantless legs, I giggled and ran my fingers up his chest. “Let’s have a little fun,” I whispered.

Solas gave me a wicked smile, squeezing my hand, he pressed a kiss to my lips in agreement. I cast the spell that would make us vanish and we slipped out the door, moving silently towards the doorway that led to the kitchen.

“Carl, did you see the Inquisitor’s door just open? I swear I just saw it open.”

I heard Carl snort at him as we drew closer to the door that led to the dining room.

“You really think that door is going to open tonight, Mike? I bet you ten silvers that door doesn’t open for a couple of days,” he joked.

I covered my mouth to keep my own snort from escaping as both men laughed. I felt Solas’ enjoyment at our childish sneaking to raid the kitchen’s pantry through our bond. If we had just gotten dressed, we wouldn’t need to sneak, but this was so much more fun. Slipping through the next door we made our way down the stairs passing two more guards before reaching the kitchen. Once inside and the door shut, I released Solas’ hand and started to giggle. His own laughter mingled with mine and I reached up and traced his large smile with my thumb. The relaxed, youthful glow on his face, stole the breath from my lungs.

Solas kissed my thumb and cradled my face, pressing his lips to mine teasingly.

“Vhenan, stop looking at me in this manner, we need food,” he whispered.

I snorted.
“You mean you need food,” I replied teasingly.

He shook his head and grabbed a platter from beneath a counter.

“Did you just roll your eyes at me?” I asked him poking a finger into his bare stomach.

“Yes – I did, now help your mate gather nourishment before he parishes,” he answered rubbing his stomach.

I chuckled as he bent and pressed another kiss to my lips before grabbing some rolls. We loaded up the platter with meat, cheese, fruit, bread and tiny cakes. Both of us giggling now, he picked up the tray and I placed my hand on his arm to disguise us as we made our way back to our chambers as silently as our trip to the kitchen.

When we were safely behind our door, Solas replaced the ward and we both sat on the first step laughing.

“That was way too much fun for it to possibly be a good thing to do,” I said trying to catch my breath.

He pressed a kiss to my cheek and stood, holding the tray.

“Come vhenan, I am hungry,” he said heading up the steps.

I stood up to follow and snorted.

“You should be, I don’t think I will ever walk straight again,” I said cheekily.

His loud laughter echoed through the stairwell and into our room as we crested the top step. I went and grabbed a bottle of Antivan wine and two glasses from the side table and brought them to the coffee table where our pilfered goods sat in front of the fire.

“Was it not to your satisfaction, vhenan?” he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Shaking my head quickly, I gave him a grinning smile that stretched across my face.

“Is that a serious question?” I replied rolling my eyes at him now. “I am enjoying my wedding night immeasurably,” I replied blowing him a kiss.

His low laugh made me smile as he plucked a piece of cheese from the tray and popped it into my mouth before pressing his lips to mine.

I picked up a piece of sliced apple and took a bite before turning towards our mound of gifts against the wall.

“That is a lot of stuff,” I said around the apple I was chewing.

He replied in a mumble around his own food making me giggle and turn to look at him. His cheesy smile made me laugh even more as I watched him swallow. Walking towards my desk, I picked up a sheet of parchment and the dwarven quill Varric got for me that was made to hold ink like a real pen like the ones from my world and moved towards the mound of gifts.

“Well, since we are awake, let’s open them and see what there is,” I said smiling at him.

He reached out and pushed a tiny cake into my mouth as his arm snaked around my waist. I chewed on the large bite, his eyes reflecting his pleasure and love for me as he popped a tiny cake into his
own mouth with his free hand. His arm holding me tightly against him, he pressed a brief kiss to my lips before I turned towards the small mountain of gifts.

“Focus wolf, we need the energy to keep up with your pace,” I said to him teasingly.

He softly laughed from behind me before he released his hold and swatted my ass.

“Perhaps I am striving towards a goal,” he replied taking a drink of his wine and grabbing another piece of cheese.

I glanced at him over my shoulder with a large smile.

“If the goal is to kill me by multiple orgasms, you’re well on your way to accomplishing that. I should tell you, I do not have a death benefit with the Inquisition that will payout for inducing such satisfaction,” I replied with a snort, grinning at him.

The corners of his eyes crinkled around the edges with his own wolfish smile and it sent small shivers through me. The bond between us conveyed his desire for me, and instantly my body was hot all over and I swallowed the sudden ball of need in my throat.

His arms wrapped around me and his lips plundered mine for a moment sending shivers racing over my skin with anticipation. I tasted the strawberries and cream on his tongue from the cake as he kissed me.

“The goal is a family, vhenan. I agree to your terms,” he said softly making my ears twitch.

My eyes flashed open to hold his. The connection between us conveyed not just his honesty but his want of such a thing and I was…floored.

“You’re serious,” I whispered holding his steady gaze unsure if I really wanted to believe it.

“I am,” he replied before kissing the tip of my nose.

“I want what you described, vhenan. I want you, I want our children around us…I want – a life, with you by my side. It is what I have always wanted. It has taken me to long to realize that what I perceived as duty had become a collar of pride choking me around my neck. What is done is done, our people's time is over, it is time to let the next generation move forward,” he said holding my gaze.

Every part of my small being did jumping jacks and back flips with excitement at his words. Pulling his lips back to mine, I kissed him passionately, my eyes closed trying to organize my racing thoughts.

“You really mean it,” I said against his lips and felt his answering smile.

His hands ran over my stomach and then to my hips pulling me closer to him.

“You, heavy with our child,” he paused and kissed me tenderly before holding my gaze. “I want with every breath of my existence,” he finally said holding my gaze.

My hands reached up to cradle his face tenderly.

“I want that too,” I said gently enjoying his expression of pleasure with my words.

Picking me up, our gifts are forgotten, I dropped the pen and paper and wrapped my arms around his neck while he carried me towards our bed and I giggled at the feeling of his nose nuzzling against
“We’ve definitely had plenty of practice,” I said as he laid me down on the bed.

His soft laughter and smile of extreme happiness filled me.

“That we have,” he replied slipping his leggings down over his narrow thighs.

I reached for the hem of his shirt and pulled it up and over my head tossing it over the side of the bed.

“Then stop making me wait for it wolf, and come here,” I growled at him.

My voice vibrated through the room and his eyes slowly glowed with the sound as he covered my body, taking my lips with his.

Sliding out of bed, I went and picked up his shirt. Pulling it on before moving towards the gifts again, I grabbed my hair and braided it over my shoulder, leaving the ends unbound. Grabbing the paper and pen from the floor, I glanced back at him and winked.

“Let’s see what there is,” I said his eyes following me before getting out of bed and pulling his own leggings on.

“This should be illuminating,” he replied grabbing a box that came from Varric.

We opened the gifts, receiving an alarming amount of baby clothing and booze making us both laugh. Pulling a narrow box with no card, I stared at it curiously before disregarding the lack of a card thinking it was lost and could be found later or Josephine would most likely know who it was from. Ripping through the paper and slipping the top off, my heart seized in my chest and my breath stopped as I dropped the box to the floor. Every particle instantly flared in angry recognition as I stared at the blade that killed me and my mind reeled back to the memory.

“You think your sacrifice will be worth something, slave? Once you are gone, I will have what should have been mine, and it will be moments before you are forgotten,” she whispered with a snide tone holding the dagger over my heart.

“You never were the smartest of your mother’s children. He will never be yours…get used to the feeling of his rejection, Andruil,” I spat angrily with a defiant stare.

Her loud growl echoing in the chamber as she plunged the dagger into my chest angrily and I held his horrified gaze at what I had done. I am so sorry my love, as all went black.

My aura erupted angrily through the room, shoving Solas against the wall away from me. The dangerous swirl of emotion destroyed everything in its wake, including my desk, armoire, and the
bed frame. Solas scrambled from the wall and grabbed my arm trying to anchor me and physically flinched when I looked at him.

“I will never yield again,” I said my voice vibrating through the room angrily with my power.

He quickly shoved the box away with his foot and pulled me into him as my aura pulsed and swirled angrily in the air around us beckoning the change in my form.

“Focus vhenan,” he said quickly cradling my face, holding my gaze intently.

I tried to do as he said and felt the change rolling over me even as I fought it and my hands turned into large paws.

“Fenlin – focus on me…push the anger away, the feelings you felt that day,” he said quickly. My body continued changing to my cat form as my thoughts swirled around the day Andruil plunged her dagger into Assan's chest. I barely felt Solas' arms now wrapped around my growing neck as the change progressed.

“Fenedhis,” Solas growled holding my neck tightly.

Soon my large cat body filled our room. My head thrown up slightly, picking Solas up from the floor and I roared angrily shaking the small things I had on my bookshelves to fall off.

“Vhenan,” he said trying to get my attention.

“NO, she dies,” I said my voice vibrating through the air angrily.

Solas grabbed my feline face and stared into my eyes.

“You must change back vhenan. You cannot hunt her – not now,” he said his tone pleading.

“She dies,” I growled holding his gaze before looking out towards the mountains.

Solas shook his head and leaned his forehead against mine.

“I agree, but not – today,” he whispered.

I roared angrily shaking the pictures from the walls.

“Solas?” I growled at him.

His head moved and now his eyes are holding mine, full of understanding.

“We will take care of her, vhenan, together. You will never submit again, this I promise,” he said calmly stroking my face.

“Dirtha'vhen'an,” I growled at him.

“Dir'vhen'an,” he said honestly and quickly.

My change came quickly and his arms wrapped around me, pulling me into him.

“I will have my justice, Solas,” I said against his chest.

“Of that, I have no doubt, vhenan,” he said pressing a kiss to my temple.
I sat on the floor staring at the dagger with a million questions running through my mind. The sun was just starting to peek over the tips of the mountains to awash our room in a soft orange and purple light. My anger surrounded me with Andruil’s subtle message. Solas drew my attention as he propped the pieces of the broken bedframe against the wall and glancing around the room I grimaced at the devastation I caused and I rubbed my face angry with myself.

Glancing back to the dagger, I slightly jolted when I felt him sit behind me, pulling me into his embrace. Our combined silence was deafening and I felt his lips against my temple.

“We must find out how she got out?” he said softly.

I honestly didn’t care how the bitch got out, only that I found her. Sighing with frustration, I knew he was right though – we did need to find out how she was released to prevent the other Evanuris from escaping.

“Fine, once we know that, then we will find out where she has hidden so I may return her generous gift,” I replied through clenched teeth.

I felt his heavy sigh against my back and closed my eyes. Breath in, breath out, all in due time – she will not get her way again, she will not take this away from me. Pulling the darkness close, I wrapped myself in its soothing embrace and I felt his arms tighten around me.

“What is that you are doing?” he asked.

“What?” I said looking at him over my shoulder.

“What you were just doing, I could feel the sudden disconnect of your emotions,” he replied.

I shrugged my shoulders as I tried to find the words to describe it.

“It is something I have always done when I worry about something. I don’t know if I could explain it really. I learned the mental way of escape the day my mother poured her anger on me for drawing and my father’s severe disappointment in my inability to be like him. I was quite the letdown for them,” I said with bitterness lacing my tone.

His eyes held mine as his expression changed to one of gentleness and consideration.

“Perhaps this technique you employ could be used for those moments of losing control. Can you focus on it during times of emotional distress?”

“I don’t know, I have never tried,” I replied.

Solas glanced around the room and then back to me with a small smile rubbing his nose with mine.

“Well we must try something before you ruin anymore furniture, vhenan,” he said softly teasing me.

I snorted and laid my head on his shoulder.

“How in the hell am I going to explain this?”

He laughed and kissed my forehead.

“You could tell them it got – out of hand,” he said kissing my cheek.

I started laughing with what he was implying and opened my eyes to look at him.
“I could, but then Dorian would want details,” I replied laughing.

The sound of his laughter soothed the angry edges of my thoughts and I covered my mouth as I yawned tiredly.

“I need sleep wolf. You kept me up all night,” I said teasingly.

“I do not recall your objections at the time,” he replied standing and holding his hand down to me with a wolfish grin lighting his features.

I chuckled taking his hand.

“And I am definitely not whining now,” I replied with an impish grin.

His arms scooped me up making me giggle as I nuzzled his neck.

“Excellent, then you will not mind that I will keep you awake for just a bit longer,” he whispered into my ear sending shivers of anticipation racing through my body.

“I could be persuaded to stay awake a bit longer,” I replied nipping at his earlobe.

His complete happiness flowed through our bond as he laid me down on what was left of our bed.

“I shall be very persuasive, vhenan,” he replied before pressing his soft lips to mine.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Fenedhis - literal is wolf dick; used as a universal type of curse words: shit, damn etc...
Dirtha'vhen'an - An unbreakable vow
Dir'vhen'an - promise
Preparations for The Temple of Dirthamen

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

I placed the sketches of the veil runes I made from the plains onto the table and with my finger, traced the path to the Temple on the other side of the Waking Sea and tapped it with my finger.

“Dirthamen’s temple is here, not far from Val Chevin. Corypheus is looking for something in this temple and I want to find it if there is even anything to be found, before he does. Once we have searched the temple, we will trek towards the Hissing Wastes to remove the Venatori that the Warden’s found on their way to Weisshaupt,” I said calmly.

Glancing around the room, I looked at Leliana.

“Have we found where Corypheus even is yet?”

She shook her head, a frustrated sigh escaping her.

“No, we only know that he is searching old Elven ruins – for what we do not know,” she answered.

“Well keep looking, something will turn up,” I replied glancing at the map.

“Will you be taking everyone with you on this mission, Inquisitor?” Cullen questioned.

I stared at Cullen, his discomfort apparent with my steady, studying gaze. Noticing the bags under his eyes, the tightness around his mouth, the hollowness in his cheeks and the slight drop in his shoulders, I knew he wasn’t sleeping well but it appeared he was barely sleeping at all. My concern for his health overrode my concern for his discomfort with my staring or his personal sentiments. He was my friend at the end of the day and looking at him, I was worried. Besides, he knew how much I hated being called Inquisitor. His imposed distance with our friendship since changing into my animal form in front of everyone was maddening and since he has insisted on acting this way, I mentally shrugged deciding two could play this game. His eyes slid sideways and I let out a sigh of annoyance.

“Yes, Commander, I will be taking everyone with me, including Raj. It is time that Raj gets out a bit, and out of getting himself into trouble around here from certain influences,” I said raising my eyebrow at him.

“One bloody time,” he muttered. I continued as if he had said nothing while Josephine and Leliana softly laughed from opposite ends of the table.

“The Wastes is a large area and like the Approach, I will need everyone’s help in covering it all.”

He nodded sharply and the meeting drew to a close. I watched everyone shuffle towards the door and held a hand up stopping him.

“Commander, one moment of your time please,” I said noticing his sudden look of discomfort with my request.

I waited for Josephine and Leliana to leave before I placed my hands on the table and looked at him.

“As your friend Cullen, you look like shit,” I said bluntly.
I saw the small flicker around the edges of his lips as he held his smile back and I shook my head.

“You look like you haven’t slept in weeks,” I said.

Cullen looked at me and shook his head.

“I am fine, Inquisitor,” he replied dismissively and tried moving towards the door again.

Hearing the title, I squared my shoulders and took a deep breath pushing my annoyance with him away and stepped in his way.

“Yes, I can see that. Okay, Cullen, you leave me no choice since you will obviously not do it yourself. While I am away, you will take one day a week, of your choosing, off. For a full twenty-four hours, you are to do anything other than work, is that understood?”

His eyes narrowed at me angrily,

“Inquisitor…”

“Oh stow the title before I slap you with it. That’s an order, Cullen,” I said angrily.

“Now wait just one damn minute,” he said angrily throwing his hand on the hilt of his sword.

My eyebrow rose with his tone and I crossed my arms.

“One day away from your office per week is not that damn much to ask but go ahead, keep talking and I’ll make it two days a week,” I replied calmly.

“Inq…Fenlin,” he said quickly as my eyes narrowed at him warningly.

“I have far too many responsibilities to take a day off per week. Perhaps we could negotiate the terms of this…”

“Christ on a cracker, Cullen. Its one fucking day a week, you would think I was asking you to take a damn month-long vacation. Since you are so against this order, I will find someone to make sure you do it because if I return and find out you ignored my request, I will have you thrown in the dungeon for disobeying a direct order. That is what you do with your own men is it not?”

Cullen glared angrily at me and I opened the door and glanced back at him before I left.

“Have a great rest of your day,” I said with a cheeky smile ignoring his sour look.

*****

Standing next to the counter in the kitchen, I watched Rayna crack an egg and fold it into the batter.

“It would be a great help if you would just check in on him, perhaps under the pretense of bringing him a sweet or lunch - anything, the man has a voracious sweet tooth,” I said absently as I looked at Rayna while she stirred.

Rayna’s lavender colored eyes glanced at me with a raised eyebrow.

“Is there a specific reason it has to be me?” she asked continuing to stir.

I laughed and quickly liberated a sticky bun from a passing basket on its way to the dining room.
“To be honest, I don’t think he will go against my orders, but if I send an agent to check up on him, he will know why they are there. You, on the other hand, he will never expect. I told him I would have some make sure he is taking a day off, but knowing him, he will expect one of Leliana’s agents watching him from a distance, or even suspect one of his own soldiers, not someone bringing him treats,” I answered with a mischievous smile.

Rayna glanced at me and started pouring the batter into a pan.

“What if he finds out it’s me that’s spying on him, he could get very angry…”

“Cullen? Get mad at you? No,” I said shaking my head. “Mad at me – possibly, but he will deal with it and I will deal with him. The man barely sleeps and is a workaholic and the way he looked today has me worried. I’m being a good friend making him take a day. He may not see it as that right now, but he will,” I said grinning.

"Are you always this much trouble?” she asked me teasingly.

I nodded my head and took the last bite of my sticky bun.

"Only when they make me," I replied around a mouthful full of the sweet bread.

“If you’re sure, Fenlin,” she said hesitantly.

“I am,” I said hugging her quickly. “I am going to owe you for this,” I said.

Rayna laughed and swatted at my hand as I stole another sticky bun before leaving for the Rotunda.

Poor Josephine stared in frozen shock at the state of my room. I hadn’t explained to her what happened, I just let her think what she would and it was obvious what she was thinking by the severe blush on her face.

“I…” she began and then swallowed nervously obviously unsure what to say.

“Don’t replace it with anything fancy, Josephine. If there is anything that we can salvage from other rooms then do that,” I told her hiding my smile and playing it off as nothing.

My voice seemed to snap her out of her shock and she glanced at me.

“Nonsense, I will find something – sturdier, to replace the furniture,” she said.

I watched her get even redder and I smiled at her. *Oh my God, what I wouldn't give to know what she is thinking.*

“That would be wonderful,” I replied biting the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing.

Solas’ aura caressed mine just before he opened the door and I turned towards the stairway just as his head crested the railing. *Perfect timing.*

“There you are,” I said as he walked towards us.

Josephine’s chin tucked to her chest and she stared at my floor interestedly. Solas’ eyebrow came up and he looked at me questioningly.

“We were just talking about replacing our furniture,” I told him with an impish smile.
“I see,” he said returning my smile with a wicked one of his own.

Josephine cleared her throat and looked everywhere but at us and I covered my mouth, repressing the urge to laugh. The bond connection between conveyed his own feelings of merriment with Josephine's obvious assumptions.

“Yes...I think I will check with Orzammar. Perhaps, they have something – more enduring,” she said gazing at the wall.

“Sounds fabulous, thank you, Josephine,” I said watching her barely restrain herself from running from our room.

With the sound of the door closing, I let the peals of laughter finally escape.

“I didn't even tell her anything, she just – assumed,” I said gasping.

Solas chuckled and pulled me into his arms.

“I noticed you did not stop her assumption,” he replied kissing my nose.

“Nope, her reaction was too good to be true,” I replied smiling up at him and wrapping my arms around his waist. “Hmm...I believe greetings are in order.”

He pressed his lips to mine and my pulse raced with the soft touch. Opening my eyes to look at him, his gentle smile made my skin tingle.

“Much better,” I said softly.

“Much,” he replied holding my gaze tenderly.

“We should probably get our packs ready, we are going to be gone for a while,” I told him.

His hand caressed my cheek and my body flushed with heat at the simple touch.

“We have time,” he said before pressing small kisses along my jaw.

“Hmm...I am getting the impression you have something else in mind?” I said a bit breathlessly.

“Indeed,” he replied pressing a kiss to my collarbone.

“I might have an idea of what that something else is,” I said before moaning softly when he pressed a soft kiss to my shoulder.

“I presumed you might,” he mouthed against my skin quickly setting my body on fire with the soft vibration of his words.

Running my fingers over his head, I brought his lips to mine with my own quiet demands. The feel of his lips smiling against mine drove me crazy and I grasped the front of his tunic tightly. His soft moan against my lips was fuel for the fire, and I pulled away, catching my breath.

“Can we get undressed now,” I panted before nipping his chin.

His thickened groan as he maneuvered us towards the mattress on the floor was quick. Falling on it, I rolled him onto his back and held his gaze as he stared up at me.

“Think I could get used to frisky, Solas,” I teased before kissing him.
He softly laughed.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” he said against my lips.

*****

I strapped on the leg casing for the dagger and Solas watched me slip Andruil’s blade into the scabbard. I looked at him when I made sure it was tight enough around my thigh and saw his expression of disapproval and ignored it. Walking towards my pack, his hands snaked around my waist and pulled me back into him.

Nuzzling my neck, I felt myself relax against him as the steady thrum of love flowed through our bond making me feel warm all over. We stood like this for a few moments silently sharing our feelings for each other before his lips pressed against my temple and he released me.

I glanced at him with a tender smile before bending to pick up my pack and glanced around the room.

“Knowing Josephine, when we return, our furniture will be replaced with stone,” I joked.

His laughter flowed around us as he slipped his own pack over his shoulders.

"I would have to agree with you, vhenan," he replied following me towards the steps.

Raj trailed behind Solas and me as we made our way to the stables. He was much larger than the wolves I had seen in the Hinterlands and on the Plains. Solas had told me he thought that perhaps he was a descendant of his ancestors that were part of the Emerald Knights that protected the Emerald Graves. If he was right, then Raj had a bit bigger to get before he was finished. His head pushed into my hip pulling me from my thoughts and I scratched between his ears, smiling down at him.

“I don’t care if that thing likes me – I’m not that kind of elf, old man,” I heard Sera snap walking away from Dennet.

Raising my eyebrow at her as I approached, she crossed her arms.

“Oh, not you too,” she said.

“I have no idea what you’re even blathering on about, Sera,” I said with a cheeky smile.

She thumbed over her shoulder towards the new Hart that was gifted by some noble ass who trapped him. The dark reddish-brown of the animal’s coat shone brightly against the early morning’s light. The white arrow that ran down its forehead between two deep blue eyes that followed Sera’s retreat and white stripes over its rump stuck out clearly.

“He says it’s mine,” she said her face scrunched in disgust as she glared at Dennet.

Solas dropped his pack and looked at the new Hart carefully, rubbing his hand along the animal’s forehead.

“Poor creature must be confused or bored,” Solas said quietly.

I started laughing as Sera’s eyes narrowed at Solas.

“Shut it Droopy, nobody asked you,” she said sticking her tongue out at him.
“Calm down Sera, you don’t have to take the Hart if you don’t want to. Besides, they require a level of skill to ride,” I said tongue in cheek.

Sera looked at me with her narrowed gaze and I could see the defiance in the way she stood with her shoulders squared back and her jaw jutting just a little outward.

“You don’t think I could ride it?” she questioned with a dirty look.

I played it off as if I didn’t care and shrugged my shoulders indifferently.

“Well, you have pointed out a million times how ‘not elfy’ you are, so no, I don’t think you can. Those animals would sooner run you through if you tried to saddle and harness them, so why don’t you just saddle your mare so we can go,” I told her turning away from her to get Inansha from his stall.

I saw Solas’ lips twitch at my obvious use of reverse psychology on Sera and winked at him.

“Whaa…you’re havin a go with me,” she said with a loud snort.

“She does have a point, Buttercup. You want me to get your horse for you?” Varric asked her as he pulled his pony out of its stall.

“No,” she said stalking towards the stall with the Hart in it. “I’m gonna show you that I can ride this stupid animal,” she said opening the stall door.

“Don’t cry to me when you fall on your ass,” I said glancing at her over my shoulder.

Sera gave me another dirty look and the finger before trying to get on the animal and falling on her ass.

I looked at her as she sat on the ground of the barn.

“Not one word out of you,” she said.

I shook my head and buried my face into the shoulder of Inansha as I laughed.

Bull walked over to where Sera got up from the ground and picked her up, placing her on the back of the Hart.

“There, now we can go,” he said laughing and Sera made a growling noise at him.

Solas helped me up and I glanced around making sure everyone was ready.

“And we are off like a herd of turtles,” I said loudly.

Everyone snickered with my stupid joke and I looked down at Raj.

“Come on big guy,” I said and the wolf took off ahead of us.

Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you my heart
vhenan - my heart
We made camp early and found a nice area we have used before that was nestled in a forest of trees. Sitting in the middle of tall grass away from camp, I drew Raj rolling around and scaring up rabbits as he played. Our trip down the mountain pass was uneventful for the most part. The large herd of rams that crossed our path took almost half an hour for us to get through. The upside, we got our dinner for the night with their slow crossing.

Still somewhat laughing, I had watched Varric while he glanced around at the animals and pulled Bianca from his back. Before I knew it, he had shot the ram that was standing right next to him. I recall looking at him with surprise and he shrugged at my look and slid off his pony.

“What? Dinner,” he said before gathering the ram and throwing it over the back of his mount.

I set my sketchbook down quickly as Raj bounding towards me. Opening my arms out to him, he knocked me over with his excitement and I burst into laughter trying to turn my face away as his big tongue took a swipe at it. The sound of Solas’ deep laughter caressed my senses and my eyes found him as he walked towards us.

Raj moved quickly and ran towards him. Dropping next to his feet, he rolled over and Solas knelt down and rubbed his belly in greeting. As soon as it was done, Raj rolled back to his feet and rubbed his large head into his side while Solas continued running his hand down his long back.

“So what brought you out here, handsome?” I asked him picking my sketchbook back up.

His eyes crinkled around the edges with his smile.

“I required the presence of my mate. Since she was not in the camp, I chose to find her to rectify my need for her company,” he said with a cheeky smile.

I laughed even as his words filled me with happiness.

“So you missed me,” I said still laughing.

“Yes,” he said chuckling as he stood and walked towards me to sit beside me.

I bumped into his arm with mine. He raised his hand to caress my face before tilting my chin up to accept his warm kiss. The subtle sizzle of desire ran beneath the surface of my skin as his tongue gently danced against mine. Slowly coming apart, the soft panting of our breaths mingled as our eyes held one another and his thumb slide back and forth over my cheekbone.

“Hmm, I think I like it when you miss me,” I said softly.
He pressed his lips briefly against mine again before pulling me onto his lap.

“I have studied your drawings of the Veilfire runes you found in the plains. I have reason to suspect that the temple will be guarded by a priest to Dirthamen.”

I nodded my head in agreement and then nuzzled into my niche between his neck and shoulder.

“I think you’re right, I only hope that whatever Corypheus seeks inside that temple is still there,” I replied.

My head came up as Dorian walked towards us.

“How did I know I would find you two out here? Cuddle time is over kids, dinner is ready,” he said with a smug little smile.

I sighed and gave him a pouty look making him laugh.

“Oh come on, just five more minutes’ dad,” I said sullenly.

Solas laughed as I slid off his lap and stood while Dorian shook his head at me. I rubbed Raj’s head.

“Go hunt,” I said softly to the wolf.

He made a quick yip before taking off to find something for himself. I glanced up at Solas when he laced his fingers with mine, smiling.

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The entrance into the lost temple was blown open and the door lay crookedly on hinges. Everyone had their weapons drawn and barriers were cast as we entered the darkened hole cautiously. Casting mage lights for some light, we quickly extinguished them when we saw that the corridor was lit with torches.

Walking down the small flight of steps cautiously, I found a brazier to my left unlit like the others. Smiling to myself, I rotated my wrist and a minty, blue-green flame ignited within the small brazier.

“Whoever is here or came before us – doesn’t have a mage with them,” I said running my fingers through the Veilfire.

Fenris glanced at the gear and supplies left against one of the walls and picked up a journal handing it to me.

“I doubt they left all their stuff here out of the goodness of their black hearts,” he said with a smirk.

I took the book from him lightly laughing as I nodded my head in agreement and slipped the journal into my pack to read later. Bull, Cassandra, and Fenris led further into the temple as the rest of us followed behind them. I bent and held Raj’s blue-green eyes.

“Stay close and no heroics sir,” I said softly ruffling his fur around his face.

The soft chuff of understanding and then his quick headbutt into mine in answer was enough as I stood. The temple appeared partially flooded as we descended the next small staircase.

“Great, wet calves,” Bull said.

I snorted and he looked at me as the water was at my knees.
“ Seriously Bull, I love you, but fuck your calves,” I said sounding disgusted as the others started laughing.

“I feel your pain Sketch,” Varric replied winking at me as he too had water more towards his thighs.

“You two want a piggyback ride,” Bull joked and I slapped his arm.

“Go on before I send a lightning bolt up your backside,” I teased him and his chuckle echoed in the chamber.

We progressed down the long corridor and in my head I heard unintelligible whispering. I glanced around to see if anyone else heard it but it appeared that only Raj and I were the ones with our heads tilted to the side, listening.

“No one else but me and the wolf hears that?” I asked softly.

“Hear what?” Solas questioned looking at me curiously.

“Whispering – can’t understand it but it is coming from there,” I said pointing to the corridor to my left.

We moved down the corridor that led to a small room with a cloaked statue of a man holding an offering bowl. Dirhamen, my mind said quickly looking at the statue. Upon closer inspection, the offering bowl had an offering in it already – a severed head.

“Well that is one way to keep your secrets,” I said and Solas stood next to me silently.

“It is indeed,” he replied his tone laced with disgust.

“What do you mean?” Hawke said from behind me.

I studied the head as I answered her.

“This is the Temple of Dirhamen, the keeper of secrets and knowledge. ‘Some words remain unuttered. Truths are pushed down, down where they shall never arise again,’” I repeated the phrase absently in elven and felt the bond between Solas and I vibrate with unease.

“The ancient was depicted in a couple of ways as you can see by the statue. This statue is cloaked, hiding the bearer’s face – hiding their secrets. The two ravens on his shoulders, they are known as Deceit and Fear. He acquired their assistance when searching for his twin brother in the far-reaches of the Fades, and then the Varterral lying in his hands as its legs hold the offering bowl up. This creature was said to be created as an eternal guardian for a village of people he chose to share his wisdom with before - Arlathan.”

“Creepy guy, if he liked severed heads as offerings,” Hawke said with a snort.

I chuckled, more than you realize.

“I believe this is not so much meant as an offering as it is a ritual. Perhaps a punishment for one of his priests for speaking,” I replied.

“Agreed, this part is one of many that I believe we will find,” Solas replied.

“Well, should we take it with us?” I said looking at him.

Solas nodded his head and I looked at the head again noticing the dark Dirhamen vallis’lin
embedded into the greyish, elven head.

“Yes, I believe that whatever we are searching for will not be found unless we complete the ritual.”

“Yuck,” I said looking at the head that was not only still warm, but moist.

I heard Sera and Bull groan at the same time and pulled my pack from my back and pulled out a cloth to wrap the head in and placed it inside handing the book we had found earlier to Solas to hold.

“You’re not seriously buying into this ‘Elven Gods’ shite?” Sera asked.

I could hear in her tone the disbelief and mockery she felt towards anything of elven nature and sighed gathering my patience before I looked at her as I slipped my pack back on.

“I can no more dismiss the Elven Gods than I can the Maker and Andraste. They existed, Sera. To discount them so disrespectfully shows ignorance and I for one, am not ignorant and neither are you.”

“Yeah – well they failed and the Maker didn’t,” Sera said flippantly and I narrowed my gaze at her.

“Yes, the Maker was such a winner he only let his wife be burned to death,” I retorted and let out a heavy sigh. “We are here for one purpose and that is to obtain whatever Corypheus is looking for in here if there is anything here. I will not spend my time having a philosophical argument with you about the existence of Gods, Sera. Believe or don’t, I honestly do not care either way,” I replied with a tight voice.

Solas’ aura was soothing as it touched mine, the connection between us conveying his own frustration with Sera but also his understanding of my frustration and his love for me, and this went a long way to calming my need to slap the stupid out of Sera.

I took another breath for patience and heard Bull’s soft laughter beside me.

“She pissing you off, Boss,” he joked.

I snorted and held my fingers up to show about an inch between my thumb and forefinger.

“Just a little,” I replied dropping my hand. “Come on, this place feels wrong and I really don’t want to stay here any longer than we have to.”

_Dirthamen was a sadistic asshole_, I said to myself or I thought I did until I saw the small upturn of Solas’ lips as my feelings for the twin were conveyed to him through our bond.

We moved through the wet corridors of the temple. Along the way we found scrolls written by treasure seekers that got lost in the temples labyrinth, describing their mental torture with hauntings and demons within the temple. Slipping the next scroll into Solas’ pack, we found the next room with a tongue in the offering bowl.

_“Without a head, you cannot remember, without a tongue you cannot speak,”_ I recanted quietly in elven.
I had an eerie feeling I knew what would be the other pieces as this was one of Dirthamen’s punishments for telling secrets he wished not known. I wrapped the tongue in a small piece of cloth and slipped it into my pack ignoring Sera’s disgusted sounds.

We left the room and continued through the labyrinth of wet corridors until we found the next piece of what I was beginning to confirm was one of Dirthamen’s priests.

“Without hands, you cannot turn the pages of knowledge,” I whispered before pulling out more cloth.

Slipping the hands inside my pack, I turned to leave the room and Raj’s menacing growl made the hair on my neck stand at attention. Everyone pulled weapons quickly as a large group of undead descending on us in the narrow corridor.

Casting barriers quickly, we went about clearing the hall of the undead as they shuffled towards us. I watched while Raj took the last one down on Bull’s blind side by tearing its leg off first and then crushing its head within his huge jaws when it toppled over.

“That’s my buddy,” Bull said ruffling the fur on his head.

“This is what happens when you mess with dead peoples bits,” Sera said disgustedly.

Fed up with her attitude about being here, my patience snapped.

“Fenedhis lasa, Sera, do you need a time-out somewhere in a corner until you learn how to shut the hell up? I get it, you don’t want to be here,” I said holding her blue gaze irritably.

“Wha? I’m jus sayin, if we weren’t messin with things that didn’t need messin with, like puttin a bunch of body bits in a bag, then this shite wouldn’t happen,” she said sarcastically.

“I’m about to add you to the fucking bag if you don’t get over yourself,” I answered her angrily.

She opened her mouth to say something else, and Cassandra slapped her hand over it covering it quickly.

“Enough, I do not want to spend all damn day in this wet hell,” she said loudly looking at Sera and then me.

“I completely agree,” I said walking past Sera as Cassandra removed her hand from Sera’s mouth.

“Whole place is full of lies and demons,” Sera muttered angrily after I passed.

I heard the collective sighs of everyone as I stopped and turned towards her.

“Why? Because you say it is? Because you have never seen them? You’ve never seen the fucking Maker either but you believe he existed. Will you continue to shove your beliefs down my throat until I give in and agree with you so you can feel better about your limited idea of elven history? Should I give in to your beliefs Sera because you grew up hating that you were an elf and so, in turn, I should too? Just do me a favor, and shut the hell up until we are out of here because you are riding my last fucking nerve right now with your continuous blathering of nonsense about shit you don’t even know about.”

Her eyes were wide as I angrily lit into her and when I was done, I turned from her praying to whatever fucking God was listening for her to shut up for the remainder of our time in the Temple. Everything about this place felt off and it was making my skin crawl anxiously.
Fenedhis lasa - suck a wolf dick
Conversations in italic quotations are to be thought of spoken in elven.
Thank you, everyone, for being so awesome and your continued support! I hope you enjoy the update.

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.
Thrice and once, the hedge-pig whin'd.
Harpier cries:—'tis time! 'tis time!
Round about the caldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw.—
Toad, that under cold stone,
Days and nights has thirty-one;
Swellter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot!
Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.
Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the caldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and owlet's wing,—
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.
Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.
Scale of dragon; tooth of wolf;
Witches' mummy; maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark;
Root of hemlock digg'd i the dark;
Liver of blaspheming Jew;
Gall of goat, and slips of yew
Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse;
Nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips;
Finger of birth-strangled babe
Ditch-deliver'd by a drab,—
Make the gruel thick and slab:
Add thereto a tiger's chaudron,
For the ingredients of our cauldron.
Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.
Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.
We gathered the last piece of the body, which was the still-beating heart, and I cringed at the sight of it even as I could hear the thumps echoing softly from the bowl.

“I don’t care who this Dirthamen was – that’s fucking disgusting,” Hawke muttered beside me.

“Well, that is - something,” Dorian quipped uneasily.

“It was a punishment for one of his priests for disclosing a secret he wished not to be told,” I said staring at the beating organ uneasily.

“That is some cold shit, Boss,” Bull said quietly from behind me.

“Yes it is Bull, Dirthamen was not known for his kindness. It is said that most of his priests were without tongues so that they couldn’t repeat his secrets. This,” I said pointing at the heart, “was his way of sending a message to others that would join his priest’s ranks if they ever spoke to anyone about what they learned during their training.”

Cassandra handed me a cloth and I stared at the heart thumping away like a battery in the offering bowl.

“Fenedhis,” I muttered wrapping it in cloth and praying I didn’t drop it before I could get it into the pack.

“Well, now what do we do with all the parts?” Fenris asked from his position of leaning against the statue.

“Now we find the ritual chamber. There should be the main altar and smaller, pedestal type altars, for each of these pieces of this priest to place them on.”

“And then?” Bull asked me eying my pack cautiously.

“And then – we will kill the priest and give him a merciful fucking death,” I replied simply.

Everyone seemed to take in my words and slow nods of agreement went around.

“Do you believe this…priest, is what Corypheus was after?” Cassandra asked.

I shook my head.

“No, what the priest is guarding will be what Corypheus wants. This priest’s punishment was to never have peace for his transgression, but he was placed here within this Temple for a purpose and it wasn’t just as a warning to the others to shut up.”

We left the small chamber and made our way down more partially flooded corridors until we came to a set of double doors that were blessedly absent of water. Bull reached for the handle on the door and Solas grabbed his arm quickly.

“Perhaps you will wait a moment. This room is most likely magically protected,” he told him.

Bull nodded his head and stepped to the side while Solas, Dorian, Hawke, and I ran our hands over
the outside of the large door feeling the wards guarding the entrance. The ward was strong, very old and - hungry.

“If this isn’t the room, I will shave my mustache,” Dorian jested standing back.

I gave him a cheeky smile and laughed.

“Bull might miss its tickle,” I replied impishly.

Bull chuckled and nodded his head in agreement.

“Especially when he does this thing…”

“They do not need to know that,” Dorian interrupted quickly.

“Well, can it be removed so we can get in?” Fenris asked sounding bored.

Solas physically winced as he held his gaze.

“It is possible, you will not like the ways of which we will be forced to remove it however,” he replied.

Fenris’ eyes narrowed with Solas’ words and I cleared my throat drawing his attention. Hawke looked at him and snorted making him look at her next.

“Stop looking at them like that, it is not blood magic, but it does require blood to break the seal.”

Fenris growled and Hawke held her hand up holding his gaze.

“I will give the drop of blood, Fenris,” I said quickly holding his cold emerald gaze before anyone could say anything.

“A drop is all it needs? I doubt that,” he said angrily.

“No, she is correct. It does only require one drop smeared over the door to break the ward,” Dorian said calmly.

“Vhenan,” Solas said softly looking at me.

Our bond conveying his discomfort with me doing it because Dirthamen, even if he is locked away, will know it was me that broke the seal.

“It is fine, my love. It must be magical blood, and it must be willingly given,” I replied giving him a soft smile.

Before anymore objections could be made, I magically sliced a small cut into my middle finger in a silent, ‘fuck you’ to the ancient and smeared my blood down the center of the door, breaking the seal. The loud hiss of the wards release was like the sound of a long held breath being let go. When it was done, I resealed the cut and looked at Fenris.

“Are we okay?” I asked him.

Fenris stared at me for a moment and finally a small tilt to the edge of his lip formed.

“Yes,” he answered with a brief nod.
My smile was large as I looked at him before turning back towards the door and pulled it open.

“Good, I enjoy having you and Hawke around to bother Varric,” I teased.

“Standing right here, Sketch,” Varric said with a touch of irritation.

“Yup and that’s why I said it,” I joked winking at him enjoying his deep laughter before walking into the large chamber as Cassandra softly laughed behind me with him.

We saw the main alter at the far end of the chamber with six pedestal alters in two rows of three directly behind it. Walking closer, I saw that each pedestal was labeled in ancient elven.

“The Heart of Despondence; The Ears of Unheeding; The Hands of Torment; The Eyes of Sorrow; The Head of Misery; The tongue of Whispers,” I said softly as I read each one’s translation aloud.

Solas found the notes from Venatori agents on the main alter and handed me one page with his eyebrow raised. I took the paper and scanned the note reading that they searched for ‘Dirthamen’s Wisdom’. I snorted and shook my head as I looked at him before slipping the paper into his pack.

“Well, shall we get this party started?” I asked glancing at the others.

I saw their nods and uneasy looks as they readied their weapons and I walked towards the first alter for the head and knelt before pulling it out and placing the head down.

“Though severed from self to live in misery, I place you here to remove despair,” I said.

Walking towards the next alter for the tongue, I repeated the motion and placed the tongue down.

“Though removed for whispers and guttural sounds to only be uttered, may you be released to laugh and speak freely once again,” I said.

Repeating the actions for the next alter, I laid the eyes down carefully.

“Though taken of sight, the gift is returned and sorrow turned to joy at the bright colors of the world you may see once again,” I said.

The next were the ears, and I saw Solas watching me carefully as I repeated the steps of respect to Dirthamen sharing in his unease as I reverted Dirthamen’s punishment on the priest.

“No longer unheeding, now only hearing, once again you may rejoice in the sounds of life around you,” I said before moving onto the next alter.

“With your heart despairing no more, embrace the beat that thrives again my brother,” I couldn’t help but say sadly.

Standing at the last alter I looked at the others and gave them a small nod to prepare themselves.

“Hands left for torment, bound to do horrible deeds, shall again feel delight and only good works shall move past these fingertips now unbound and free,” I finished and a loud crackling sound vibrated through the chamber as the priest was freed.

Casting a barrier over myself quickly, black eyes met mine beneath a cloaked unnatural body of an ancient elf and the tremendous magical power that radiated from the now corporeal form was intimidating.

“I know you,” it spoke with a raspy voice in ancient elven studying my eyes, my aura.
I felt Solas’ instant distaste with the priest's words and his surprise with my recognizing who this priest was speaking to me.

“As I know you, your duty is done old friend. It is time for you to finally have peace,” I said calmly taking in the Dirthamen vallis’lin over the face of the pale on the edge of grey skinned elf Assan used to know as Athras, Sentinel before a priest to Dirthamen.

The priest bowed his head towards me.

“Thank you, sister. I shall look forward to eternal sleep and dream of better times. Please, with my blessing, take the crystal with a piece of Dirthamen's knowledge that I am tasked to guard and release me,” he whispered as he knelt.

“As you wish, Athras, find happiness once again my old friend, safe journeys,” I said before sliding my dagger through his beating heart.

The ancient closed his eyes and smiled at me as his spirit was finally released and his body turned to ash around my blade.

I took a calming breath and slid my dagger back into the sheath at my back and turned to look at everyone ignoring their curious looks.

“Sometimes paying respect to the old Gods pays off, come on – it is an orb of crystal, imbued with Dirthamen’s wisdom that Corypheus searches for. It will be in the chamber at the other end through those doors,” I told them.

I glanced at Solas and we shared a knowing look together before walking to the end of the room and obtaining the large violet and black swirling crystal from the small pedestal. If Dirthamen placed this here within his temple, he had an idea that his reign was coming to an end.

It did not take long for us to return to camp and Raj took off for the forest to hunt as we arrived. Sera had given me the silent treatment for the rest of our time in the temple and on our way back to camp. She probably thought this would upset me and right at this moment, it was doing the exact opposite. I strode towards my tent hearing Sera’s muttered grumbles to Bull and Dorian.

“I don’t care, it’s stupid – that whole place was demon bait.”

“You want her to be wrong so you can be right. It is scarier to think she is right,” Cole said quietly from beside Sera.

“Hush it you – that ain’t it at all,” she said angry.

Solas grasped my elbow trying to direct me towards our tent and I yanked my elbow out of his grasp.

“No, this is ridiculous,” I said to him.

“Vhenan, she is apart from herself. Whatever you tell her will not change her outlook on herself or her kind,” he said softly.

“So your suggestion is to just ignore it,” I said looking at him.

He looked at me tenderly and I knew what he was trying to do and walked into the tent.

“I’m going to take a nap,” I told him before entering.
Solas watched her enter the tent and turned towards Sera. Through their shared bond, he could feel the hurt that Sera’s words had brought her. How quickly she had regretted getting angry with Sera in the Temple. He stood in front of the tent and listened to Sera continue to speak without thought and took a calming breath as he and Dorian shared a knowing look.

“Believe in them or do not Sera, but the Elvhen Gods existed. Regardless, it is quite over now,” Dorian said to her as he groomed his mustache.

“How do you know they existed? She is the freaking Herald of Andraste – you can’t be Andraste’s herald and believe in a bunch of Dalish shite. It’s stupid,” she said offhandedly.

Sera had not heard Solas as he approached from behind her and she jolted, turning quickly to look at him when she heard his deep, disappointed tone.

“She has never claimed to be the Herald of Andraste, Sera. That is what everyone else has titled her. You do her friendship a great disservice acting this way towards her. She has never asked you believe in what she does; has never expected you to blindly agree with her. Your mockery of her beliefs in the temple and your continued attitude towards her hurts her more than you realize.”

She snorted and shook her head.

“You, I get why, but she is being stupid…”

Solas’ gaze hardened as he interrupted her.

“Do not utter one more spitefully, uninformed word Sera. My mate is neither senseless nor ignorant, and I will not allow you to continue to call her such. I do not know why I had thought to even try to speak with you logically as I can see you either do not see what you have done or you simply do not care.”

Solas turned on his heel and left her quickly before he got any angrier.

Sera watched him leave slightly confused and glanced towards Dorian and Bull.

“You really need to work on filtering what you say aloud, Sera,” Dorian said gently patting her on the shoulder as he left her.

Sera looked at Bull and he grunted at her, shaking his large head before leaving her.

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“He is mated now – and stronger brother. That fool, Andruil, believes she is still bound to her mother and has no idea that she is now an Evanuris,” Imshael told him as he folded his arms behind him looking very pleased with himself.

Xebenkeck watched Imshael as he leaned back against the tree uncaringly looking at his nails.

“What you plot will get us all killed. If not by the precious Golden Ones, then by our own,” he reminded him as he too leaned against another tree.
"What will?" Gaxkang asked coming out from the cover of the forest asking with a large toothy smile that showed his elongated canines.

A dark, smoky, feminine voice echoed around the three as it answered the posed question.

"War, brother, he wishes to start a war – one that is long overdue," she replied solemnly.

"Ah, our sister has finally arrived. How good of you to join us, how do you think we should proceed?" Imshael questioned with an excited smile.

"The Dread Wolf is cunning and dangerous, more so now that he is mated. We shall warn him that our time has come, to not do so would be rude and we are above those – foul others," she answered simply.

Xebenkeck leaned up from the tree looking at the eerily, glowing red eyes in the forest that stared out at them from the cover of darkness.

"You wish us to warn him, why?" he questioned her curiously.

The loud, ominous sigh, that echoed around them made even Xebenkeck’s skin uncomfortable.

"Because brother, we owe him a debt. He convinced Mythal to stop her blood-thirsty daughter from hunting us to extinction in the Void – or have you forgotten?" she answered him.

Xebenkeck glanced around at his brother’s and bowed his head towards his sister's hidden form in the shadows and darkness of the trees.

"I am grateful for the reminder," he replied.

Gaxkang looked at Imshael rubbing his hands together, excitedly.

"So – which one of us shall inform the Dread Wolf we are coming?" he said.

Chapter End Notes

Fenedhis - universal cuss word (shit/damn/fuck)
vhenan - my heart
Unwelcome Guest

Chapter Notes

***FYI***
I wanted everyone to know that I have taken a position that will take care of real life crap that all us responsible adults must take care of. This means that I will not be posting every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday any longer. My goal is to at least post twice a week, but I will have to wait and see how everything goes. If my physical limitations raise their ugly heads, then I will be down to one chapter a week.
I hope everyone will continue to read the story and is understanding about the plight of adulthood.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Laying in the tent listening to what Solas told Sera, our bond connection vibrated with his disappointment and anger with her and I let out a sigh. *I should have known he would say something to her.* Rubbing my face, Solas entered our tent and warded the opening before looking at me.

“I would have told you don’t waste your time, ma’lath,” I said watching him remove his gear.

His loud sigh and the love I felt flowing from him was everything I needed to make me feel better.

“I do not like that her words hurt you, vhenan,” he said gently looking at me as he pulled his boots off.

Softly smiling at him, I motioned for him to join me on our pallet.

“Come here and snuggle with me, it has been one of those days,” I replied watching his easy movements towards me.

The feel of his strong arms pulling me into him made everything better and I snuggled into his side, listening to the steady thrum of his heart beneath my cheek.

“How did you know the priest that guarded the temple?” He asked trying to keep his tone only curious.

I felt the smallest twinge of jealousy from him through our shared bond, and it made me smile at him trying to control the emotion.

“Athras was a good sentinel taken by Dirthamen when Assan was first brought to Mythal as her guard. She trained with him and from her memories, they were friends before his duty took him to that arrogant, narcissistic asshole,” I answered.

Solas’ soft laughter rumbled beneath my cheek and I glanced up at him with a small smile.

“I get the impression Dirthamen made a grievous transgression towards Assan for you to speak so strongly about him,” he replied with a knowing grin.

“Oh, you mean besides thinking he was every woman’s wish and that we were all dying to get into
his bed?” I said cheekily.

I felt the instant flare of anger rush through our connection and his eyes held mine silently asking me to continue. I chuckled and pressed a kiss to his lips before answering him.

“Handsome, he was, but from what the rumors the other woman retold, God in bed he was not,” I said giggling. Reaching up to rub my thumb over his chin, I smiled at him. “Do not have such a serious look, my love, it was nothing so horrible,” I said pressing another kiss to his lips. “Did Dirthamen ever explain to anyone how he got that scar over the top of his right hand?” I asked him curiously.

I knew he could feel the humor I felt with the memory and his eyes widened as we stared at each other.

“He did not, he only commented that his foolishness is what resulted in him receiving the mark,” he said looking at me curiously.

I snorted and nodded my head in agreement with his answer.

“Oh, it was definitely foolishness that earned him that scar. Mythal had asked that Assan get a scroll from her chambers and he stopped her in the corridor. His advances were unwanted since he was not the one she wanted to take such liberties,” I said winking at him. He gave me a smug smile and kissed my nose before I continued. “Anyway, he chose not to believe Assan when she told him no the first time. He received the warning for his transgression with a blade across the back of his hand that was trying to touch her. Before he could punish her for wounding him, an Evanuris, Mythal stepped into the hallway and ushered Assan away from Dirthamen. Reprimanding him for his atrocious behavior towards her Sentinel.”

I listened to Solas’ small snort and a burst of laughter.

“So yes, he made a grievous error in judgment that fuels my opinion of him,” I said with a smile.

*****

Our journey to the Hissing Wastes was tedious as we crossed the northern part of the Western Approach. It had been blistering hot, and the sandstorms a bitch. Setting up our camp just outside of what used to be Adamant, I smiled at the rubble that Bull’s Chargers had made of it before I went about preparing the animals for camp in silence.

Solas walked towards me and pressed a kiss to my forehead as Varric and Cole walked up behind him.

“I shall return shortly,” he said.

“Hunt well,” I replied watching him walk away with the others. My heart did a little flutter watching his long strides and quick smile with whatever Varric said and returned to brushing the horses.

I had chosen to completely ignore Sera until I could speak calmly with her about what had happened in the temple. I was still angry with her for her attitude, and that was my problem not exactly hers. I knew that Sera did not grow up in a nurturing environment, and that environment shaped the woman she was today. What frustrated me was her childish behavior towards it all. I knew her opinion could be changed, Cole was proof of that. Shaking my head as my mind turned it around and around, I finished brushing Cassandra’s mount and patted him on the flank. Well, if I can’t use my adult words, then my lips are zipped until I can.
My lack of talking, however, was proving to bother Sera considerably when I would not look at her or speak to her. It was quite apparent that Sera did not like the silent treatment when it was given to her. I finished taking care of the animals and was walking towards the fire when I overheard her and Bull’s conversation and felt my frustration with Sera mount even more.

“She won’t even talk to me now,” she said with annoyance.

Bull looked at her and grunted.

“Have you tried apologizing,” he said running his wet stone down the edge of his ax and checking the edge with his thumb.

“No, pfft – why should I?” she replied throwing a torn piece of wood into the fire.

Bull’s eye held my angry gaze as my fists clenched at my sides. She cannot truly be that childish.

Unable to keep my tongue silent, I spoke angrily.

“Because you were a complete asshole to me, Sera,” I answered her.

I saw her shoulder’s slight twitch with the sound of my angry voice before she turned and looked at me over her shoulder.

“Why should I apologize when I don’t think I was wrong,” she replied with a sharp edge to her tone.

I shook my head at her and clenched my jaw.

“The key words in that whole sentence were, ‘you don’t think’. Just forget it, Sera. Be a self-centered jerk, I don’t have the energy for your bullshit anymore,” I replied. Shaking my head and throwing my hands up at her, I turned towards my tent no longer even hungry just done with the day.

I entered the tent and used the small basin to clean up before climbing under the covers and going to sleep. I just need to sleep and forget this stupid childish bullshit.

“She didn’t mean it like that, she was embarrassed and now she doesn’t know how to fix it,” he said looking worried.

Solas felt Fenlin’s anger and her hurt. It was not long after he felt those emotions from her that he felt his temper snap knowing it would be Sera and her thoughtless tongue. He stalked back towards the camp with Varric holding the rabbits they had killed, ready to throttle the little fool.

They walked in silence, his thoughts a jumble with how he could help Sera understand when Cole placed his hand out, stopping them on the edge of the camp. His head tilted as he listened and looked around.

“We are not alone and it is very angry,” he said quietly.

Solas stopped and glanced around carefully at the darkening area, feeling the malevolence in the air around him. Cole looked at him suddenly.

“No, it is not her it is – another,” he said before disappearing.

Another? He moved quickly into the camp dropping the rabbits next to the fire before moving on
towards his tent. Removing the ward, he slipped inside and lit a mage light. Breathing easier when he found her sleeping, he knelt down and gently shook her shoulder. As her eyes opened, he pressed a finger to her lips and saw her instantly become alert and glance around the tent warily.

Solas stood back up while she moved to stand next to him still glancing around. He could feel the moment she felt the change in the air around them and her apprehension with the feeling. He should have expected that Andruil would acquire assistance, but whom? He glanced down when he felt her hand grab his tightly and lead him out of their tent. The others around the fire looked around warily, ready for a possible attack as they glanced at them as they came out.

“Cole said we are not alone – do we know who is it?” Cassandra said walking around the fire towards us.

I shook my head letting my senses absorb the differences in the air.

“I don’t know, Cassandra,” I answered.

Scanning around the area into the growing darkness, I felt the malicious intent lurking around our camp. *This is familiar*…linking my aura with Solas, I pulled the Fade to me and cast a large, protective barrier around all of us before I spoke.

“It is of the void,” I said looking at Solas.

“Agreed,” he replied his eyes scanning the area around the camp intently.

“Would she…” the unfinished question hung in the air between us as we stared at each other.

The sudden sight of the slow black tendrils crawling up the sides of the barrier looking for weakness made my lips form a snarl as I recognized them.

“Forbidden,” we said in unison at the sight of the black fingers trying to enter my barrier.

“What in the name of Andraste, is going on?” Dorian said as he quickly stood.

“Evil, Dorian – pure, evil is what is out there. If it is the creature I think it is, then prepare yourself for something worse than the Nightmare demon we encountered in the Fade. This one will make it resemble child’s play,” I told him.

“Full of anger but calm, here only to warn…,” Cole said quietly watching the tendrils move over the outside of the barrier.

*Sure…some fucking warning.*

Cassandra flinched when the first black sphere hit the barrier echoing around us.

“This is because we messed with that Temple shite,” Sera snarled readying her bow.

I growled at her, my voice vibrating with my anger as the Evanuris part of me flashed in irritation at her ignorance.

“It has nothing to do with that you childish fool. Hush your mouth and prepare yourself to be introduced to your fucking self-induced ignorance in Elvhen History.”
Sera’s eyes widened with my words and I turned towards Solas.

“More than Imshael is free now and they have found us. He obviously found a way to release his brothers,” I said in elven as more black smoky spheres hit the barrier. “I cannot hold this forever, my love. We know what will come next and we need a plan.”

Solas’ eyes met mine just as the black spheres turned into smoky looking sentinels crowding around the outside of the barrier and they were quickly becoming corporal.

“You got to be shitting me,” Bull said pulling his ax from its harness as he stared at the growing army outside the barrier. “Boss?” Bull said nervously.

“Just trust me, Bull,” I replied still holding Solas’ gaze.

“Did she just say, ‘trust me’? Is she fucking crazy?” Fenris said angrily holding his greatsword ready for the attack.

“I told you, Sketch was like Hawke, crazy,” Varric joked dryly.

“I resemble that,” Hawke said winking at Fenris before focusing on the growing army.

“Fade fire first, my heart. Push them back from the barrier. What I must do, will not be comfortable. I will need to use the power in the anchor,” he said holding my gaze.

“I understand,” I answered glancing around at everyone and settled on Dorian and Hawk.

“Will you lend me your energy?” I asked and they both moved to where we stood wordlessly watching the disturbing soldiers multiply as they readied themselves to channel their magic.

“You two obviously have a plan,” Dorian said looking at me.

“We do,” I answered focusing on my connection with the Fade.

"Care to elaborate, my dear?” Dorian asked sarcastically.

"Just hold onto your tits Ethel, this is going to be unpleasant," I joked closing my eyes.

Gathering the Fade to me tightly, I threw my arms into the air and let loose fire. It swiftly fell from the sky in a meteor shower of green streaks across the now darkened night sky, pounding into the ground around the barrier making the dark force back away. Solas took my hand just as the barrier broke and I glanced at Dorian and Hawke quickly.

“Now,” I said.

Solas’ power rushed through my arm mingling with Hawke and Dorian’s combined energy lighting up the scars in a mint green flash up my arm. The bright light formed into one giant shielding dome over us, burning away the warriors as the edges of the light spread, leaving only one left standing with an evil grin on its lips. The burn was intense as the power rushed through my blood and nerves, reminding me of my first trip up the mountain trying to close the Breach. I gritted my teeth as I glanced at the one left standing while the scars on my arm slowly dimmed.

“Xebenkeck,” Solas whispered.

“Who’s this pissbag?” Sera whispered.

The Forbidden One glanced at the group behind us and smiled at Sera slightly tilting its head,
studying her. I stepped in front of her and held its gaze menacingly, and his attention focused on me.

“Imshael prepared me for your mate old friend, and I must say, I am not disappointed Dread Wolf, she is – captivating,” he said from across the distance.

My stomach churned with his words as I held the cold, red gaze from across the sandy expansion between us and my aura pulsed warningly.

I felt the change in Solas through our bond immediately with the Forbidden’s words and it was unsettling. It was spreading cold through my soul, devoid of emotion like the void itself and not unlike...my eyes closed as knowledge suddenly flooded me through our bond and hurt filled my heart with him not trusting me enough to tell me. Focus! Now is definitely not the time to get all butthurt. Squaring my shoulders, I kept my eyes on the agent of Geldauran and pushed my hurt away to review later.

“Are you Andruiil’s pet as well, Xebenkeck, or do you still serve Geldauran?” Solas asked watching the creature carefully.

“I serve no one but myself,” it said showing us his unmarked wrists.

I felt the black tendrils of violent anger roll off of Solas’ aura as he exuded his true nature of being the Nightmare of the Void. His cool control and the violent blackness were painful to feel through our connection. Everything I experienced through our bond shared nothing but fear, death, and unending darkness. I felt an intense desire to run and stiffened my spine in stubbornness. They cannot have him back – he is mine now.

“Then why have you come?” Solas questioned him coldly folding his arms behind him with deceptive calm.

“Take this as your only warning, Dread Wolf, it is our turn and the time of the Evanuris is over,” he answered before transforming into a raven and vanishing into the night sky.

I stared at the empty place Xebenkeck had stood for a moment before turning away from Solas unable to bear the dead feeling I felt inside any longer. I walked towards Bull and Cassandra noticing their uncomfortable glances around and tried to give them a reassuring smile even though I felt far from reassured.

“Two man watch from here on,” I stated. “Hawke,” I said gesturing for her to follow me.

Hawke walked beside me and I glanced at her carefully.

“I am going to show you a ward I learned in the Fade, it will keep us a bit safer than what we use now,” I told her. Walking around the perimeter of the camp I showed her the pattern and gratefully Hawke was a quick learner as we began setting the wards for the night that would warn us of any void-like creatures if they were to return.

I could feel Solas’ eyes following me and his emotional worry through our connection once he removed the cold feelings and allowed his emotions to return. I restrained the heavy sigh I wanted to free and focused on pulling the darkness to me and quieting my mind, effectively shutting my emotions off and him out until I could straighten this out in my head.

As soon as we were finished, I told Cassandra I would relieve her in two hours and went to get some sleep before my turn at watch. Entering the tent, Solas was waiting for me. His eyes following my movements while I placed wards over the tent opening and removed my boots.
“I should have…” he began softly.

My eyes gazed up from my boots at him, flashing angrily.

“Yes, you should have,” I interrupted. “It was always rumored you were a Forgotten One, Solas. That was how you could walk in between, but Assan never believed the rumors,” I said looking at him. “You never told her the truth, and chose to not tell me the truth either.”

I walked to where he knelt on our pallet and knelt down in front of him allowing my hurt to flow to him so he understood why I was so angry and saw his physical flinch with the onslaught of my emotional state that held hurt, resentment, uncertainty.

“You promised to always be honest with me. I give you all of me; my loyalty, love - trust and you deliberately kept this from me, why? Did you think it would matter? That it would change how I felt about you?” I asked him angrily.

“I did not believe you would look upon it positively,” he replied quietly staring at his hands.

“Oh bullshit, you didn’t believe in me, in us,” I said moving to stand.

His hands suddenly gripped my shoulders holding me where I knelt.

“That is not true. The fault is mine and my own foolish fear of you turning away once you were aware. It is why I have always believed myself undeserving of you. How could you love something that is in all aspects a monster,” he said searching my face.

*When is a monster not a monster?* My mind asked as my eyes searched his and my heart ached that he truly thought this of himself. *When you love it*, I finally answered myself.

“I can’t love all of you wolf, if you won’t let me,” I said softly caressing his cheek.

I shook my head at him and his foolishness. My aura caressed his tenderly and I heard his soft intake of breath with the feeling. I touched his chin, lifting it so his eyes would meet mine.

“Is there anything else you have failed to tell your mate? Like you’re already taken by another, have a pack of kids running around in the Void somewhere?” I asked with a small teasing smile.

He pulled me into him in a crushing hold when he felt my forgiveness and unconditional love for him. His emotions of love, dread, and gratefulness flooded my body through our bond. The unsteady breaths I heard from him made my arms tighten their hold on him. *Oh my love, what a tangled web we spun and here we are, finally out of silk.* Running my fingers over his head, I pressed a small kiss to his temple.

“Hush now my love,” I whispered pressing small kisses to the side of his head. “Ar lath ma sul bellanaris, dir’ven’an Fen’Harel, ar elvar’nas,” I said before pressing another kiss to his head.

His subtle tremors ceased as he lifted his head and cradled my face. I saw the unshed tears of emotion in his eyes glittering like diamonds as he looked at me and my heart squeezed at the sight of him like this.

“Ir abelas, vhenan,” he whispered thickly suddenly closing his eyes and bowing his head exuding shame.

I ran my fingers over his jaw and leaned forward to press a kiss to his lips.
“Hush now, ma’lath,” I said softly. “We are together, and it will always be so. My love for you has not changed, it has only grown.”

Solas’ lips turned hungry as a need for each other grew swiftly between us. Melting into him, he pulled me down to the pallet while his lips devoured me.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” he mouthed against my swollen lips before claiming them again and rolling me beneath him.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma sul bellanaris, dir’vhen’an Fen’Harel, ar elvar’nas - I will love you for eternity, I promised and I meant it.
Ir abelas vhenan - I am sorry my heart
Ma’lath - my love
Ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you my heart
I reached for the tent opening preparing to answer the multitude of questions when Solas snaked an arm around my waist and pulled me back from the tent opening.

“Perhaps just one more moment,” he whispered into my ear before pressing a kiss to my neck.

Shivers ran enticingly over my body and I leaned back into him.

“Hmm, I could be persuaded to wait a few more seconds,” I answered with a knowing smile.

I felt the small smile of his lips against my skin and everything in me melted with the feeling.

“I shall make the most of my moment then,” he said turning me within his arms.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I pressed a small kiss to his lips.

“You are not wasting my time so far,” I said nipping his lower lip.

His soft moan was a sweet sounding music before my mind went blank with the possessive touch of his lips over mine. Lightning flashed behind my closed eyes as my heart raced with anticipation. His hands around my waist pulled me that little bit closer while his lips teased mine and my toes curled within my boots while the pleasurable sensations danced through my blood.

When he lifted his lips from mine, it took me a moment to realize that I had things I needed to do yet. My eyes slowly opened and he wore a smug smile on his lips that told me he knew he had just kissed me stupid. His lips pressed against mine briefly before he pushed aside the tent opening.

“Shall we?” he said still smiling.

“I know you do that on purpose – ass,” I grumbled while walking out of our tent.

Solas’ soft laughter and feelings of affection through our bond followed me as we walked towards the others already gathered around the fire with their breakfast. Our morning’s breakfast was simplistic in nature with only coffee and oatmeal and I grabbed a bowl for Solas and myself while he made me a cup of coffee.

I could tell that everyone was anxious to discuss last night’s visitor and while I took a bite, I heard Cassandra clear her throat deciding she would be the first to break the silence around the fire.

“Was it a demon?” Cassandra asked and both Solas and I shook our heads.

“Not really, but you will feel more comfortable calling it that,” I told her as Solas nodded his head in agreement with me.

Taking a drink of my coffee, Solas placed his spoon in his bowl and glanced around, addressing
everyone as he explained.

“Xebenkeck is a Forbidden one, a servant to one of the Forgotten Ones. It is similar to Imshael, the
one we met in Emprise Du Lion. All of the information that is available about them has been written
by the Chantry, so they refer to them as Desire Demons, but that label is too simplistic of a
description for what they are. They are undying and they serve as Sentinels to those that are the
opposite of what the Elven Gods were residing in the Void.”

Sera’s eyes rolled and my spine stiffened waiting for her to mouth off. I noticed Cole lean towards
her and whisper something in her ear that made her face scrunch up in frustration before she nodded
her head and looked away. Whatever Cole told her somehow kept her quiet and I was grateful to not
have to have a damn argument with her so early in the day.

“Is this…creature now working for Corypheus?” Cassandra asked us.

I took a bite of my oatmeal as Solas answered.

“It is possible Seeker, their kind would enjoy the chaos Corypheus brings but I do not believe that is
why they have come forward. They seek to destroy anything that will stand in their way of obtaining
power over the people, and that would include a would-be God,” I listened to him answer with half-
truths.

I heard Bull grunt and look at us.

“So – we stand in the way of whatever they have planned,” he said pointedly.

I nodded my head as I held his one-eyed gaze. *This I could answer honestly.*

“We do.”

“So that thing coming here was just a warning?” Fenris asked looking at Solas.

“It served as both a warning and a test, Fenris. It warned us of their plans to take over the land and
test our strength against them,” Solas replied finishing his oatmeal. “We have shown them that we
will not easily be defeated. It will make them wary,” he said.

I stood and grabbed everyone’s empty bowls and began cleaning them to be packed away so we
could get going.

“We can talk more on the road. Let’s get this place packed up and get a move on. I want to try and
get to the Hissing Wastes and see why the Venatori is there,” I said.

As we traveled the sky grew gradually darker until it abruptly changed to pitch-black. Glancing
back behind me seeing the light as if it were just turning dusk and then looking forward and it was
dark as midnight…it was confusing. Two moons shone brightly in the sky ahead and I glanced at
Cassandra who was riding next to me.

“Did I miss something? It gradually grew darker and then, wham, darkness. It is barely the
afternoon,” I said.

Cassandra chuckled as she answered me.

“Welcome to the Hissing Wastes. It is always dark here and for a desert, very cold.”
At one time this used to be a forest before the encroaching desert of the Western Approach took over the land,” Solas commented.

“So no one knows why it is always dark?” I asked curiously.

“No one knows, it has just always been,” Cassandra replied simply.

“Maybe this is the ass-end of Thedas and the sun can’t reach this far, Sketch,” Varric joked.

“Huh…well okay then,” I replied completely mystified making the others chuckle around me.

We saw the bright flames of braziers from a distance as we rode towards the Inquisition camp. From my vantage on Inansha’s back, I could make out Lace standing next to a makeshift table. Sliding from his back, I patted his shoulder and walked to where she stood with a large smile on her face.

“Any luck charting the area?” I asked her.

“I did what I could Fenlin but this place has nothing but…space,” she said shaking her head. “If there’s nothing valuable here, I say let Corypheus have it.”

“Oh come on, Lace, you’re here, so there is something valuable here,,” I told her with a cheeky smile.

“You’ve had a lot of time to come up with these bad jokes haven’t you?” she remarked laughing. I nodded at her, laughing. “I did find something for you,” she said pointing towards the roughly drawn map of the area laid out on the table. “Old, Dwarven ruins – on the surface; impossible, but there ya go. The Red Templars are digging them out with Venator supervision.”

“Well of course they are, can’t just let the kids get sidetracked now can they,” I joked giving her a wink. “We’ll find out what they are looking for,” I told her standing up.

“I just saw Red Templars heading northwest of here. They might be a good start. I was able to aggressively negotiate this map from one, maybe it shows where they’re headed.”

I laughed at her choice of words and took the map she held out to me.

“That’s what I like about you Lace, you are motivated to get answers,” I said opening the map and looking at the rough sketches of the area. Cassandra came to stand next to me and took the rough map Lace held out for her.

“My team can take this side, and you take the other,” I said separating the areas out. “We can start off first thing.

Cassandra looked at me curiously for a moment.

“Do you think it is still wise for us to split up after what we experienced?”

I heard the unease in Cassandra’s tone as I looked at her.

“Would you prefer that we didn’t?” I asked her holding her chocolate gaze steadily.

“I would,” she finally answered after a moment with a heavy sigh.

Touching her arm, I smiled at her with understanding. I didn’t want to let them out of my sight either, especially with the Forbidden’s warning still bouncing around in my head.
“Then we won’t Cassandra, we will do what we have always done in other areas and blow through this place like a child with sweets,” I replied with a cheeky grin.

Softly laughing with me, Cassandra nodded her head.

“Good, I will inform the others that we will not separate into teams.”

Letting her go, I watched her walk towards the others and I looked back down at the map. Xebenkeck showing himself like he did, boded poorly for any peaceful future I had imagined. Sighing heavily, I felt the clench of displeasure in my stomach with the thought of what was coming. *Just once I would like it if things just went as planned.*

“All is not lost, vhenan,” Solas said from behind me, his voice surprising me.

I glanced at him over my shoulder and gave him a lopsided smile that held the heaviness of my thoughts.

“No, but close,” I replied.

Sighing heavily again, I folded the map and stared at it as my mind whirled through the rapid thoughts that wouldn’t leave me since seeing Xebenkeck. Solas’ arms slipped around me, pulling me back into him.

“I believe you once told me that all would be okay as long as we were together,” he said.

I snorted and leaned back into him, closing my eyes.

“I did, didn’t I,” I replied.

Taking my hand, he pulled me towards our tent.

“Come vhenan, your thoughts are too heavy,” he said with a mischievous glint in his eye.

I raised my eyebrow at him and heard his soft laughter.

“So far your form of distraction exhibits promise,” I said teasingly as he pulled me inside the tent.

“I believe you could use a moment to – forget,” he said with a wicked smile making my insides twist with anticipation.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
The Hissing Wastes Part 2

Chapter Notes

***NSFW***

Thank you, everyone, for your patience as I try to get used to my new work schedule. I have hours of ideas recorded on my phone that I still need to transcribe but rest assured, I have not abandoned this story. To much shit still needs to be written.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My eyes slowly opened to the feeling of his breath tickling my neck. Of their own accord, my lips tilted at the corners with the sensation. I would never tire of this feeling he gave me even as he slept. Protected, cherished, and my lips moved up even more with the feeling of his fingers softly grazing over my stomach pulling me even closer to him.

“And very loved, vhenan,” he whispered against my neck before pressing a kiss against the extremely sensitive skin.

I stretched back into him while his hand moved up over my ribs to cup my breast. The strong connection between us hummed with our shared passion and desire for one another that we experienced silently between us, and a soft sigh escaped with the gentle bite he left against my shoulder. I rolled within his arms and pressed my lips to his.

Chasing the storm of desire his kiss always ignited in me, I found relief from my own mercurial thoughts on the future. Pushing him slowly to his back while keeping our lips connected, I straddled his hips and slipped over him, swallowing his moan of pleasure. The instant thrum of connection as he filled me physically, emotionally, and magically made my skin lightly glow with the bond.

His hands moved from holding my face to grasping my hips as I rolled them forward studying his expressions of pleasure with each movement. His eyes conveyed his desire for me as he watched me move over him; his skin flushed a soft pink with his desire and his lips are parted, allowing soft moans to escape. I loved seeing him like this…this unabashed moment of vulnerability he showed me.

He rolled me beneath him and I moaned pleased with the sudden change and the depth of which he now filled me. His roguish smile at the sound sent fire rolling through my veins. I wrapped my legs tightly around him as he bent to capture my lips fanning the flames with each thrust into me. My body was racing towards the pleasure he was building, my core tightening around him and his moan of delight with the sensation drove me closer to that beautiful cliffs edge.

“Solas,” I moaned against his lips as my body took flight.

"Ar ame i ma," he whispered against my lips.

His moan of release muffled against my lips and I wrapped my arms around his neck holding him to me. His lips moved to kiss the corner of my mouth before trailing kisses down my neck.

"Ar lath ma, vhenan," he said softly kissing my collarbone.
“The sky is so…big,” Cole remarked looking up at the vast expansion of just past twilight sky.

I looked up at the sky with him and smiled with wonder I could hear in his words. The Hissing Wastes was a unique area all its own. In some ways, it reminded me of Alaska during their six months of darkness. When it should be daytime, the sky was stuck at that moment where it was perpetually pre-dawn.

“The stars will guide us out of here – I hope,” Solas said following Cole’s gaze upward.

Sera looked up at the sky like the rest of us.

“So many stars, they go past forever,” she commented from beside Cole.

Cassandra moved to stand next to me and glanced around the vast desert area.

“Be wary, many predators come out at night,” she warned.

I drew my eyes from the sky and looked at her with a playful lift to the corners of my lips.

“Like us?” I teased her and heard Bull’s answering chuckle. “Come on guys, we can't stargaze all day we have Venatori to find.

In some ways, the formation of the rock we followed on the southeastern side of the Hissing Wastes gave the impression that I was within a deep ravine or canyon. Although, it was difficult to actually judge time without a sun to follow it felt like a couple of hours had passed when we found the first camp of Venatori.

My eyes took in the encampment of mixed Venatori and Red Templars around the fire. I counted seventeen surrounding the area before my gaze found a cage built onto the back of a wagon with ten elven slaves to the right of the fire. The mounts they were using tied to the bars of the cage and my stomach clenched at the sight of them huddled together for warmth.

Behind the cage, I noticed torches leading towards a set of rock stairs that wound up into the side of the mountain, and I wondered if this was one of the Dwarven ruins that Lace had told me about. I tilted my head just slightly and smelled the air. The smell of fear and death permeated the area making my stomach curdle before I could wipe my nose with my arm to dispel the odor.

Sometimes using that ability to smell everything around me was not always a good ability, nor in this case, a good idea now that I could taste the fear and death on my tongue. I pulled my canteen and rinsed my mouth hoping to remove the foul taste and caught Solas’ playful grin as he watched me gulp water. *Ugh...does he have to always look so smug?* His aura playfully poked at mine and I shook my head at his antics before sending my aura back. *Focus you daffy cow.* I glanced at Bull and Cassandra and saw their eager smiles while they pulled their weapons. Gesturing towards the others with small hand signals, we spread out and began to surround the small camp. Solas grasped my wrist before I moved away and pressed a brief kiss to my lips.

Our connection conveyed his concern and I smiled at this silent way of communication between us. Giving him a brief nod of understanding, I moved to take my position around the camp. The feral part of me smiled when the beginning volley of arrows fell, and the sudden screams from the
Venatori peeled through the air.

“Honey, I’m home,” I said with a chuckle wrapping the fade around me before pulling through the veil green fire to fall on the scrambling camp. Across from me, Solas called a winter storm slowing the movements of the fleeing Venatori and from the other ends of our outer circle, Hawke rained lightning over the group while Dorian separated the Venatori and Red Templars from the slaves with a wall of flame.

Bull, Cassandra, and Fenris charged in taking advantage of the chaos of the moment while Sera, Cole, and Varric picked off the Venatori and Red Templars with arrows or Cole’s quick daggers. I felt a sense of pride watching the way they all moved together as one. So many different beliefs, personalities all working together like a well-oiled machine. Multiple shards of red lyrium bounced from my barrier and I focused on the Templar that was shooting as he bore down on me.

“You will die,” he growled.

I heard the hollow echo of his voice and it instantly brought me back to that future I experienced in Redcliffe. The horrible sound and the disjointed music that came from the former Templar made my blood freeze and I felt pity for what was done to him. Twirling my staff, I channeled the fade while my eyes narrowed on the hulking giant.

“No, I won’t,” I replied my voice vibrating through the air slowing the Red Templar down.

A giant rock-shaped hand grew beneath the Red Templar. My own hand shaped the rock as I mimicked the movements. Grasping him, I tightened my hand into a fist, pinning his arms to his sides as I held the red hazed gaze of the Templar. He struggled to release himself from my rock grip, growling his anger and frustration at his inability to escape.

My peripheral vision caught Cole’s quicksilver movements before his rabbit handled daggers dug deeply into the Red Templar’s neck, killing him instantly. Allowing the Fade to recede, I released my hold and the rock returned to the earth. Glancing around at everyone making sure they were unhurt, it was a relief to see that no one had.

“Get those people out of that cage please.”

The immediate sound of a lock being broken echoed through the camp along with the instant cries of fear from those within the cage. I walked towards the opening with Fenris standing next to me staring inside at the huddled elves that had moved to the far back of the cage. I gazed at the people who had shrunk back in fear and counted fifteen, five more than I had previously counted and I felt my anger grow with what Tevinter found acceptable.

“Please, don’t hurt us, we won’t fight,” one man said quickly holding a young girl to him his gaze staring at Dorian.

“We won’t hurt you, please come out of there and warm yourselves by the fire. I am sure there is food in one of those crates that can be cooked up,” I said soothingly while motioning them to come out.

Though our shared connection, Solas’ anger at what the people had turned into vibrated between us and I shared with him my own anger at the injustice done to them but also emotional support to alleviate his sense of guilt. One thing I was quite aware of was that Solas wore guilt better than a good Catholic.

“But when the other Magister’s come, they will punish us for what has happened to the others,” one
woman commented nervously as she slipped out of the cage eyeing Dorian warily.

I could hear his exasperated sigh and I gave him a sympathetic glance before focusing back on the undernourished woman in front of me. I knew that since coming to the South, Dorian no longer saw slavery as justifiable. He finally understood that just because his family treated their slaves kindly did not mean all the noble houses of Tevinter did as well. I gave her a compassionate smile and patted her arm.

“You let us worry about them. In the meantime, warm yourself near the fire while we search for something for everyone to eat.”

Solas rested his hand on my shoulder and I gazed up at him. I could feel that seeing the people like this hurt him deeply.

“Stop punishing yourself, my love,” I told him softly and his blue eyes darted to mine. I saw that they held a wealth of anger with himself, and I reached up and touched his face wanting to give him comfort.

“It is my responsibility…”

“Stop it,” I interrupted him. “What’s done is done, and it is not only your responsibility. If you continue to insist on feeling as if you are the only one to blame, I will continue to argue the point.”

My absolute conviction that Mythal shared in the responsibility was obvious in my tone. His eyes softened as his hand cupped my chin.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” he whispered before pressing his lips to mine.

Once the freed elves were sitting around the fire comfortably eating, I walked to where Fenris and Hawke sat.

“Will you stay here with them while I take a few people up the stairs to check out the Dwarven ruin? I don’t want to leave them unprotected until Lace’s group can get here and I think they would be more at ease with having a former slave with them.”

Hawke nodded her head while Fenris gazed at me curiously.

“Are you sure the Inquisition has the room for them?” he said gesturing towards the newly freed slaves around the fire with his chin.

“If we don’t then we will make room for them, I will not leave them out here to fend for themselves. You know as well as I do that it would only be a matter of time before another group of Venatori found them and herded them into another damn cage. They have skills but they have never had freedom, and I can give that to them even if that means I have to kill every slaver, Venatori, or Magister that stands in my way.”

My tone left no doubt that I meant what I said and I saw his small smile at my conviction.

“That I will gladly assist you with,” he said with a spark of mischief in his eyes.

“Good, I’m going to need it,” I said with a soft chuckle before turning away from them.

Solas moved to fall into step with me as I walked towards Cassandra and Varric. I watched Cole
move from one freed slave to another helping their hurts, alleviating their fears. Sera appeared to be helping him and I noticed that even Dorian was talking with the man who had spoken first. I was pleased to see him trying to help them understand that he was working towards change and that he would protect them as much as I would. They would all be needed in the future to combat what I knew was coming.

“I can hear your mind spinning with your machinations,” Solas said softly beside me.

I laughed and looked at him nodding in agreement.

“Did you think that I would fight my so-called brothers and sisters without help? You asked me what I expected from myself and I told you that I wanted to help people. I will need help doing that,” I answered softly before we stopped in front of Cassandra and Varric. I could feel Solas’ curiosity with my statement but for the moment he was content to leave the subject for later and I winked at him before walking up the stone stairs.

“Let’s check out this ruin and see what all the fuss is about.”

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ar ame i ma - I am with you
Ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you my heart
We crested the steps and the ruin was a marvel to behold. Dwarven architecture above ground even in the dark was breathtaking. The ingenuity and the craftsmanship of the Dwarves were brilliant. I heard Varric let out a low whistle from beside me as he spoke almost reverently.

“Well I’ll be damned, it really is Dwarven.”

“Well do you think it is above ground?” I asked him while staring at the largely carved pillars with Dwarven writing.

Varric shrugged before reaching out and running his hand over the engraved writing.

“Well the main way into the ruin is locked Fenlin,” Cassandra said standing in front of it with Solas.

“Well do you know what the writing says?” I asked him.

Varric nodded his head and then looked around at the other three pillars in different areas with small braziers.

“This is one of four and I believe it tells a story. All Dwarves like a good story,” he said teasingly making me laugh.

“Maybe it is some kind of puzzle that trips a mechanism that opens the main door into the tomb. If I am not mistaken, the braziers are meant to hold Veilfire, and if we light them in order...maybe it will open it?” shrugging my shoulders I worried my lower lip as I studied the pillar. “Question is what will happen if we light them incorrectly?”

“Your guess is as good as mine,” Varric replied with a smile.

I rubbed my neck, a sure sign of agitation and I looked at the writing.

“Well, what does this one say? Maybe if we heard the passages written, we can make some sense on the order.”

“This one says: ‘and worked together, for a time, side by side. Each ruled half the Thaig’.”

I nodded my head and gestured towards the others.

“It sounds like we jumped in the middle of the sentence, let’s check out the others and piece it together.”

“This one is: ‘and where one brother fell, the other raised bloodied ax in hand, alone’.”

I pulled out my sketchbook in my pack and began writing down the sayings.
“Next one says: ‘but each ruled differently. They argued, and heated words made the brother’s duel.’”

“And that one,” I said pointing towards the last one while Varric walked towards it and read it aloud.

“Fairel’s sons built monuments to their father, locking away his greatest works,” he replied.

Solas held a mage light while he and Cassandra peered over my shoulder reading the four, separate sections of writing.

We numbered them in order that we thought sounded right and I read it aloud.

“Fairel’s sons built monuments to their father, locking away his greatest works and worked together, for a time, side by side. Each ruled half the Thaig. They argued, and heated words made the brother’s duel, and where one brother fell, the other raised bloodied ax in hand, alone.” I glanced around at them and scratched my head. “I wonder if all of the ruins hold a piece to this story,” I mused aloud. “Do you know who Fairel was, Varric?”

“He was a Paragon from before the first blight. Part of the smith caste and a Shaper of Runes. He was made a Paragon because he developed powerful weapons from the runes. It is said that when other dwarves started to use his rune inventions to war against each other, he took his own house and several others, and left for the surface,” he replied scratching his chin.

We walked around until we found the one that we believed was the beginning and I lit the brazier. When nothing happened, I smiled and we walked to the next one we hoped was the next part. When all four braziers were lit, an audible click was heard and we walked towards the entrance of the tomb.

“Is it me or does this seem almost too simple? I mean if we can open it, why couldn’t the Venatori?”

“Perhaps they did not have anyone to translate the text,” Solas offered.

Cassandra pulled her sword just encase before she pulled the stone door open with little resistance. I cast a mage light into the darkened tomb and followed behind her and Varric inside.

What first surprised me as we entered the tomb was that the air smelled fresh with a hint of pine and snow – similar to the Frostbacks. The carvings into the stone depicted cities and upon closer inspection I realized this must have been what Orzammar resembled before the blight came to destroy everything.

At the far end of the tomb stood a stone altar with intricate carvings around the edges and legs. Walking slowly towards it, I found tokens to the former Paragon and a long metal fragment placed on the surface. Picking it carefully up, I turned it this way and that trying to figure it out. It was about four inches in length and half an inch thick. The edges reminded me of a puzzle piece just made from metal.

“Something tells me we will find more of these as we go through the other tombs,” I said slipping it into the pouch at my hip.

I walked up to one of the two intricate carvings of dwarves that flagged the sides of the tomb; one male the other female. I ran my hand over the woman’s feet and looked at Varric.

“Maybe his wife?”

Varric nodded his head in agreement.
"That's surprising," he said looking at the large carving of the woman.

"What is?" I asked him curiously.

"I thought she would have a beard," he said with all seriousness.

Laughing, I moved towards one of the stain glassed windows like the ones we found in the Crestwood Thaig. It was a curious thing to see that they were lit from behind with some sort of light that was not magical yet it gave off a warm yellow glow with its light and it never went out.

We left the tomb taking only the metal shard and with a wave of Solas’ hand, he extinguished the braziers so Varric could close the door keeping the Venatori from entering.

“Well that should tickle their pickle,” Varric said with a chuckle.

I laughed and threw my arm around his shoulder.

“I love your way with words Varric,” I told him pressing a chaste kiss to his cheek still laughing.

Varric slid his arm around my waist as we walked towards the stairs leading us back towards the camp below.

When we returned to the small camp I saw that Raj had returned from hunting and was lying next to Cole. His large head lifted when he saw us and his huge, bushy tail slapped against the sand.

“There’s my boy,” I said kneeling down as he trotted towards me to rub his forehead into mine in greeting.

I felt the eyes of every freed elf staring at me as I greeted Raj in my usual manner. My eyes glanced towards them and I saw their superstitious stares. *I guess even slaves worried about the Dread Wolf catching their scent too*. Running my fingers through the soft hair around Raj’s neck, I ignored the looks and continued with my affections.

“Was there any problems while we were gone?” I asked giving Raj one last scratch before standing.

Hawke chuckled with my question obviously catching the uncomfortable looks from the people and rubbed her hands over her leather encased legs.

“Just a little concern when Raj came into the camp,” she replied.

*I’ll bet*, I thought with a soft sigh before forcing my lips to form a smile.

“I suppose it’s not every day a wolf just walks into your camp like he owns it,” I replied teasingly.

“Fen’Harel,” one woman whispered making others murmur nervously in the group around the fire.

There was an instant ache that vibrated through our bond, and I pushed soothing calm back to him. The elf was obviously raised Dalish the way she stared at Raj nervously.

“I can assure you this is not Fen’Harel, he’s too small and much more well-mannered than the Elven God,” I said biting the inside of my cheek to keep myself from laughing.

Winking at him, our bond vibrated with my teasing, removing the discomfort he had felt before and his gaze held retribution for my cheekiness. One of the elves chuckled and shook his head at my
comment. I was just grateful to lighten the moment for everyone. My ears twitched with the sounds of hooves trudging through sand and I glanced over my shoulder watching Lace and a few of her soldiers riding towards us.

“Lace, we really must stop meeting like this or people are going to start to talk,” I joked.

Her laughter echoed over the sand along with her soft snort as she slid off her pony.

“Fenlin, I would rather hear rumors about us than that Orlesian flop they tried saying I was involved with,” she remarked dryly rubbing her hand over Raj’s head in greeting.

Lace looked around the fire at the elves and glanced at me.

“I can probably safely assume you will find more as you make your way. You want me to send a raven to Skyhold?”

“Yes, let them know that I require assistance getting them back to Skyhold. Also, give Josephine the heads up that all of them will require jobs.”

Lace nodded her head in understanding and glanced at the stone stairs.

“Did you find anything?” she asked me curiously.

“Part of a story about a Paragon and a shard of metal that reminds me of a puzzle piece along with some tokens. I think that we will probably find more of the metal shards and the story will continue as we found more of the Dwarven ruins. Once we have removed the Venatori and Red Templar threat, I would like to talk with Josephine about finding scholars to come out here and study them because they are incredible.”

“Those stuffy jerks in Orzammar will shit their small clothes when they get word of these.”

Laughing, I glanced around the fire at the elves that watched Raj nervously and clapped my hand on Lace’s shoulder.

“We should be off; there is a lot more ground we want to cover before we make camp for the night.”

“Be safe Fenlin, I will wait for your next signal,” she replied walking towards the fire to introduce herself to the nervous elves.

I turned towards everyone and gestured it was time to go and they stood to grab their packs and strap on their weapons. I pulled out my map and judging the distance I wanted to cover it should take us a few hours to get there on foot. Cassandra looked at the map from over my shoulder and I pointed to where I wanted to go.

“According to this, there is supposed to be a canyon here. That might be a great place for us to stop for the night.”

“Agreed,” she said before walking away.

I whistled for Raj and fell into step next to Solas and Cole as we set out into the darkness leaving Lace in charge of the camp.
“His mate is deceptively strong,” Xebenkeck said to them as he shifted from his raven form.

Imshael’s eyes danced with delight.

“And quite attractive wouldn’t you say, brother?”

Xebenkeck held his brothers gaze angrily while Gaxkang shook his head, his expression full of annoyance with Imshael’s games.

“How she resembles is irrelevant brother, focus on the task at hand or we will not live to see another day. We have warned Fen’Harel and in so doing this, it has guaranteed there will be a war.”

Imshael laughed and rubbed his hands excitedly.

“Yes, but it is only him and his mate the spirits are calling Ras’Salladin,” he said sounding pleased with himself.

Xebenkeck stared at his brother about to tell him he was a fool when their sister’s voice hissed through the air around them malevolently.

“You have forgotten the mother – Mythal. She still walks this world, and that means that there are three Evanuris walking this plane of existence that will align against us. Do not delude yourself thinking that we can overcome their combined might for we would fail. Even as much as the huntress wants her revenge, she would turn on you in a blink. We must be smart and cunning like the Dread Wolf will be or he will surely kill us one by one. As for his mate, we shall see how strong she is in due time.”

Imshael smiled sinisterly as he tented his fingers nodding his head in agreement.

“Andruil is quite impatient with her want for revenge; perhaps if we released her brother’s they might do our work for us.”

“NO,” his sister growled angrily at him.

Imshael flinched at the site of her red eyes flashing at him angrily through the darkness of the forest.

“We will stick to the original plan you fool! If you deviate from the plan brother, it will be the last thing you ever do. I have waited far too long for this moment to let you ruin it with your foolish amusements now.”

Imshael bowed his head towards her quickly.

“My apologies sister, it will be as you say.”
We traveled in silence with an occasional cough or sneeze from all the blowing sand.

“There’s sand in my shoes again,” Cole remarked before stopping.

We stopped and waited for him to empty the sand from his shoes while Dorian glanced around with a frustrated expression.

“Does that noise ever stop?”

Bull chuckled and patted his shoulder.

“Well, it’s sand blowing on sand in a place full of wind and sand,” he said dryly.

Dorian looked at him and smiled sarcastically.

“Thank you. That makes so much more sense now.”

Bull kissed the top of Dorian’s head and chuckled when Dorian swatted at him.

Cassandra coughed and pulls her canteen from her pack.

“I will never get the dust from my throat out.”

I laughed and nodded my head in agreement as we continued onward once Cole put his shoes back on.

Bull stopped and held his hand up an hour later.

“Smell that smoke? People are lighting campfires somewhere,” he said softly.

My lips twitched with his words since I had smelt the campfires for hours but if he smelled it now then we were getting close to a camp.

“I’ll bet we are close to the canyon,” Varric whispered.

“Well we aren’t going to find it standing here,” Cassandra said walking past Bull.
“Agreed,” I replied following after her with Raj walking beside me.

We crested the small sand dune and the light of the campfire lit the camp. Looking around the area, it was a small Venatori camp with only a few mages and four Red Templars. I was to see that they did not have slaves in this camp and gestured towards Cassandra for her to come closer speaking quietly.

“Let Cole and Sera worry about the mages; focus on those two rock heads that spit lyrium.”

Cassandra softly snorted and nodded her head before tapping Bull’s arm as she passed. The sound of Bull’s loud roar as he charged into the camp echoed off the rock and carried on the air. As I thought, the mages scattered nervously towards the rock wall of the camp looking for a good place to fight from, only to walk right into Cole and Sera.

Laying frost runes on the ground beneath the rock heads to slow their movements, I noticed an archer move from behind a wagon of supplies focused on Fenris.

“Fen’edhis,” I muttered preparing a freezing spell.

Unaware that Raj had left my side and made his way onto the battlefield, he tackled the archer from behind, his large jaws around the archer’s neck. I saw Solas’ slight smirk and the vibration of pride flowed through our connection at the sight of Raj dragging the kicking and screaming archer towards the frost runes on the ground. Fenris turned at the sound of the screaming and cut the head off of the archer that had the lower half of him frozen on the ground.

The skirmish did not last long and when I glanced around the small camp and I saw that Sera had used one of the mages as a pincushion with all the arrows in him that held his slumped form against the rock wall. Someday soon, her and I are going to have to have a long talk. I glanced at her with a raised eyebrow seeing her shoulders shrug indifferently.

“Wha? He kept moving,” she answered my inquisitive look.

Bull spat on the ground as he looked around.

“Well, this was disappointing.”

“Not enough of a work out?” I said teasingly.

Laughing, I just shook my head at him. We went through the camp, searching for any information on what the Venatori was up to and found two more maps describing the tombs and one looked to be deep within the canyon. Running my fingers over Raj’s head, I motioned forward.

“Come on, let’s find a spot for the night because I sure as hell ain’t staying here.”

We walked for another hour or so before we found our camping spot for the night and we set up in a carved out part of the rock and erected four tents. Since we were rotating watch with two at a time and there were ten of us, we chose to share the tents and cut down on what we carried across this vast desert.

With our meager dinner of dried ram, water, and a few vegetables cooking over the fire in the stew pot, I pulled out my map and sat down looking at it, making my notations to where we were. Studying the other maps carefully, Solas sat next to me and pointed towards the one in the canyon.

“This one is perhaps the closest to us.”
Folding up the map and slipping it back into my pack, I glanced at him.

“I think so too,” I said.

Dorian stirred our sad looking stew and glared at Raj.

“That wolf eats better than we do most of the time,” he said aloud sounding quite disgruntled.

Raj lifted his head, looking at Dorian with intelligent blue-green eyes and chuffed an answer. The way Raj had his head tilted and his eyes staring at Dorian, the wolf looked almost bored and I could almost imagine what the animal would say if he could speak and it made me laugh.

“Perhaps you should hunt with him next time,” I replied teasingly.

Dorian waved his hand at me dismissively.

“I can’t get the blood out of half of my clothes as it is, and you’ve seen how he takes down a ram,” he said throwing his hands out to encompass the area. “The blood goes everywhere.”

We actually heard Raj sigh at him before closing his eyes and lay his head back down pointed away from him prompting everyone to laugh.

“I do not believe he agrees with your description Master Pavus,” Solas said with a smirk on his lips.

“Pah! What does he know,” Dorian said throwing a hand up.

Raj lifted his large head to look at Dorian again and I covered my mouth to keep from laughing at the indignant look on the creatures face knowing he understood everything. Raj then proceeded to growl-talk to Dorian surprising him and making everyone laugh while he held up his hands.

“Now, now, there is no need to take that tone. Perhaps I exaggerated a bit, I apologize.”

Raj snorted and laid his head back down and I gripped my sides as I burst into laughter.

“Oh…ouch…that was priceless,” I said between fits of laughter.

Dorian’s eyes narrowed at me.

“Ass,” he grumbled and I rolled onto my side on the ground still laughing.

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We entered the canyon and found it was full of radioactive sized spiders that spit venom at us from a distance. They had easily twenty, glossy black eyes set in their huge heads and large pinchers for mouths with furry exoskeletons. The revolting arachnids made my skin crawl with disgust. After the tenth one in five minutes skittered at us across the sand, I cast a freezing rune on the ground. As it ran over the rune it suddenly froze in place and Solas cast a fade fist to shatter the creature. Frozen pieces of the creature flew in different directions and I could no longer suppress the shiver of disgust from showing and rubbed my hands over my arms.
“Gross,” I mumbled with disgust.

Solas softly chuckled from beside me and I noticed that I was not the only one with an aversion to the ugly creatures. Hawke was making a similar reaction that I had moments before by rubbing her arms vigorously.

“The Maker has a sense of humor creating such disgusting creatures,” Hawke said as another came out of the canyon path towards us.

I repeated the freezing spell and this time Bull shattered it with his ax.

“How many of the bleeding things are in here?” I grumbled.

Bull and Cassandra chuckled at my obvious discomfort with the creatures as we made slow progress into the canyon. When we found a partial unearthed rock wall with Dwarven carvings, I felt a sense of excitement. I couldn’t help feeling like Indiana Jones looking for lost artifacts. We found the entrance to the Dwarven ruin and stopped when we heard voices talking ahead of us.

“You said you could read ancient Dwarven, Saldren. Now that we are here, I am seeing a lack of knowledge you expressly told the Elder One you had,” his companion said angrily.

We all heard the heavy sigh of annoyance from the one called Saldren before he answered.

“How many times must I explain to you, Varner? This writing is a dialect of Dwarven I am unfamiliar with, that is all.”

“Well, I for one am tired of your mistakes. Every time you light the braziers incorrectly, a group of bloody demons appears to attack us. You best hope you can open this tomb before the Inquisition finds us.”

Oh, that’s what happens if we do it wrong. Solas and I shared a small smile learning this bit of information.

“Don’t tell me you’re afraid of that farce they call a Herald?”

“You’re a fool Saldren if you are not. They killed everyone in Emprise Du Lion, or have you forgotten?”

The dry laugh from Saldren echoed softly off the chamber walls.

“Fools, the lot of them; they allowed a knife-ear to get the upper hand with their overconfidence. They relied on the Red Templars to protect them; I rely on no one but myself. Perhaps this is why I am a Magister and you are still an Altus.”

The loud growl of annoyance from the other echoed loudly and I moved silently to where Bull and Cassandra stood, gesturing for them to bend and everyone else around us followed suit.

“We need one alive so we can find out really what the hell they are looking for,” I whispered to them.

Everyone nodded in agreement and we moved quietly closer to the men. I knelt and rubbed my forehead against Raj’s and whispered to him, “stay with Bull” before I grabbed Solas’ hand and whispered the spell that would cloak us and moved into the chamber to stand behind them. We waited for Bull to enter, drawing their attention before I released Solas’ hand making us visible. Bull, Raj, Cassandra, and Fenris entered the chamber and the Venatori mage on the right instantly
screamed.

“Inquisition,” he yelled.

The one on the left must be Saldren as he had not screamed but only began casting fire runes on the chambers rock floor. He is the one I want. Warping the Fade, I twirled my staff as if I was winding up for a pitch and slammed the blade into the floor sending a fast-moving Fade fist at the back of the Magister’s head instantly knocking him unconscious. Fenris decapitated the other quickly and then wiped his sword off on the Venatori’s cloak.

I glanced down at the unconscious Magister with a smug grin on my face.

“Well let’s get this trash tied up.”

Bull kicked the Magister over while Cassandra wrapped his wrists tightly with rope. I ripped off a couple of pieces from his cloak and wadded one piece up shoving it into his mouth before tying the other piece around his head.

“That ought to keep him quiet,” I said with a cheeky grin.

"I will stay and make sure he doesn't try to escape," Fenris offered as he slipped his greatsword back into the scabbard strapped to his back.

"Make sure he is still alive when I return," I teased and heard Hawke's chuckle.

"I will try my best," Fenris answered with a small smirk.

I patted his shoulder and turned to look around the chamber. Varric walked around the chamber reading the passages holding a writing journal and making notes. I gathered up the documents and tombs from the table, shoving them into my pack before we gathered around Varric and looked at the sentences trying to put them in order. Once we thought we had the order, I took the sheet that was numbered and read it aloud.

“After many years Fairel, Greatest of Paragons, could not bear life’s burden and with the burden growing, he called his sons to his bedside. He bade each son swear he would take care of his brother and the brothers swore, and mourned when their father returned to the stone.”

“That sounds about right,” Bull commented.

Shrugging and giving him an impish grin, I cast Veilfire in my hand.

“Well if we are wrong the demons will let us know.”

Bull grimaced while Dorian chuckled at his obvious discomfort with the talk about demons. I followed Varric as he guided me through the order of the passages and when the last brazier was lit the door leading into the tomb opened with a soft click. Extinguishing the Veilfire in my hand, Cassandra opened the door and like the other tomb the air inside the tomb was fresh like mountain air and there were stain glass windows giving off the soft yellow light into the room.

The stone altar at the far end held tokens to the Paragon like the other and as I thought, there was another of the metal shards. Picking it up, I placed it in my pack and saw that in this tomb the Paragon and his wife were behind the altar, carved into the large stone wall and three male dwarves knelt to the right of the altar.

“Must be his sons,” I said softly studying the craftsmanship of the statues.
We left the tomb and I noticed that the Magister was finally awake and glaring at Fenris who wore a
smug smile as he stared at him. The Magister’s gaze swung towards us as we exited the tomb and
with an absent flick of his fingers, Solas extinguished the braziers. Varric shut the door to the tomb
and I heard the audible click as it latched shut. The Magister’s gaze held hatred and I smiled at him.
*Good, the feeling is mutual asshole*, I thought walking towards him slowly.

“This must be appalling for you to have been bested by lowly knife-ear.” Making little tsk’ing noises,
I knelt in front of him enjoying the way his steely brown gaze narrowed.

His muffled response made Bull chuckle from behind me and I held the Magister’s gaze as I reached
up and pulled the gag from his mouth.

“My apologies, where are my manners” I replied flippantly.

“You filthy knife-ear”, he spat taking in a ragged breath. “When the others find out what you have
done here they will hunt you down like the worthless creature you are and kill you.”

Raj lunged to within inches of the Magister’s face snapping his teeth at him while I laughed and
shook my head with his instant slurs and threats. The immediate fear I smelt from the Magister
permeated the air around us as Raj was within scant inches of his face.

“You got balls, I'll give you that,” I said with a wicked smile. “Shall we see how long you keep
them?” I questioned my tone turning ominous as I pulled my dagger from my thigh and flip it in my
hand. The soft vibration of power in my voice as Raj growled and snapped at his face made the
Magister flinch.

The Magister’s gaze went from Raj to me as he studied my face angrily trying to gauge if I meant my
threat or not and decided to clamp his lips tightly together.

“Now then, I didn’t keep you alive to exchange pleasantries. I want you to tell me what the Venatori
are looking for,” I said calmly tapping my blade against his leg.

He spat at me keeping silent. Reaching up I wiped his spit from my cheek and the vibration of anger
through our shared bond was instant with the Magister’s actions and I held my hand up stopping
Solas from coming to my side and killing the Magister before we could get answers. My action drew
the Magister’s gaze towards Solas and he gave him a smug smile. I thrust my dagger into his thigh,
inches from my previous threat, wiping the smug expression off his face. The Magister instantly
screamed in pain and brought his gaze back to mine.

“I see I have your attention now,” I replied my voice vibrating in the air warningly.

“I will never tell you anything,” he yelled.

Spittle ran down the Magister's chin, his brown eyes glossy with pain and I twisted the dagger
making him scream again in agony and I gave him a cold smile.

“Never is a long time and I am not known to play with my prisoners, I don’t have the patience for it.”
I replied.

Running my fingers over Raj’s large head, I patted his shoulder before standing.

“I cannot say the same for my companion,” I said turning away from the Magister while Raj growled
taking a step towards the Magister.

“Wait!” He yelled and I turned towards him holding a hand up that halted Raj’s progress towards the
cowering Magister.

“We were sent to find a key that opens a tomb guarded by a dragon. The Elder One believes it is Fairel’s actual tomb where they laid him to rest. He believes the Paragon was buried with a rune of destruction never seen before.”

“Thank you,” I said before nodding towards Fenris who I could tell had been itching to kill the Magister since we had tied him up.

Fenris gave the Magister a sinister smile as his lyrium markings began to glow, lighting up his entire right hand.

“Wait! I told you what you wanted to know…” he yelled angrily and I looked at him with a raised eyebrow.

“I never said I would release you if you told me,” I answered calmly just as Fenris’ hand ghosted through the Magister’s chest and crushed his heart ending him swiftly.

“That’s a convenient trick,” Bull commented looking at Fenris’ completely clean hand.

Fenris chuckled and held up his hands exposing the lyrium markings that ran up his arms.

“Compliments of a Magister who wanted a weapon for a slave. He got his wish,” he replied dryly making Bull chuckle in understanding.

I snorted and rubbed my face walking towards the exit.

“Let’s get out of here and find the next one.”
We found the large Venatori stronghold that many of the notes we had found throughout the tombs described and I scanned the camp noticing the four large cages of elven slaves along with the large presence of Red Templars. The same anger I felt when I saw them the first time churned in my gut and Solas’ soothing aura surrounded me while his eyes regarded the cages as well.

We had already rescued over fifty slaves in the two weeks we had been mapping out the Hissing Wastes. Thankfully, Cullen’s men and the Chargers had shown up a couple of days ago with more supplies and transportation for the freed people. It was difficult to see them so unsure and scared. Some spoke of how the Magisters would punish them for what we had done. It had taken Fenris a good part of an entire evening to explain to them that the Magisters were welcomed to try and would meet with the same end as the others before them.

“I believe we found their hideout,” Bull said quietly his eye scanning the camp garnering my attention back to the present. “I’m counting thirty so far, but there will be more hidden in the caves over there,” he said pointing towards the mouth of a cave behind one of the wagons.

“Archer’s walking the scaffolding around the perimeter as well,” Fenris commented.

A pair of Venatori warriors walked through the gate unmistakably on patrol and I glanced around the perimeter carefully. There is no way Cole can slip in undetected…shit.

“Well there is only one way for us to know exactly what we are facing in there,” I said softly.

Solas’ disapproval was heavy through our bond as was his expression when he gazed at me knowing instantly what I was about to do.

“Vhenan,” he said frowning.

I gave him a patient smile while I slipped my pack off.

“There are far too many rogues in the camp and Cole will be detected by them, I will not,” I replied simply dropping my pack.

His hand quickly snaked out to take hold of my wrist.

“You endanger yourself unnecessarily,” he said with anger.

Cassandra cleared her throat and glanced around at the others. Motioning for them to follow her, she stepped away giving us a moment of privacy while I stared at Solas with a strong sense of annoyance rushing through my system.

“You are as bad as a mother hen over a clutch of eggs,” I said with frustration dripping from my tone as I rubbed my face in aggravation.

His eyes flashed angrily while the emotions that rolled through me from him were heavy with worry and anger. I held his angry gaze with a stubborn one of my own willing him to stop being so overprotective.
“At least a hen’s eggs stay in one place and the hen is allowed to guard what is hers. You, however, test my patience and I am forced to act in such a manner because my mate acts foolishly at times,” he replied deceptively calm.

My eyebrow rose almost to my hairline with his words and I yanked my wrist from his grasp.

“I test your patience? Oh, that's rich you giant ass,” I said irritably. “I am trying to make sure none of us get hurt and you think my actions foolish,” I said with exasperation. Shaking my head at him, I look at him knowingly. “I feel your worry Solas, so don’t use words that have no bearing on what is actually going on, you can’t hide from me. I will not ask you not to worry because that is a waste of time but I will also not sit under your proverbial wing just because it makes you feel better. Now kiss me and tell me you love me so I can get this over with quickly,” I said lifting my face up towards him.

The slight lift at the corner of his mouth with his stormy blue eyes holding mine sent the butterflies buzzing. His hands cradled my face; his thumbs brushing over my cheekbones before his head descended towards mine. The cool touch of his lips on mine was enough to remove the rest of my annoyance with him and his controlling ways. Wrapping my hand around his pendant, I nipped at his lower lip before he pulled away.


“Ma nuvenin, lathan na Solas,” I whispered back letting his pendant go.

Stepping away from him with a tender look, I cast the spell and disappeared hearing his audible sigh mixed with annoyance and acceptance. Smiling at the sound, I left the rocky outcropping and walked down the long path into the camp unseen and unheard. Moving through the area I overheard bits of information about their search for the key before entering the cave.

They were looking for a complete key and didn’t realize that the metal shards we had found in the tombs were what made the key nor did they know that I now possessed the key. Knowing that we had beat the Venatori again was a good feeling, especially when I thought about how they had to report back to Corypheus their failure. Rounding a small corner, I saw a large group of mages toiling over maps and books. Bull was right; there is easily twenty Venatori in here. My eyes scanned the small area carefully and moved quietly to one table where correspondence with other Venatori was strewn about.

My eyes scanned a letter that described an area to the south through the Dales. At the bottom of the letter, I noticed that they were discussing looking further south from the Emerald Graves. Something about a possible elven temple hiding in the wild area, I read with surprise. Glancing at a few of the other correspondence, I saw similar descriptions of a wild area beyond the Graves and made a mental note to tell Leliana about the area they were describing and to send some agents to investigate.

Making my way back out of the cave, I moved towards the back of the camp and found another exit. Making my way back through the camp, I found a small area walled off for the one they called the Overseer. He wore black robes with a large hood that obscured his face as he stood over a table littered with candles, maps, and stacks of notes in the small area. I moved a bit closer so I could listen to the conversation between him and the messenger that had run in just after me.

“Overseer, the Inquisition is on the move and heading in this direction,” the man said quickly.

The Overseer nodded his head not looking at him.

“I am aware they are coming and we can do nothing about that but wait for their arrival. They will be
surprised to find we will not be caught unaware like the others. Perhaps if we can capture their leader, she may know how to get into these tombs.” I watched him rub his chin, the unshadowed part of his face pensive before he sighed and glanced at the messenger. “The rest of the Red Templars shall arrive later today. Their Inquisitor will find us prepared,” he answered.

I left the area and headed back towards my group waiting on the rocky outcrop where I left them. Making my way up the mountain path, I found Solas waiting with Raj in the middle of the path beneath a shadowy overhang of rock and I removed the spell a few feet from him. His instant relief that floods me put a smile on my face as I took the last steps towards him.

Lacing my fingers with his, we walked silently up the rest of the path towards the others waiting. Raj’s head fell under my hand and his head rubbed my leg possessively.

“There is fifty in the camp and they are gathering Red Templar reinforcements that will arrive shortly,” I said quietly. Looking at Bull as I put my thoughts in motion, I smiled. “We are going to need the Chargers and some of the others if we are to remove them from here.”

He nodded his head in approval.

“Agreed,” he said.

“We should also use Lace and her men,” Cassandra supplied and I nodded my head in agreement.

We followed the mountain path back towards the camp to prepare for our mini assault on the Venatori encampment.

I pointed at the two entrances into the camp I had drawn in a crude map of what I could remember, including the areas with archers and separated groups of Venatori warriors. I looked at Bull and Krem who stood studying the map across the makeshift table from me.

“Bull, will you be leading the Chargers or Krem?”

Bull glanced up from the map and pointed his thumb at Krem.

“If it’s all the same with you, Boss, I will stick with you and let Krem handle the assault at the rear entrance.”

I nodded and looked at Krem and Lace.

“Krem, you and Lace will enter here,” I said pointing at the rear entrance. “Lace and her men will take out the archers patrolling the scaffolding and offer ranged assistance for you and your team. No unnecessary risks here Krem, there are Venatori mages over here,” I pointed at the map again as I continued. “Dalish, Skinner, and some of the Inquisition agents will need to focus on them when they engage as you continue to enter the camp.”

Krem’s face scrunched up as he pinched the bridge of his nose.

“Maker, I have two mothers now,” he teased.

Those around the table laughed and Bull slapped Krem’s arm.

“Listen up princess and don’t be an ass,” he said.

Krem nodded his head quickly.
“Yes, Chief.”

I snorted and shook my head before looking at Rocky, Stitches, and Grim.

“Rocky, you are in charge of placing your beautiful pyrotechnics here and here,” I said pointing at strategic places just inside the camp that would collapse the cave full of Venatori. “That will take care of those pesky vermin hiding within,” I said with an impish smile.

Rocky gave me a quick nod and a happy smile while he rubbed his hands together. Stitches and Grim waited for me to tell them what they would be doing.

“You two will be guarding Rocky’s back while he plants the bombs. Lace will give you cover as you need it.”

They nodded in unison and I looked at Sera, Varric, and Cole.

“You three will handle the archers at the main entrance. They are expecting us to come through the front door, and we won’t disappoint them.”

They nodded, Sera continuing to be quiet and I looked at Solas and Hawke.

“We will create the storms that will disorient them. Solas you handle the cold. Hawke you handle the lightning and I will bring the fire. By the time the Venatori figure out what's going on, they will think the Maker is making a special visit himself.”

Everyone but Solas chuckled and I looked at Dorian.

“Dorian, you keep your focus on Cassandra, Bull, and Fenris. Your barriers, runes, and necromantic crowd control will be of great help once the shit starts flying.”

He rubbed his chin and nodded his head as I focused on Cassandra, Bull, and Fenris.

“You three just kick the shit out of anything in your way and let us worry about covering your ass,” I said with a cheeky grin.

Cassandra snorted and Fenris glanced up at Bull as he bumped their shoulders with his large elbows.

“I think we can do that,” he said with a big smile earning similar smiles from them.

“Then we should get some sleep and hit them in the middle of the night,” I said folding up the map and slipping it into my pack as everyone scattered towards their tents or bedrolls. I ruffled Raj’s hair affectionately, “go hunt little man and be back before we leave.” Raj gave me a soft chuff of reply before taking off and blending into the darkness. I watched him leave as Solas laced his fingers with mine and led me towards our tent. Ducking inside through the opening with him behind me, he placed wards over the entrance while I started unbuckling my gear.

His hands gently pushed mine out of the way as he began helping me with the buckles and it made me smile with the pleasure I felt come from him with the simple action. Pulling my chest plate off, I unhooked the chainmail and rolled it down my body. Stepping out of it, I laid it next to my chest piece. Grabbing at the hem, I peeled my tunic off that I wore beneath the chainmail preparing to pull out a fresh tunic. His fingers brushed over the scar on my side and his feelings of frustration and responsibility rolled through me with our bond.

Dropping the shirt, I looked at him over my shoulder and reached up to caress his jaw willing him to look at me.
“They are not your fault,” I told him softly.

“If I had been paying attention, these would not blemish your body,” he replied quietly running his finger softly over the scar in the middle of my chest.

“Solas,” I said shaking my head at him.

“If that is the path you would like to follow, then I will have no choice but to accept that the rogue who tried to take you from me is my fault.”

Tracing my fingers over the pale scar on his neck, the memory of that day still haunts my dreams and he shook his head.

“That is absurd,” he replied softly pressing a kiss to the scar on my shoulder.

I chuckled and my eyebrow rose to wait for him to realize his feelings of responsibility for my wounds were just as absurd when he softly laughed.

“I concede your point,” he finally replied.

I smiled at him impishly before pressing my lips to the dimple on his chin.

“I knew you would,” I replied.

Solas started removing his armor and I pushed his hands out of the way as he had done earlier and his smile grew as I slid leather free of buckles releasing his chest plate so he could pull it off. I loved helping him remove his armor, revealing each delicious inch of him one metal piece at a time and the satisfied emotion that came from him told me he was well aware of my addiction. Once all of the armor was removed, I ran my fingernail down his chest making him laugh thickly as he pulled his tunic over his head.

“I believe we were to rest before our assault this evening,” he replied gruffly before hissing as my fingers ran over his stomach playfully.

I looked up at him teasingly through my lashes while my fingers slipped beneath the band of his smalls. The simple action provoked a small groan from him making me smile.

“Are you telling your mate no, Fen’Harel?” I questioned him brazenly before wetting my lower lip, caressing the tip of his arousal.

“Never,” he growled wrapping his hands around my hips and lifting me.

Wrapping my legs around his waist, I giggled softly before pressing a kiss to the side of his neck just as he laid me down. He slipped down my body, pressing kisses to my skin as he went. His eyes twinkled with mischief as he looked at me nipping at my hip and hooking his fingers beneath my smalls, peeling them off. Flinging the garment away with a roguish grin, he gently bit at my hipbone again.

Softly laughing at his sudden playfulness, I ran my fingers over his head, arching towards him as his tongue parted my wet folds. Moaning loudly, his mouth devoured me with quick, precise flicks of his tongue. His aura rushed through me as my body raced for that beautiful place full of colors. His mouth I gently sucked the hidden gem and my body flew.

“Solas”
His name ripped from my lips as I came and before I could even begin to catch my breath, he slipped into my waiting warmth with a groan. His lips found mine and our tongues danced in sync with our bodies as he moved slowly. The thickness of his arousal setting off a chain of contractions through me with each slow movement of his hips; I raked my nails over his shoulders while his lips trailed kisses over my cheek and down my neck.

My body tightened around him as I drew closer to my next peak. His movements grew more firm, pressing against that erotic bundle of nerves against the wall of my sex. Both of us panting and moaning with desire, his voice thick as he growled against my throat.

“Las a dara ma vhenan.”

My aura poured into him in a rush as my body did as he demanded and rushed towards the kaleidoscope of colors behind my tightly closed eyes. His own aura flowed through me as he followed and I cried out with the intensity of emotion that came with it.

Our hearts thudded frantically against our chests and I felt his hand skim over my face, pushing my hair out of my eyes. Gazing up at him, his lips pressed a soft kiss to mine and felt his smile that sent small shivers of pleasure racing through me.

“Ar lath ma vhenan,” he mouthed before pressing another gentle kiss to them.

I smiled softly, caressing his face tenderly.

“And I love you.”

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma, vhenan. Vegara em - I love you my heart. Return to me
Ma nuvenin, lathan na - As you wish, I love you too
Las a dara ma vhenan - let go my heart
I slowly woke with the feeling of his fingers tracing over the patterns on my arm and I stretched into him with a sigh. I would never tire of the way he woke me. His lips brushed the edges of my shoulder as he spoke.

“It is time vhenan,” he said before kissing my shoulder.

“Okay,” I replied rubbing my face. His arm tightened around my waist while his lips grazed across my shoulder blade.

“Promise me you will not take any unnecessary risks?” He asked me softly before kissing the back of my neck.

His worry flowed through our bond strongly and I let a small sigh escape with his persistent need to protect me. I could not fault him, I was just as protective of him. Taking his hand that traced the patterns on my arm, I kissed the tips of his fingers.

“I will promise if you will,” I replied honestly and smiled when his lips pressed against my neck again.

“Done, now let us dress before we forget that we have prior engagements,” he mumbled against my neck before rolling from our blankets.

I snorted and pushed my blanket off while he smiled roguishly.

“We forget? Hmm, …sounds more like before you forget,” I replied teasingly.

I watched him pull on his leggings while he laughed.

“Perhaps, but I am confident that I can encourage you to participate in my forgetfulness.”

He was now putting on his armor and he gave me a cheeky grin as he began strapping on his leg plates and I groaned at the site of the thick muscle. The man is such a tease!

“Stop looking at me like that wolf, or I will tackle you right now and have my way with you.” My voice is thick with my unquenchable desire for him.

His laughter brushed over me setting my senses to hum with anticipation and I gave him a cheeky smile as he tightened the buckle around his beautiful thigh. Latching the chainmail together at my side, I went and picked up my chest piece and slipped it over my head. He stood close to me, his
hands reaching for the buckles at the sides watching what he was doing with a singular focus that made my heart double beat. Once he was done, his eyes glanced up from his fingers and held mine. His lips slowly slipped up at the corners and his own desire for me clearly written in his expression.

“Then I have something to look forward to,” he replied before kissing me.

Laughing softly, I caressed his jaw tenderly for a brief moment before I grabbed our staves and passed his to him.

“Well, I guess its show time,” I said teasingly removing the wards over the entrance of the tent and bending down to leave with him following closely behind me.

As soon as we stepped out, Raj was waiting for us next to our tent. He got up and followed us as I glanced at the others gathered around the fire and prayed silently to whatever deity would listen that they stay safe before smiling at them.

“Shall we go introduce ourselves to the Venatori?”

Lace slipped her bow over her shoulder and smiled.

“Let’s,” she said following Krem’s smiling face along with the other Chargers.

I grabbed Krem’s arm quickly and gazed up at him.

“Please stay safe,” I reminded him.

He bent his head and kissed my cheek.

“I will just keep the big lug safe too,” he replied quickly before walking with Lace up the mountain path that would lead them towards the rear entrance.

Skinner and Dalish patted my shoulder as they passed both saying at the same time, “see you in the middle Sketch.”

I smiled and nodded my head in agreement as Rocky walked by and kissed my hand giving me a cheeky smile that instantly made me laugh. Stitches moved in quickly and kissed my cheek as Grim stopped next to me and laid his hand on my shoulder making me look up at him.

“You stay safe,” he said patting my shoulder before walking away.

I gave the big lug a gentle smile and saw Bull shake his head and stare at me with annoyance.

“I don’t know how you do it, but he only talks to you.”

I shrugged watching the Chargers walk away, praying that they would be alright because I didn’t have a team of Leliana’s best agents as back up this time.

“It’s because I make him hot chocolate with a splash of whiskey when no one is watching,” I said picking up my pack giving Bull a cheeky grin.

“Bullshit,” Bull said shaking his head.

I looked at him laughing as I slipped my pack over my shoulders.

“It could be because he just likes me, Bull,” I replied making him groan.
Bull’s soft grey-blue eye held mine before he started laughing.

“If I didn’t love you,” he said shaking his large head.

I giggled and shook my head at him noticing his teasing smile as he pretended to act disgruntled. Dorian smiled and patted his shoulder with false comfort.

“Amatus, the woman just has a way with people, does she not? Look at where we are right now,” he said gesturing around the desolate area. "Do you think I would be here if it wasn’t for her?” he said placing his hands on his hips.

I shook my head laughing softly while Solas handed me, my staff.

“Since you believe I just have a way about me, maybe when the Venatori see me they will just surrender,” I joked and heard Cassandra’s snort as she slipped her shield over her back. “Hmm, I didn’t think so either. Oh well, come on guys, let’s greet the Venatori as they expect.”

Everyone started up the mountain path towards the Venatori camp lighter in heart and I hoped completely focused.

Everything was going as planned. The cave collapsed and the loud explosion ricocheted from one side of the canyon rock to another startling the Venatori scrambling to find a better area to fight us on. We met up with the Chargers and Lace in the middle of the camp preparing to attack the Overseer and whoever else he had assembled. Casting barriers over those heading into the small area, I noticed that he had gathered many of the Red Templar’s to his aid with a few Venatori warriors to bolster his numbers.

The Overseer was an experienced mage and pulled out all the stops as he cast a firewall. Gathering the Fade around me, I fade stepped to behind him through his firewall as he whispered spells to thwart our efforts. I watched while Bull and Fenris rushed through the firewall just as it was extinguished by Dorian. Solas immediately cast a blizzard slowing down any Red Templars just as Hawke lit them up with lightning.

I was throwing everything I had at the Overseer’s barrier, but he was using the blood from the dead men around him to fuel his spells and reinforce his barrier. I could see that he was beginning to weaken with my consistent assault overtime. He let out a shout of anger as he glared at me before turning and throwing a precise arrow of fire right at Krem where he stood with his blade thrust into the chest of a Red Templar. His magic flew faster than a bullet. Cole slipped his dagger into the side of his throat when his barrier finally dropped from my barrage of fade magic and I could do nothing but watch the horror in an almost slow motion as the magic hit Krem in the chest and he fell.

“NO” I screamed running towards his fallen form on the ground.

“No, no, no, no,” I muttered before physically ripping his chest plate from him and tossing it away. His soft brown eyes opened and gazed up at me as he gave me a faint smile.

“It’s okay Fenlin,” he said roughly, and I shook my head.

“No – it isn’t, don’t you dare,” I growled just as Solas knelt next to me.

Ripping his padded tunic away so Solas could assess the damage, I found Krem's bound chest and realized quickly that they were breasts. Glancing at Bull over Solas’ head in shock, his knowing gaze
told me everything just as I ripped my cloak off and covered his chest, grasping his hand tightly.

“Don’t you dare die on me Krem, I will never forgive you,” I told him angrily watching Solas work on the magical arrow wound in his chest just above his heart.

Raj whined and paced behind us while Solas worked and when he was done I looked at him with a tear-stained face.

“Well?”

“He will live whenan, he just needs time to heal,” he said gently touching my shoulder.

“Thank whatever God is listening,” I replied bowing my head.

Bull picked Krem up and carried him towards the camp with the rest of the Chargers following behind him. I glanced at the others that stood around each with different expressions of shock that had caught the sight of Krem’s bound breasts. If Bull knew, then so did his Chargers it would be only my people who hadn’t known, and I gazed at them all quickly.

“It is Krem’s story to tell if he chooses,” I said.

“He’s a she?” Sera mumbled in confusion and I whirled around to stare at her angrily.

“He is Krem – got it?” I spat out quickly.

Everyone around me nodded their heads in agreement while Sera held her hands up in a form of surrender not saying another word and we left the Venatori camp in a hurry for our own.

We made our way down the mountain path back towards our camp. My stomach was in knots with worry about Krem and the soft push to calm that came from Solas was not distracting me. I should have gotten a barrier around him quicker; he wouldn’t be hurt if I had paid attention. Sighing in frustration with myself, I moved quickly towards the light of the camp.

We arrived just as Stitches came out of the tent were Bull and the rest of his men waited. I sprinted towards them and Stitches glanced at me before he spoke with Bull.

“Solas stopped the major flow of blood. I stitched him up and like he said, Krem will heal just fine. He will be out of commission for a month or two, but he will recover just fine.”

Bull nodded his head, patting his shoulder pleased and turned to walk away as Stitches looked at me.

“He asked to speak with you, Fenlin.”

Solas took my staff and his eyes held the knowledge that he knew I was blaming myself. The flooding of love that came from him felt good but it did not remove my sense of responsibility. I nodded my head and pushed the flap of the tent out of my way as I entered. I saw Krem lying on his bedroll and the sight startled me. The stark white of the bandage stood out glaringly against his tan skin and again I felt the heavy responsibility for what had happened to him. I knelt next to him and we looked at each other silently for a long moment before he cleared his throat and spoke.

“I should have told you I was a woman.”

I snorted and shook my head.
“You don’t owe me any explanations, Krem. I’m just glad you’re alive.”

He chuckled and reached up to rub his face.

“I should have known it wouldn’t bother you, I just didn’t want you to treat me differently,” he said softly.

I held his chocolate gaze for a quiet moment before taking his calloused hand, squeezing it gently I smiled at him.

“You are my friend, Krem. I don’t care that you have to pee sitting down or that your breasts are bigger than mine, this changes nothing.”

His fingers tightened around mine and I could see the relief in his eyes that my words brought him.

“Now stop worrying about that foolishness and just focus on healing. Bull is a mess when he doesn’t have you too keep him in line,” I teased.

Krem chuckled and nodded his head in agreement. Squeezing his hand one last time, I stood and left his tent. Solas stood next to Bull and I knew the two had been listening to my conversation with Krem by the soft look Bull was giving me.

Gently patting my shoulder, Bull nodding at Solas and walked away. I watched him leave as Solas took my hand leading us towards our tent where Raj laid next to it. What a long fucking night. All’s I wanted to do was curl up against Solas and sleep for the next week.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
Solas warded the opening of our tent while I placed our packs in the corner. I unbuckled my chest piece and dropped it next to my pack exhausted. Our assault on the Venatori tonight was an overall success and an emotion shitshow. I prepared to unhook the chainmail that lies normally beneath my armor and Solas’ fingers found the small hooks first, slipping them free to expose the back of my neck. He pressed a small kiss to the small vertebrae that were visible once the armor was removed, and I tucked my chin to my chest tired.

“You blame yourself for what happened,” he said against the skin of my neck.

“A good leader protects their people, I should have been paying attention and seen what was going on…predicted the chance,” I replied.

Solas’ hands that were gently resting on my shoulders turned me, so he could look at me.

“It is what happens during battle, vhenan. Some live, some die, and some get wounded. Your sense of responsibility for everyone is admirable but also a heavy burden needlessly carried. You cannot protect them all.”

I listened to him and dropped my head into his chest. The feeling of his strong arms wrapping around me calmed the rapid thoughts that rushed through my head telling me that I was not strong enough and that I was too foolish to save anyone. Our bond vibrated with my emotions of fear and disappointment with myself and his arms tightened around me, his lips pressing a gentle kiss to my head.

“This feeling you feel for yourself is groundless vhenan. This disappointment in yourself that you feel is unnecessary, tonight we were successful. The Venatori threat was removed, thirty more slaves were freed, and we have but to find the final tomb to understand what Corypheus was looking for out here.”

I knew he was right but that didn’t stop me from feeling the way that I did. His heavy sigh told me that he knew it and his lips pressed against my head again.

“Perhaps after you have slept, you will feel less burdened by what happened this night,” he said gently against my head.

I glanced up at him with a wry smile and caressed his face tenderly.

“I just need you and some sleep, I will sort the rest out later.”

His eyes held comfort and understanding for me as I stepped away from him and peeled off the chainmail preparing for bed.
My forest was full of spirits now I noticed while walking through my forest with silent steps enjoying the peaceful feeling it brought. I scanned the water’s surface as I took the narrow path towards Wisdom’s garden. This should help me bring everything back into perspective...find a peace with what happened to Krem. One thing I found that during my times of self-doubt, even with Wisdom gone, her garden was where I found the most peace.

Entering the garden, I stooped to pick up a Crystal Grace flower, plucking it and breathing deeply of its spicy scent and abruptly started in surprise to find Mythal sitting on a bench appearing to wait for me.

“Savhalla Ras'Salladin,” she said standing in greeting holding her hands out.

I walked towards her, taking her hands and ignoring the name she called me that the spirits had given me. She was always a calming presence and I could use that this evening I realized as I relaxed, and she pulled me to sit beside her.

“What brings you here this night,” she asked me curiously.

“I wish she were still here, I could use her guidance...especially when I am unsure if what I am doing is the right thing or not,” I said with a heavy sigh.

Mythal patted my hand, nodding her head in understanding.

“Your path is difficult ma falon but not impossible. There is much at stake all based around your success.”

Nodding my head, I scanned the flowerbed full of herbs and heavy-scented flowers and I took a deep cleansing breath.

“Andruil has found a way to escape her prison,” I told her quietly.

“I am aware,” she replied, and I looked at her in surprise.

“You did not think I knew?” she said with a soft laugh.

What the fuck? I shook my head unsure of what to think and studied her expression, her profile while she too studied the flowerbed of herbs and flowers.

“She will try to kill you, as I imagine she will go after Solas and I as well,” I said plainly completely unsure of what to do at this moment. Mythal almost seemed...melancholy but also at peace. She had to know that if given the chance, I would kill Andruil.

Mythal glanced at me with a gentle smile and tucked some of my hair behind my ear.

“You would be correct, but she should not be your focus. You are aware that the Forbidden have taken this moment of chaos and are moving against us?”

I immediately thought about Xebenkeck and the dark night he brought his voided Sentinel’s to test our strength. Frowning, I nodded my head in agreement.

“Yes, we were warned...or that is what it said it was doing. Xebenkeck was - interesting,” I answered not surprised that she already knew.
“Then you know how my daughter was released,” she said simply.

The shock that I was sure covered my face as I finally put two and two together was appalling. *I should have seen the connection sooner... idiom!* 

“She would have had to make a deal…but how could they help her? Why would they help after all that she had done to their kind? What could she possibly offer them that they would want?” I muttered trying to piece the pieces together.

“My daughter is a fool,” Mythal answered swiftly and angrily. “Her revenge and jealousy blind her to the fact that the Forbidden is using her as a distraction and will destroy her at the first opportunity. We, however, will not be so easily distracted, nor so easily vanquished.”

I saw the glint of anger in her yellow eyes and nodded my agreement with her. Mythal grabbed my hand and smiled sadly, shedding all early appearance of retribution for the Forbidden and her troublesome daughter.

“I know you will face my daughter and extract your vengeance for what was done to you, falon.”

I held her steady gaze and felt her fingers squeeze mine in reassurance as I was quite sure she could see that I felt conflicted with discussing it with her.

“I am prepared for what is to come lethal’lan, what was done to you and my brother will never be forgivable. Her jealousy, and thrill for the hunt of a wolf she could not have consumed her. It is why she scoured the Void for centuries, tormenting and murdering the Forbidden that refused to give her the information or the location of The Dread Wolf,” she explained.

Unsurprised by Mythal’s understanding of my need to kill Andruil, what did surprise me was the lengths the crazy bitch had gone to trying to get Solas for herself.

“No, it is not forgivable ma falon. I am grateful for the chance to be with Solas again but what she did to keep us apart will never be forgiven. I appreciate your words of understanding because I know how much it will hurt you in the end,” I said holding her hand tightly.

Mythal glanced away and I saw the small shimmer of unshed tears in the corners of her eyes and my heart squeezed with the sight. The ancient was not known to show emotions outwardly, fearing that it would be perceived weak and to bear witness to it was humbling.

“It is perhaps more distressing to wonder where I went wrong with her. How had I been so blind to her rage, so...complacent?” she questioned quietly.

It dawned on me that I was not the only one in need of a place to pull my shit together. I knew she was not expecting an answer from me and we sat silently for a while before I noticed the spirit of Sorrow’s vibrant ocean-blue eyes peeking at us through the garden’s emerald green foliage and squeezed Mythal’s hand comfortably.

“Enough talk of doom and gloom.” I said bringing a more upbeat tone to the air. “There is something I wish to ask of you,” I said changing the subject. Sorrow’s face glanced at me for a moment instantly looking annoyed, if a spirit could really express annoyance while Duty, Harmony, and Persistence entered the garden to stand next to her.

I watched Mythal’s expression change from concerned mother to a smooth composed Queen. All outward emotions wiped from her expression as she waited for my question with calm yellow eyes. *Well, that explains why duty has shown up.*
“I would appreciate your help in learning how to speak with the Dragons nesting around Thedas.”

There was a subtle surprise to her gaze and a curiosity that instantly curled her lips at the corners.

“Why would you want to learn such a language?”

I twirled the Crystal Grace flower between my fingers, causing the spicy scent to waft up at me with gentle waves.

“We were forced to kill one in Crestwood and I…” glancing at her, I let out a sigh before continuing.

“I felt it’s spirit leave, and it was as if a piece of my soul was taken from me. If I could talk to them, convince them to leave an area or talk to them about leaving the people alone, then I wouldn’t have to experience that painful feeling of loss again.”

I could tell that Mythal was contemplating my words carefully when she suddenly stood and looked at me perceptively.

“For me to share this knowledge with you lethal’lan it will not be pleasant, nor will it come without a price,” she warned me.

In other words – this is going to hurt like a son-of-a-bitch and I am going to owe her.

“I did not think it would be. Nothing worth knowing ever comes painlessly or free,” I said trying to bring a little humor to the situation. Solas might be mad at me later for this deal but he would just have to deal with it. I emotionally could not kill another one without truly losing something in the exchange, especially knowing that they could be spoken with.

Mythal’s instant laughter filled the small garden before she held my face gently.

“There is a truth to your humor lethal’lan,” she said holding my gaze. I took a deep breath, closing my eyes waiting and felt Mythal’s forehead press against mine. The sudden transfer of information flooded my mind and it felt as if my brain was in a vice as the knowledge flooded in. When she was done, I was panting and slightly sweating from the ordeal.

Opening my eyes, Mythal stared at me with a large smile.

“I shall look forward to becoming a ma’isa’ma’lin,” she said excitedly.

I laughed believing she was joking.

“Oh, that isn’t going to happen for a long time,” I said dismissively waving my hand.

Her eyebrow rose, and she folded her arms looking at me knowingly and I felt my stomach drop to my toes. No…that isn’t possible…no.

“You are talking about our future, not our present…please tell me that you are not talking about our present. I have been using the spell to repress my ovulation, I haven’t forgotten…I…” I was rambling and sat down quickly before I just fell down in shock while Mythal softly chuckled enjoying my surprise.

“Sometimes it is not for you to decide and plan for. I did not plan for Dirthamen and Falon’Din either, especially during an uprising. Sometimes the spirits know better than we,” she remarked calmly.

Fuck! This is not the time…really not the fucking time. IDIOT!!! Dropping my head into my hands, I
felt a cold fear wash over me with the idea of becoming a parent...now. My emotions were running on an all-out panic and the bond that I shared with Solas vibrated with my sudden fear startling him awake.

“Vhenan,” his worried voice broke through the air pulling me from the Fade and the last thing I saw was Mythal’s knowing smirk.

My eyes opened to the soft glow of a mage light to remove most of the darkness in our tent with Solas staring down at me worriedly. His eyes studied my face intensely looking for clues to what was scaring me so badly, and I closed my eyes, sighing heavily. Calming my chaotic thoughts by pulling the darkness around my mind, I heard his sigh of annoyance with the sudden pushing him out of my feelings. I just needed to get a grip on what the hell was going on and how I was going to deal with this new information.

“It is clear you are unwilling to share with me what has scared you to such an extent that it would awaken me.”

I could hear his annoyance and I rolled away, sitting up without speaking. How in the hell did this happen? This wasn’t supposed to happen...oh my God, what have I done? Rubbing my face trying to remove the panic uselessly and felt his arms wrap around me and pull me back into him. His love and comfort warming me on the inside as much as his arms around me did. It is not like I will be able to hide this from him. I took a deep breath for courage and tried to swallow around the lump of fear in my throat.

“Vhenan, whatever is troubling you, we can handle together.”

I snorted and shook my head at how fitting his words of comfort were for the moment.

“I met with Mythal in Wisdom’s garden tonight,” I began, feeling his body slightly stiffen behind me with the mention of her name. His aura moved cautiously around us, and our bond hummed with his displeasure, but he waited patiently for me to continue.

“We talked about Andruil, The Forbidden Ones, and what was currently happening. She was already aware of what was going on and helped me understand that Andruil has made some sort of deal with the Forbidden for her new-found freedom.”

His aura pulsed with his anger and he suddenly stood to pace our tent.

“The fool,” he growled angrily.

“I agree,” I replied quietly. “I don’t believe she knows that she is nothing but a pawn for the Forbidden but that is what she deserves – and more,” I said with my own anger.

Solas stopped pacing and held my gaze.

“My sister must be aware of what you plan,” he began and stopped when he saw me nodding in agreement.

“She is and understands. In a weird way, she gave me her blessing.” Shaking my head at the whole conversation, I plucked at the fibers of the blanket.

“There is more,” Solas said with clear understanding and my eyes darted back to him nervously.

“She generously granted me my wish and gave me the ability to speak with the Dragons as she can,” I replied quietly.
Solas suddenly knelt in front of me and lifted my chin so that he could study my expression and I wished just once I had a poker face.

“At a price I am sure…and,” he gently prodded holding my gaze.

My stomach flipped and twisted with anxiety while I knotted my fingers together nervously.

“And…” I began trying to ignore the nervous warble of my voice and swallowed anxiously. “And said she looked forward to becoming an aunt.”

His eyes rounded, and I felt the immediate shimmer of something I had never felt from him before tremor through our bond. His hand slid from my chin and he sat back on the pallet in stunned surprise. Before I could blink, he was on his knees and pressing a hand to my stomach. I felt his magic flow through me briefly before he pulled a visibly shaky hand away, his eyes holding mine with wonder. His silence was deafening, and I couldn’t stop myself from babbling like a fool thinking him justifiably angry with me.

“I swear Solas, I didn’t forget. I have done exactly as you showed me…I would never -”

His lips crashed into mine silencing me and I wrapped my arms around his neck holding on. His emotions that rushed through me filled me to a point of overflowing. It was a riotous mess his feelings. Exhilaration, anxiety, pride, love, pleasure; all these emotions filled me making me dizzy with how quickly he felt them. He pulled back and pressed his forehead to mine while we both caught our breath.

“We must find this last tomb and leave this place. I need to get you back to Skyhold where I can protect you,” he said softly.

I leaned back and watched his eyes slowly open to look at me and his jaw tightened as I crossed my arms in stubbornness.

“Not this again,” I said with a sigh of annoyance.

His anger flashed, and he crossed his arms mimicking my movements.

“You are my mate.”

“Mate, yes – property, no,” I answered angrily.

“You twist my words,” he argued.

“I am twisting nothing that your intent doesn’t clearly explain for me;” I spat back angrily.

“You refuse to even listen to my reasoning,” he said with the Evanuris vibration flowing around the room.

“When your reasoning revolves around suffocating the shit out of me, you’re damn right I’m not going to listen,” I replied hotly as my own voice took on the powerful vibration in response to his.

I didn’t miss the way his eyebrow rose with my tone and he unfolded his arms.

“Perhaps we should discuss this later,” he said sharply, and I groaned.

“Yes, I love when you get broody and silent for weeks on end. It should make our return trip back to Skyhold a fucking bowlful of excitement.”
I grabbed some of our covers and made a pallet away from him completely ignoring his expression of surprise.

“You’re being childish,” he said angrily, and I could hear the sound of him gritting his teeth behind me.

“And you’re being an overbearing Jerkface,” I retorted pulling the covers over my shoulder and closing my eyes angrily.

“Vhenan”

“Good night, Solas,” I said interrupting him.

Our bond vibrated with our shared displeasure with each other and it was a weird feeling. His worry and anger mixed together with my own anxiety and need to be self-reliant were heady. I jolted when I felt his arms suddenly slip beneath me and pick me up. Prepared to tell him to put me down, his eyes held mine with a gaze that conveyed there was more to his actions then anger and he would not accept no.

“I cannot tolerate you sleeping away from me. Be angry with me if you must, but please sleep beside me.”

I could still hear the anger in his tone, but there was an underlying of nervousness that vibrated through our bond. I nodded my head sharply not willing to let my anger with him go just yet, nor would I admit that I didn’t like sleeping away from him either. He laid me down on our pallet, repositioning the blankets before slipping beneath them. His arm slipped around me and pulled me back into him and I was instantly reminded of what someone had said to me once or maybe I read it somewhere in one of those magazines that talked about relationships. Never go to bed angry.

I rolled towards him and pressed a kiss to his lips, his surprise with my actions apparent.

“I am angry with you right now, but I love you, Solas, that will never change,” I said softly before laying my head down on his chest. His arms wrapped around me and I heard his heavy sigh before he pressed a kiss to my head. Our bond hummed with his pleasure at hearing my softly spoken words and my arm tightened a bit around him. We can figure this out...we have to.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Savhalla - informal greeting
falon - friend
ma'isa'ma'lin - aunt
Fairel’s Tomb and Some Fade Practice

Chapter Notes

Thank you for your continued support. Your comments and kudos are so very much appreciated.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

My lips curled with the gentle back and forth motion of his fingers over my flat tummy while our bond hummed with his curiosity. Sappy as it was, I couldn’t help enjoying the happy feeling that radiated through our bond from him. I had expected him to be angry about our new development and now that I have had the time to think about it, my expectation of his reaction had been silly. Instead of thinking he would be angry, I should have known that he would go into a mother-hen mode.

I felt his lips press against the line of my shoulder and his thick, sleep-filled voice sent delicious chills racing over my skin.

“Searching the Fade as we slept, I believe I found the path to Fairel’s final resting place.”

His lips moved to the nape of my neck and my breath shuddered as any thought of what I was about to say, fled from my mind. My anger with him from last night evaporated with the sensation of soft, open-mouthed kisses moving down my spine. His voice reeling me into a desire-filled haze with each huskily whispered word over my flesh.

“Once we have completed our mission, we can begin the long journey back to Skyhold. Perhaps I will convince you to stay there for a time.”

“Hmm,” I replied my voice breathy from his lips on my skin. “By time, do you mean a nine-month vacation?”

His lips smiled against the skin at the base of my spine sending waves of desire to seep into my bones.

“As I am aware of how unappealing you find the idea but as your mate, I must try to convince you.”

My throaty laughter filled the tent and I rolled towards him. Running my hand over his head and sliding down the side of his face to cup his jaw, his blue eyes twinkled with an almost boyish mischief making me smile. Leaning up, I pressed my lips against his instantly overwhelmed with the flood of love I felt for him.

“We really must start writing these down my love because you are one smooth talking elf,” I teased before nipping at his lip.

His soft, husky laughter surrounded me while his lips trailed down the column of my neck.

“I see that you will not be so easily persuaded and that I must double my efforts to convince you.”

My body was heavy with desire as his lips lit little fires everywhere they pressed, and I arched my hips towards him not unhappy with his determination.
“I will take that into consideration and base my decision,” I moaned when he nipped at my hip and breathlessly continued, “on your efforts. Though, your tactics are – unfair,” I panted.

His wicked laughter flowed over the skin of my inner thigh like tiny licks of lightning that teased and made me moan even louder as he nibbled at the sensitive flesh. My body was filled to the point of shaking with anticipation as he whispered words against my fiery flesh had me gripping our blankets with bloodless fingers.

“I must use the skills that best suit the situation, vhenan.”

His mouth slipped over my sensitive flesh and my mind went blank as white noise filled my ears and I moaned his name.

When we left our tent, I had a ridiculously pleased smile on my face while his expression was one full of smug know-it-all-ness. Cheeky ass. His instant chuckle from beside me had me shaking my head and smiling up at him impishly. Raj rubbed his face against my hip pulling my attention and I ruffled the thick, black hair around his face.

“Good morning handsome boy.” Pressing my forehead to his in greeting, I heard those around the fire preparing to leave.

“Come on you two lovebirds, we have a tomb to find,” Varric called out just as he slipped Bianca over his shoulder.

“And a dragon,” Bull commented excitedly.

Dorian rolled his eyes at him and held out some dried meat for me to eat.

“It is quite sickening how pleased you two look all the time,” Dorian commented.

I gave him a cheeky smile and bit into the meat.

“Enough, the sooner we get this done, the sooner we can escort the last wagons full of people back to Skyhold,” Cassandra commanded.

“Agreed,” Solas said and I glanced up at him. It was his turn to give me a cheeky smile and I just shook my head at him.

We found the path that led to Fairel’s tomb by the dwarven statues that stood at the entrance. The statues were detailed but they were not like the ones in the other tombs, these statues were different.

“Warrior Caste,” Varric commented.

“What?” Cassandra said to him curiously while she studied the tall, stone statue.

“A dwarven society mostly concerned with defending Orzammar's borders. Each Warrior caste house is sworn to a noble house, even the smallest noble house has a few warriors and the largest can have more than a dozen. If you look at the helmet, it has horns – Warrior caste,” he answered simply.
It always amazed me with really how much Varric new about Orzammar when he was what he called a ‘surfacer’.

“It is as I witnessed in the Fade,” Solas commented quietly from my side.

We made our way through the narrow, carved out path, between the rock. Finding more of the rock warrior statues as we went. *It would seem that this Fairel, was not a small noble.* Reaching the end, it opened up into a large basin with Dwarven ruins built into the rock walls surrounding the area in a semi-circle. Square in the middle of the basin, guarding the ground entrance to Fairel’s tomb was a large, non-moving mass that was unmistakably a dragon. From our distance, you could see the small puff of smoke with every breath and a soft snore could be heard. I scanned the area looking for a possible nest and thankfully, saw none.

We made our way towards the basin and my stomach twisted with knots of apprehension as what was a soft snoring sound before grew louder. *I hope this works.* Solas’ hand grasped mine while he silently conveyed his reassurance through our bond. We reached the bottom of the trail, and Cassandra’s eyes scanned the area. I stopped and surveyed the area with her and Bull; her voice quiet as she gave me her assessment.

“There is no way around her.”

I nodded in agreement with her evaluation, and I could feel Bull’s excitement radiating from his huge form. With a soft smile on my lips, I rested my hand on his forearm, drawing his attention.

“We are going to ask her to grant us passage Bull, not kill her.”

His eye stared down at me in shock as I heard Cassandra sputter beside me.

“Fenlin, that is not possible. You cannot just have a conversation with those creatures, it will kill you.”

I gave her a patient smile and shook my head in disagreement.

“It is possible, Cassandra. I learned the ability in the Fade. There were mages that knew the language and it has been lost to time and war,” I replied.

Her eyes narrowed, and I kept my face neutral since I was not lying, I just wasn’t telling her everything. I pressed on, ignoring Bull’s groan of frustration and disbelief that Sera shared with him.

“If it were not possible, do you honestly believe Solas would let me just walk right up to the giant creature to have a bloody chat?”

This seemed to give both Cassandra and Bull pause. Glancing over my shoulder at Solas, he gave me a tender smile before nodding his agreement with me.

Dorian chimed in angrily from behind me. Closing my eyes, I took a calming breath before turning to look at him as he ranted.

“Have you both lost your damn mind!”

Solas shook his head and held Dorian’s gaze steadily.

“We have not. She has the ability to speak with them Master Pavus, allow her to prove this skill to you.”
Dorian threw up his hands in disgust with him and stomped towards me.

“The only thing she is going to prove is how quickly she dies! This is madness…” he began, and I raised my hand stopping his tirade.

“Enough Dorian, you have voiced your concerns and I have heard them. You are worrying over nothing, trust me. Have I steered you wrong yet?”

Dorian’s mouth snapped shut and he shook his head no.

“Then it’s settled. Now excuse me, I have a dragon to convince to let us pass without roasting us.”

Solas bent and kissed my cheek, speaking softly.

“Be careful.”

I snorted and patted his arm, whispering for his ears only.

“You are completely okay with me talking with a dragon, but the other makes you want to confine me to Skyhold.”

He held my gaze with humor dancing in his eyes obviously not going to say anything.

“Ass,” I muttered walking away from him.

Solas’ soft chuckle carried on the breeze as I made my way towards the dragon.

“This is ridiculous,” Dorian injected watching her walk towards the dangerous creature.

“Ras’Salladin can get her to listen,” Cole said aloud.

Solas glanced at Cole uncomfortable with his use of her new name.

“Who is this Ras’Salladin you keep talking about? I am talking about Fenlin, the woman currently walking towards a damn dragon,” Dorian spat out angrily.

Cole turned his watery blue eyes on him and nodded.

“Yes, me too,” he answered calmly.

“What in the…” Dorian stopped as he finally understood what he meant and stared at Solas.

“Fenlin is Ras’Salladin.”

Solas let out a small sigh of annoyance with Cole but held Dorian’s gaze steadily.

“Yes,” he finally answered as the silence stretched on.

Everyone’s focus moved from Cole to Solas and he stood tall, ignoring their curious gazes as Cole spoke again.
Born of the brightest sun, a shadow of souls move as one, dancing in between what is past and what is present. Truly given as a gift to all, she brings hope.”

Solas finally understood how the spirits saw his mate and why they had named her this and felt a wealth of pride grow in his chest. Cole glanced at him and smiled while everyone stood confused about the meaning of Cole’s words.

“Could he get any more cryptic?” Bull remarked, rubbing his face.

“I can say what I mean without your understanding,” Cole remarked.

“Clearly,” Dorian replied turning back to watch Fenlin.

“Would you idiots shut up, I wanna see this,” Hawke said irritably making Cassandra snort in agreement.

“Yes, let’s watch our fearless leader get eaten by a bloody dragon,” Dorian snarked.

Hawke turned and glanced at him over her shoulder with annoyance.

“Dorian – for the love of the Maker. Her husband is standing right there saying she can do it and he is the most overprotective husband I’ve ever met next to Fenris. If he says she can do it, then I fucking believe that she can do it. Now shut your damn mouth so we can watch her do something that none of us have ever seen done before.”

Solas softly chuckled and Dorian glared at him as he tightened his lips together and watched with the others silently praying they weren’t wrong.

The closer I got to the sleeping dragon, the louder the snoring got, and the stronger smell of Sulphur permeated the air. *I really hope this wasn’t a bad idea.* The snoring stopped with my next step and I watched as a large yellow eye opened to gaze at me. I stopped and instantly bowed. Protocol’s, language flooded my thoughts as a guttural-sounding language flowed passed my lips and my ears heard a lilting tone with a lot of growling vowels.

“I humbly beg your forgiveness for my trespassing and disturbing your slumber, ancient one.”

The creature opened both eyes as I spoke and slowly raised its enormous head, studying me carefully.

“Come closer and tell me your name,” the dragon requested, and I moved from my bowed position of respect and walked fearlessly towards her.

I stopped less than a foot from her large head and felt the hot breath of the dragon ruffle the escaped hairs around my face.

“I am known by some as Ras’Salladin, but my given name is Fenlin.”

“Brave of you to give me your given name, mine is Amyntas. It has been many centuries since I have spoken with a creature such as you,” she took a deep breath, inhaling my scent and snorted, blowing smoke around my form. “Even longer since an immortal creature graced me with their presence. My kind had thought you all dead.”
I nodded my head in understanding and folding my arms behind my back, careful to keep my gestures respectful.

“Not dead, but asleep or imprisoned. My kind has lost their way and seek only war and death. My mate created the veil to keep them from destroying everything.”

The large creature stared at me for a moment, eyes narrowing just slightly.

“Desperate measures to keep those that were corrupt away, they must have been very troublesome for your kind.”

“There actions and dishonesty led to the fall of our kind, the choice to lock them away was not made lightly.”

The dragon tilted her head and studied me intently. The bright yellow of her gaze was penetrating and a bit unnerving. I held her stare and saw that her eyes held bursts of green and red within their depths and the sight reminded me of a nebula in space. Squaring my shoulders under the uncomfortable weight, I waited for her assessment.

“Rise and fall of creatures are inevitable,” she answered with a guttered trill in the depths of her throat. “You have come for a purpose to speak with me and show a respect that has been bereft of your kind for an age. Most times, they come to kill my kind, hunt my children and yet you have not. Tell me why you have come.”

I took a steadying breath before I explained our reason for being here.

“As a warning Amyntas. There is a creature that is half human and half blight infected. It comes to destroy everything in its path and controls a blight-infected dragon. Its goal is to tear the veil down and make itself a God. Its agents scour the area for what is hidden in that tomb behind you. I would ask that you allow me and my group to pass and retrieve what is hidden in that tomb, so this hideous creature cannot get its hands on it.”

The dragon slightly reared up and her enormous tail thumped against the ground with agitation.

“It enslaved one of my kind?”

The deep growl of anger was clear, and I nodded my head silently. The snort and smoke that surround me was uncomfortable as I stood my ground. One thing Mythal’s gift had given me was a thorough understanding of never showing a weakness in the creature’s eyes.

“You will fight this creature for your kind?”

“I will find this monster for all kind. What he plans cannot happen if we are all to live.”

She suddenly stood, and I backed up a couple of paces to give her room. The thrill of being this close to such an impressive creature still astounded me.

“Then you and your kind may pass unharmed. My kind will aid you when it is time for you to fight this abomination. You will share your blood with me, so we may communicate.”

Her offer was more than I could have ever hoped for and unflinchingly, I magically made a cut along the palm of my hand and held it out to her steadily.

“I would be honored to share with you my knowledge and to fight at your side.”
The dragon’s tongue darted over the wound and I don’t know what I expected. I thought perhaps her tongue would feel grainy like a cat’s tongue or slick like some snakes and realized it was neither. Though her tongue was indeed forked like some snakes it was a cross between soft and rough, not unlike a human’s tongue. What was astonishing was the magical caress over the wound when she was finished, sealing the cut and leaving my hand unmarked.

“It is done little one and it is I who is honored to have someone of your nature to fight for us. Gather your kind and finish what you have come to do, I will keep watch.”

Bowing towards her, I returned to the others smiling smugly at Dorian as I got closer. His arms crossed, he stared at me with annoyance.

“That was…” Hawke started then threw up her hands obviously still shocked. “Fucking amazing!”

“Most importantly here is will the creature allow us to pass?”

I nodded my head and smiled at her.

“Oh yes, and we now have some new allies to fight Corypheus.”

Cassandra’s surprised look made me giggle and I took my pack and staff back from Solas as he handed them to me.

“Come on Cassandra, we have an army and now we have the help of dragons to defeat that monster. Besides,” I said holding her gaze. “I can’t wait to see the look on that assholes face when dragons come to our aid.”

Bull’s deep laughter and understanding were enough to calm the others.

“Come on, she has offered to guard us while we search the tomb.”

Solas took the hand that I had used and kissed my palm while holding my gaze knowingly.

“You continue to surprise me, vhenan.”

I smiled at him impishly and batted my lashes at him.

“Wait till later handsome, I got another surprise instore for you,” I whispered with a hint of seductress in my tone.

The instant flash of desire through our bond filled me and I smiled at him knowingly.

“I shall bear that in mind,” he answered with a roguish tilt to his lips.

I pulled the key out of my pack and stared at it. It was a jigsaw puzzle of metal shards that made up the Everite key and it fit perfectly into the lock. My stomach was a tangled mess of excitement at what we could possibly find hidden inside. The door swung open as easily as the others and I followed Cassandra and Varric inside.

It was lit with the little windows like the others, the difference was the strong looking stone statue of Fairel himself. This one actually had armor encasing the stone form and a very large axe fit into the stone hands. The armor was unlike anything I had ever seen before, and I let out a surprised breath.
“Well, you don’t see that every day,” Varric commented glibly.

I stood at the foot of the statue and realized quickly what Corypheus was after. The runes that lined the axe where extremely rare and unseen in this time. One rune was for demons that shone like an emerald with a symbol etched into the middle, laden with lyrium. The next rune was a strength rune that resembled a ruby, the likes I had never seen before. This rune could make any creature unnaturally strong. The final rune was for a barrier, not unlike a mage’s. The solid sapphire blue rune, hummed waiting to be activated.

I looked at Cassandra with surprise.

“This is what he was after, these runes. If they fell into his hands, he would be almost impossible to kill.”

“I agree, what do you suggest?”

I looked at Varric now.

“Well, how many dwarves are we going to piss off if we take them?”

Varric laughed and shook his head at me.

“Sketch, if they get their smalls in a bunch because you kept this out of that asshole’s grasp, you send them to me.”

Everyone, including me, snorted and I nodded my head. Grasping the large axe, it slipped easily from the statues grasp. The surprising part was how light the axe actually was. I expected it to weigh a ton but surprisingly it weighed about the same as my staff and that was when I found the final rune that was unlike the others and it resembled a moonstone the size of a thumbprint. It was crafted to reduce the weight of the weapon, so the user could use it without tiring. I held it out to Solas and he shared my look of surprise as he passed it to Bull. The weapon made its way around before getting back to me.

“Come on guys, let’s close this place up and get back to camp. We leave early tomorrow.”

I carried the axe with one hand out of the tomb and glanced back at the statue and the room. Thank you Fairel for being as genius as you were.

It was easy to find Dorian in the Fade. His memories took him back to Minrathous, and a simpler time for him. The room I walked into held lush red carpets over buffed marble floors. Golden curtains hung from gilded rods around the windows that fluttered with a small warm breeze. The furniture was also golden toned with plump red pillows in the corners. I glanced around finding Dorian sitting in an armchair with his feet propped up on a cushioned ottoman while he read from a thick tomb.

“Hey there handsome,” I said teasingly.

Dorian’s lips quirked at the corner, and he closed his book looking at me with a raised eyebrow while his blue-grey eyes studied me carefully.
“Well if you are a Desire demon, you have taken the wrong form,” he teased laying his book down.

I laughed smiling at him cheekily.

“I believe I promised you an opportunity to watch me practice my skills with the transformation.”

Dorian rubbed his hands together excitedly.

“Yes, you did my dear.”

I held my hand out to him and Dorian instantly laced his fingers with mine.

“Well then, let’s get started, shall we?”

Raising my free hand, I changed the Fade around us to the field from my childhood that Solas and I used for my training. Dorian’s quick inhale and suddenly tightening of his fingers around mine was unsurprising.

“Breath Dorian,” I said softly teasing him.

“Andraste’s ass,” he replied breathlessly. “Easy for you to say beautiful but your magical power is a bit overwhelming.”

“If you would rather not Dorian,” I began leaving the ending open for him to decide.

“Nonsense don’t be absurd. I’ve waited for months to get answers to how you can do what you did that day and I will not be influenced by my silly nerves now.”

I giggled and squeezed his hand before letting him go and moving towards Solas.

“We cast an impenetrable barrier around the area first, so we are not found in the Fade by the others,” I explained as I raised my hands to cast the first layer.

“Others?” Dorian questioned quickly.

I gazed at Solas and saw his small nod before I looked at Dorian.

“Yes, others of our kind,” I answered honestly.

Dorian looked a little unsteady and Solas created a seat for him just as Dorian sat down. I could see that he was trying to puzzle it out.

“Elven mages that could shapeshift and use magic died out before the Imperium ruled over southern Thedas. They were considered Gods by the elven people,” he said with confusion.

“We were not Gods, just powerful mages,” Solas replied quickly before casting the last barrier over the area.

“We?” Dorian said his voice slightly unsteady.

“We,” I replied looking at him.

“That would make one of you or both of you extremely old,” he said looking at me and then Solas carefully.

“It would,” Solas replied with a small smirk.
Dorian’s eyes narrowed at him just slightly.

“And well preserved. Perhaps you will tell me the secret to keeping such healthy skin Solas, is it diet?”

I laughed and shook my head at him as I moved towards him and knelt, taking his hands within mine.

“Dorian, there is so much I want to tell you and so much that I cannot if I am to keep you and everyone else safe.”

Dorian’s eyebrow rose as he held my gaze.

“And what is there to keep me safe from?”

I nibbled at my lower lip and squeezed his hands as I started to explain.

“You met one that would wish me and Solas harm on our way to the Hissing Wastes.”

“So that creature didn’t just show up by accident, it came for the two of you, but why would it mean to harm you?”

I looked at him and worried my lip more with my unease and Solas laid his hand on my shoulder, our bond vibrating with his reassurance and Dorian looked from me to him and sat back.

“You can’t tell me.”

I shook my head and gripped his hands tightly.

“It’s a very long story and it’s not that I don’t trust you Dorian, I just can’t tell you yet.”

Dorian seemed to perk up at this.

“Yet…so you do intend to tell me at some point.”

Solas snorted drawing Dorian’s attention.

“Of course, we do, but for now there are some things that you should not be aware of until it is safe for you to do so.”

Standing back up, I stepped away from him smiling. It was such a relief to finally tell him.

“Well, I guess we should begin that practice before it is time for us to wake up.”

Dorian slapped his hands together and rubbed them briskly.

“Show me what you got.”

“Okay, but remember you wanted this.”

Solas started laughing at Dorian’s expression as I changed into my cat form.

“Andraste’s dimpled ass!” Dorian cried out with surprise.

I stood still as Dorian grew slowly comfortable with my change. He stood slowly and took a hesitant step towards me. Solas clapped him on the shoulder with a large grin on his face.
“She won’t bite – well, not much anyway,” he teased.

Dorian gave him a cross look before taking another step towards me.

“There is a heavy wave of magic that comes from her…is that – normal?”

Solas nodded his head yes and I suddenly felt like a test subject as Dorian began asking his million questions.

“When in the Fade, her power is amplified exponentially. In the waking world, it would not feel as it does now because of the veil.”

Dorian tapped his chin thoughtfully.

“And yet when I witnessed her change, her magic radiated from her in physical waves. It completely knocked Bull back ten feet.”

Solas nodded his head and folded his arms behind his back and I mentally groaned, realizing that they were going to discuss me as if I wasn’t standing right there.

“Fear was her motivation at the time. You know that fear for a magical being is a strong motivator and can be devastating for the mage at the time. It is when we are the most vulnerable to malevolent spirits.”

“True enough, so in this form,” he said gesturing at me absently. “She can heal and do things that in her elven form she cannot?”

Solas laughed and shook his head.

“She cannot yet, that is all. Once she has control over this aspect of her being, she will be able to heal in her elven form as well.”

I smacked Dorian on the back of his head with my tail and he turned to look at me.

“I’m right here you two,” I softly growled.

Solas chuckled while Dorian looked sheepish.

“I do apologize for ignoring you my dear, but it is all just so amazing what you can accomplish that other mages cannot.”

A different scent filled my senses that reminded me of the frozen cold of the void and I raised my head warily. Solas noticed the change in my posture and scanned the area.

“Vhenan,” he said softly, and a low growl emanated from my throat.

“We are being watched, I can – smell the void on them,” I answered.

I scanned my field as I spoke to Dorian.

“Dorian, we will have to continue this conversation some other time, it is time for all of us to wake up.”

“I’ll see you in camp.” he replied before he left my field.

Changing back to my elven form, I twined my fingers with Solas’.
“Nothing is ever easy is it?” I muttered in annoyance at the unwelcomed intrusion.

“No, it is not,” he replied kissing my fingers.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Fall had made its way to the Hinterlands and Frostbacks with what I thought was a blink, but I quickly realized that we had been gone for almost three months. Raj stood next to me and I absently ran my fingers through the fur around his ears while I enjoyed the beautiful, vibrant colors of the season. It was early yet, and I gazed out over the valley below soaking in the scene before the others woke and broke down the camp.

It is Harvestmere, or what I used to know as October and it felt dreamlike the way the valley was filled with a delicate mist. The bold flashes of color the sunshine kissed as it made its way over the mountains were almost shocking in contrast to the slow waking morning.

 Reds deeper than any rose and oranges brighter than the sun in the middle of day scattered playfully through the lush green foliage. The soft caress of mist over the valley made me think that it was blanketed with a shimmering silver quilt hiding a mystical world beneath its wispy tendrils. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath and for a moment I let my fears for the future evaporate as surely as the mist below would with the coming of the morning.

 My joy with the calm morning pulled him from our pallet and I kept my eyes closed and leaned back into him when his arms wrapped around me. The heat of his body warming me against the crisp morning air that smelled of rich earth and pine. My mouth curved at the corners with the soft press of his lips to my forehead and it was a perfect start to my day. Smiling gratefully for this moment that would forever be etched in my mind, I took another soothing breath.

 “We should reach Skyhold by dark,” he said softly, and I opened my eyes.

 Peering up at him, I gave him a teasing smile as I reached up and caressed his face.

 “Not soon enough as far as you’re concerned.”

 He softly huffed and kissed me. The angle of our faces as mine was looking up and his looking down was different, and totally heart-meltingly cute. A soft hum came from the back of my throat and the way his lips smiled over mine sent shivers and goosebumps to rush over my skin. When he lifted his head, I was a bit breathless and I could see the twinkle in his grey-blue eyes as they gazed at me tenderly.

 “I will not apologize for my desire to keep you safe.”

 I softly laughed and pressed a quick kiss to his chin.

 “Yes, of course, my love,” I said with a teasing lift of my lips.

 “Obstinate ass,” he said softly before kissing my temple taking away the sting of his words.
Laughing now, I nodded my head in agreement.

“Absolutely correct,” I replied.

The sound of a tent flap opening cut off anything further we would discuss as Cassandra emerged from her tent, rubbing her face tiredly.

“Good morning Cassandra, I made coffee.”

Her soft, still somewhat sleepy brown eyes glanced at me.

“Thank you, I believe I will need it this morning.”

Once Cassandra was awake, it was not much longer before everyone began milling around the camp and started breaking down tents and packing up to leave. Raj followed me to where the freed people were also packing up and some of them I noticed flinched at the sight of the large wolf. Sighing softly, I ruffled my fingers through his soft fur. Ignoring their nervous looks, I walked to where Fenris and Hawke stood, helping load one of the wagons.

“Are you guys ready to get back to real food and indoor plumbing?”

Hawke laughed and threw another pack into the back of the wagon where Fenris was busy stacking them.

“You bet your ass I’m ready. It will be nice to bathe in water above lukewarm or freezing and to sleep on a real bed.”

I laughed and nodded my head in agreement while glancing around the area at the others mulling around gathering their things.

“We’ll be ready to leave in five,” Hawke commented.

“Great,” I replied. Walking back to where my own tent was, I saw that Solas had already packed up everything and was talking with Dorian. Smiling at them, it was nice that their friendship had grown closer, especially with what happened while we were in the Fade. Solas at first was nervous about what Dorian had learned but Dorian had proved trustworthy and kept his questions for him quiet until they had moments they could speak privately.

The sound of the wagons taking off filled the air of the now clear area and I waved at Lace and Krem as they passed. Solas brought Inansha to me and smiling, lifted me up onto his back. Running my hand over his cheek, I bent down and kissed his lips briefly.

“Ar lath ma,” I whispered against his mouth before sitting back up.

His eyes skimmed over my body and rested on my lips, sending little shivers of excitement to dance over my skin.

“And I, you.”

“You two are disgusting, ugh. Com’on already,” Sera yelled out as she passed us.

Solas grinned at me before sliding on Siugen and we followed after the others.
The sun was setting behind the mountain just as we started across the bridge. Skyhold was breathtaking in the change of lighting. Solas’ relief was flooding our bond and I glanced at him curiously. He had yet to explain to me how he thought I would be safer here than anywhere else. It would be just as easy for the Forbidden or even Corypheus for that matter to come knocking down our door.

Master Dennet waited for us in the barn and Solas was beside me before I could dismount by myself and I sighed with irritation. He had been steadily hovering for three weeks now and it was getting irritating. I couldn’t even begin to imagine how much worse this was going to get with the next nine months. He returned my expression with a patient gaze as he pulled me down. Before I could say anything to him, Leliana was stepping from the shadows.

“Fenlin, there is something I must discuss with you before you retire to your chambers for the evening.”

Her expression told me nothing, and I nodded moving to grab my pack. Solas picked it up and I sent my irritation with his hovering buzzing through our bond.

“I will take this to our quarters and prepare a bath.”

His nonchalant attitude towards it all increased my irritation and I held his gaze steadily until he bent and pressed a kiss to my forehead before turning away. Oh, we are going to talk about this handsome. I watched him walk away for a moment before turning towards Leliana and followed the direction of her gesture.

We took the side entrance, through the kitchens into the castle. I smiled at Francois and Rayna as we passed, snitching a sticky bun on my way out the door. Rayna swatted at my hand, laughing while I took a bite out of the sweet, butter melting goodness of the treat.

We turned towards the dungeons and my eyebrow rose at Leliana curiously now and she spoke softly.

“It is empty and secure.”

What in the hell could be so important that we need complete secrecy? Unsure of what to think now, I followed her down the stairs and through the heavy, metal and wood made dungeon doors. I flicked my wrist and lit a few of the braziers, and Leliana finally stopped and looked at me.

“I have failed you, Fenlin.”

Taken aback with her statement, I looked at her in confusion.

“How?”

I watched Leliana swallow, her throat worked nervously, and I felt my stomach clench with her action. She never shows this kind of apprehension.

“Wycombe’s nobles have murdered every one of Clan Lavellan.”

I felt a numbing shock run through me as I stood frozen. Leliana held out the missive and I took it, scanning the report. The more I read the more my anger built.

“Everyone?”

“I believed that sending a few agents with Josephine’s diplomats to speak with Duke Antoine would
be enough to sway the Duke and his aggression towards the elves. We even sent twenty-five horses for them to use so they could leave Wycombe as you suggested. But I was wrong. Before negotiations were over, the Duke had dispatched a band of mercenaries to attack the elves.”

“But why?”

Leliana shook her head as she answered.

“His reasons are unclear. My agents are looking into it.”

“And the Duke?” I asked handing her the missive.

“Escaped.”

I rubbed my face as I thought of them dying just because I had chosen to use their name. The missive from one of her agents suspected that it was done as an attack towards the Inquisition. A direct attack towards me because they were my clan or so they believed they were. *They didn’t deserve that, they didn’t do anything to them.* Every particle of my being screamed for me to go to Wycombe and burn the whole bloody place down. Wrapping the darkness around me a loud sigh escaped, and I dropped my hands finally looking at her.

“Find him for me, Leliana. My clan…” I swallowed the growing lump in my throat. “My clan deserves justice for this.”

Leliana nodded sharply before turning on her heel and leaving the dungeon. I glanced around the room for a moment before following after her for my own room. Everything about the whole situation weighed heavily on me and I just couldn’t wrap my head around why the nobles would do it. I felt my darkness shredding as I tried to remain calm until I could reach my room.

I walked without seeing through the main keep and pulled open my door. Warding it absently, I trudged up the steps and every step felt heavier than the last. Each soft echo of footsteps drove home the deaths of all those elves who I didn’t even know. Solas waited for me in our room and when I glanced at him, he felt my pain as much as my face reflected it.

“The nobles of Wycombe murdered every one of Clan Lavellan because they believed them to be my clan.”

Saying the words aloud hit me like a boulder and before I could crumble into a heap on the floor, Solas was there, his arms wrapped around me tightly. The tears came quickly now that I was alone with him in our room. Wracking sobs shook me as I cried unable to fathom why…*to what purpose did killing all of them serve?*

“Why? I don’t understand what killing them accomplished.” I cried into his chest. "They didn't do anything."

The flow of steady compassion and love rushed through our bond bringing me a stability I needed badly. I knew he would have no answers for what had happened and for a long time, he just held me; soothing hands rubbing over my back, soft lips pressed against the top of my head whispering gentle words of comfort. My tears finally slowed, and I leaned away rubbing at my face. His hand gently cupped my chin and brought my gaze up.

“Come, I shall attend you while you bathe.”

I gave him a watery smile and caressed his cheek. *This is exactly what I need...just him and his calming strength.*
“I would like that.”

Taking my hand, he led me to the bathroom and with a careless flip of his hand, reheated the water before focusing on removing my armor. His nimble fingers slipped hooks free, undid buckles and before I knew it my chest plate was off, and he was rolling the chainmail over my shoulders and down over my hips. He pulled over my head the thin linen tunic I wore beneath my armor and peeled off my leggings. Surprisingly, he made quick work of my smalls and I stepped into the water with a soft moan of pleasure.

He rolled up his sleeves and I looked at him curiously.

“I know you said you would attend me while I bathe but I had hoped that meant you would be doing that from inside the bath.”

His smile was radiant as he pulled his own tunic off and slipped out of his leather breeches. I moved forward in the tub and he stepped in behind me. With one of his legs on each side of me, he began by washing my hair. His fingers were gentle yet firm as he worked soap in, massaging my scalp as he worked.

With the pitcher of water next to the bath, he rinsed the soap out of my hair. Braiding it, he slipped it over my shoulder to keep it out of his way. He lathered up a washcloth and washed from my neck to the base of my spine, his pleasure in this simple action vibrated through our bond even as it resonated from his aura. He worked the washcloth down one arm and then the other. Rinsing the soap off, he pulled me back into him and started washing my chest.

His hand moved the washcloth over my stomach and he stopped for a moment and the soft feel of his magic as it slipped through me made me smile as he moved on to wash my hips. It was curious this little magical touch he did with the small bean growing inside me. I could feel his wonder with the life we had created, and I began wondering if this was why he sent his magic to the unborn child. *Is this his way of reassuring himself that it is indeed there or is it something else entirely?*

“Yup, still pregnant,” I commented teasingly and heard his snort.

“I was making sure that our child did well on our journey back to Skyhold.”

Now it was my turn to snort and I tilted my head to look up at him.

“That is utter bullshit, my love.”

I had a knowing smirk on my lips as he looked at me, his cheeks slightly reddening with embarrassment before his eyes darted to the washcloth he held. Reaching up with my wet hand, I touched his cheek making him look at me.

“I love you.”

His head bent towards mine and our shared kiss was gentle. His forehead pressed against mine for a moment before he pulled his head back a bit and held my gaze.

“I never knew how much I wanted a child – our child, until the moment you told me. My life before you was dedicated to the people and bringing our heritage back. Then suddenly there was you and what was once not so difficult of a task, became a struggle to keep.”

I smiled and laid my head against his chest enjoying the vibration of his voice against my face.

“Everything about you called to me and the moment I thought you had perished in Haven was the
moment I no longer cared about our people. When you made your way back to me through the snow and freezing cold it was then I understood how much my life was missing and how you had filled the void inside of me. When you bonded with me, all the pieces that had been missing were no longer when your spirit joined with mine and I was finally complete.”

His hand slipped over my stomach and he glanced at it, his voice full of emotion.

“Now, I am to be a father, another gift I hadn't dared believe could happen and yet it has, and I still struggle in accepting that it is true. You are a gift that I believed I did not deserve and now you continue to fill my life with more than I ever thought possible. This is why I struggle with not being overbearing vhenan, I cannot survive without you.”

His warm gaze held mine and I swallowed the emotional lump in my throat at the sight of his tears of happiness. Leaning up, I wrapped my arms around his neck and pressed my lips to his.

“I never thought I would love someone as much as I love you,” I whispered against his lips and pressed another gentle kiss to their softness. “That still doesn’t mean I am going to let you lock me in my room.”

My gentle teasing provoked a soft chuckle from him and he held my gaze, eyes twinkling with joy, our bond humming with love.

“You will forgive me for continuing to try.”

Flicking water at him, I laughed and scooted away from him.

“No one would ever believe me if I told them how much of a sentimental romantic you are,” I teased. Picking up the washcloth and lathering it up I began washing his foot. "Come on handsome, let's finish up before we turn wrinkly.”

Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma - I love you
vhenan - my heart
Thank you, everyone, for your continued support. I hope you enjoy the update.

I woke with the soft press of his lips on my shoulder, and I stretched lazily, opening my eyes to the sunrise just peaking over the tips of the mountains. My heart still felt heavy with the loss of Clan Lavellan and the love he felt for me flowed through our shared bond just as his arm pulled me closer to him bringing me comfort.

I had cried my tears for their deaths, and the responsibility laid heavily on me. The part that hurt the most was that if Leliana had done what I asked her to do in the beginning, the clan would be alive and miles away from Wycombe. Solas’ hand caressed my stomach and I felt his subtle magic caress the small life we created pulling my thoughts away from what happened to the elves.

“It is not your burden to carry for what happened to them, vhenan.”

His quietly given statement broke the silence and I closed my eyes focusing on the subtle caress of his magic over our little bean.

“At the end of the day my love, it is my fault what happened to them because those I trusted to take care of it didn’t. You would feel no different,” I said softly glancing at him over my shoulder.

I knew he felt the same feeling when he thought about casting the Veil and the loss of our people. For him, it had been over a thousand years since the casting and sometimes through our bond, I could feel his loss as keen as if it was yesterday.

Our silence stretched on while his fingers continued caressing my stomach slowly. His aura caressed me, bathing me with his love. Our bond hummed with his feelings for me and my eyes started watering with how intense his emotions for me really were.

“After today, my advisors will either do what I tell them to or I am disbanding the Inquisition and we are leaving.”

I could feel his surprise through our bond with my softly spoken words.

“You would do that? What about Corypheus?”

I snorted and glanced at him over my shoulder.

“In a heartbeat and I would still track him down and kill him just without the backing of the Inquisition,” I replied simply. I smiled, holding his gaze tenderly. “It is what I have always planned to do once Corypheus is dead. Did you believe that I would continue being the Inquisitor once our goal was accomplished?”

“Actually, I was unsure what you had planned.”

I kissed the dimple in his chin and caressed his face affectionately.
“I never wanted this, my love, I have only done what I had to do because no one else could. Once Corypheus is dead, the reason for the founding of the Inquisition will be over. I honestly can’t wait for the day when I can relinquish the reigns back to the royals of Thedas. We have a duty to our own people, our family, and I cannot do that job if I am the Inquisitor.”

His soft mouth pressed against mine and a thrum of pleasure with my words flowed through our bond.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” he mouthed against my lips.

“Var bellanaris ma vhenan,” I whispered back, cupping his face.

Cassandra read the reports in horror and looked around the table understanding now why Leliana had requested her presence at the meeting.

“They are all dead? How did this happen?” She questioned and saw that Josephine twisted her fingers anxiously.

“Because I asked Leliana to allow my ambassadors one more chance before we resulted to violence.”

Cassandra stared at her for a moment in complete shock and then looked at Leliana.

“Was that what Fenlin wanted? Another chance at diplomacy between the elves and the nobles?”

“No, she asked that I protect the clan by any means necessary. Gather mounts and take them with my agents to the clan so that they could leave the area since their Halla were killed in the first attack.”

Cassandra rubbed her face and glanced at Cullen before looking between Leliana and Josephine. She already knew how Fenlin was going to react to this blatant disregard for her orders.

“Because you disobeyed a direct order from our Inquisitor, her entire family is now dead.”

“That was not my intention-” Josephine stuttered and Cassandra cut her off angrily.

“Enough!” She yelled at her. She couldn’t even begin to fathom how Fenlin was feeling. Cassandra knew that Fenlin was not close to her clan, her reasons were her own, but she would never have let them die…not like that.

I heard Cassandra’s angry shout through the thick wooden door and took a deep breath before pushing the door open to the war room. All conversation ceased as four pairs of eyes stared at me silently as Raj and I walked in. Standing in the doorway, Cassandra walked towards me and stood silently by me. I appreciated her silence as I glanced around and saw that Josephine fidgeted with her clipboard, Cullen busily studied the map and only Leliana held my angry gaze. Well, okay then. If they think I am going to just brush this under the fucking rug, they are mistaken.

I closed the door quietly behind me and walked towards the table where Raj instantly laid underneath it. I hated confrontation, with a passion, but people were dead because of this glorious fuck up that
never should have happened. Placing my hands on the thick wooden table, my eyes took in the markers in areas where Inquisition camps were, and I took a steadying breath before pushing off of the surface.

“When I spoke with my Spymaster about Wycombe and the problems the Dalish were having with the Nobility there, we had a sound plan,” I began glancing at each of them carefully. “Secure and protect the clan, assist them with moving away from the self-intitled tits until we could discover what was really at the root of the issue. I believed this route would save lives on both sides.”

My gaze held Cullen’s for a moment and then fell to Josephine.

“Instead of doing what I asked, you chose diplomacy was a better option.”

I saw Josephine swallow nervously while straightening her papers.

“Inquisitor, I am deeply sorry for the loss of your…”

I brought my hand up quickly stopping her as I tried to control my temper. I didn’t want her apologies or condolences right now because nothing she could say would right the grievous wrong that had been done to them.

“The nobles of Wycombe had already proven that diplomacy was not going to work for them with their continued harassment of the elves and you knew this.”

I heard Josephine clear her throat and I slightly shook my head, rubbing my forehead trying to gather my slipping composure.

“I thought it best that we make one last effort to establish a relationship with Wycombe.”

My composure snapped as I heard her words echoing in my head. I thought it best…

“It was not your decision to make,” I snarled at her.

Josephine flinched with my angry tone and the papers on the table scattered and flew from the surface, falling to the floor with the volatile expansion of my aura. The room was deathly silent except for the sounds of falling paper and my ragged breaths for control. Every fiber of my being wanted to scream at them that the elves died from their negligence and disregard.

“I never wanted this fucking job. The responsibility of making decisions that held the delicate balance of life or death, but now, I must stomach the horror of knowing that they are dead – all of them, because you chose to not listen to me. Because you made a decision that was not yours to make. It is me who will bear that burden knowing they died for your fucking diplomacy.”

Cassandra stood silently beside me as my gaze moved to Leliana and held.

“You said you failed me and you were right, you failed me by not following my orders in the first place and now the Duke, responsible for this massacre, is missing. You will never do this again and you will find him and bring him here.”

I saw her flinch with my cold words but nod with understanding and I glanced around at all of them angrily.

“With your actions, you have shown me that my choices matter little to you and I will not tolerate that. Against my better judgement, I accepted this position as each of you agreed with Cassandra that it was for the best. I go out there every day and fight for the people. All the people, not just mine,” I
said angrily looking at them. “I watch good men and women die for me, for us, for this cause because it must be done. So, when I give an order for something to be done, my expectation is that it will be carried out exactly as requested, not second-guessed and dismissed. If any of you are unwilling to accept this, then I will disband the Inquisition now and hunt Corypheus on my own. Are we clear?”

I heard Cassandra’s small intake of breath with my threat as the others quietly agreed with me and I took a deep breath and wove my darkness around the emotions that burned through my stomach. You still have a job to do girl, and with that thought, I squared my shoulders, ignoring Josephine’s silent tears of remorse and turned towards Leliana.

“Do we have any idea what Corypheus is up to or where he is?”

Leliana slid a few missives in my direction and I looked them over as she summarized what was on them.

“It appears that he is still ransacking elven ruins and we still do not know what it is he seeks. His agents have been scrambling since the blow you dealt him in the Hissing Wastes and appear to be congregating to a location in the Frostback Basin. I will have more reports by this evening.”

I nodded my head in understanding and slid the missives back towards her. I knew what he searched for and prayed he would not find another foci.

“Fine, you can give us a report in the morning of your findings. Now if everyone will excuse me, I have paperwork and correspondence waiting to be finished.”

I motioned for Raj to follow and left the war room with Cassandra following quietly behind me. Right now, I just needed to bury myself in work. I felt Cassandra’s hand fall to my shoulder and I glanced up at her.

“If you need me,” she said softly leaving it open and I nodded at her.

“Thank you.”

I watched her walk away down the corridor, grateful for her quiet friendship and took a steadying breath before heading for my room. I don’t ever want another day like this again.

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My new desk of wood and granite was littered with stacks of paperwork. My completed stack looked tiny compared to the mounds of work to be done. My eyes drifted towards the stack of reports on what happened in Wycombe and I closed my eyes. No, not yet. I grabbed another stack of reports and pulled them towards me instead.

When we had gotten back, I hadn’t really taken the time to look at the new furniture Josephine had acquired for us. My uncontrolled outburst of magic had devastated the previous furniture making our upgrade inevitable, but to my amusement, we had not been wrong with our earlier assumption. Our furniture was now a blend of stone and wood.

The bed frame was beautiful and simple, made from an almost black stone. The four posts were smooth, with no carving, and our original red daylight curtain adorned the stone canopy. Our armoire is a rich, dark mahogany, and much larger than our previous one and I smiled thinking about his things hanging next to mine.

This is not getting my work done.
Sighing, I focused back on the reports in front of me, chewing on the edge of my lip while I read about the progress in the Hinterlands. The soft caress of Solas’ aura greeted me before I heard the door open at the bottom of the stairs. I felt the small flare of familiar magic as he warded the door while I continued to read the report about a dragon sighting in the Hinterlands. I glanced up when he crested the top stair and saw the platter he carried and smiled.

Moving out from behind my desk as he set it down, his eyes scanned me with concern. There was a worry in the grey-blue depths and I felt his concern for my wellbeing flow through our bond from him. I gave him a gentle smile, stepping towards him for our greeting. His hands slipped around my waist and pulled me into him and my hands laid against his chest just as his head bent towards mine. The soft press of his lips to mine was nice and the normal feeling of butterflies buzzed through me with the gentle kiss. His quiet strength bolstered my frayed emotions.

“I thought if I brought our lunch, you would take a break from your work and share it with me.”

His subtle way of reminding me that it was lunchtime was shrouded in trickery. Even as he tried to make me think his maneuvering was to share a simple meal with me, it was, in fact, his way of getting me to eat more and just the thought of it made me smile. His want to take care of me is in a way adorably frustrating. Desiring to poke him a bit, I bit the inside of my cheek to keep the mischievous smile from forming as I glanced at the tray.

“But I just ate two hours ago.”

His arms slightly tightened around me and I pressed my face into his chest to hide my smile when I heard him take a small breath for patience.

“You ate two pieces of cheese and three apple slices. That hardly compares to a sustaining meal for you or our child.”

Damn, he is definitely keeping track of what I do. I glanced up at him, exposing my cheeky smile and he saw the teasing lift of my lips as I sent a subtle poke of my aura into his and shook his head at me.

“Why must you do that?” His expression of exasperation made me softly laugh.

“Because you are absolutely adorable when you are frustrated,” I replied without hesitation.

He kissed my forehead then turned me towards the tray and gave me a gentle shove.

“Stop with your obstinence and sit down.”

I sat down with a large smile on my face while he prepared two plates with fresh bread, roasted chicken, and what appeared to also be roasted potatoes and carrots. It all smelled wonderful, and my smile grew when I saw the cluster of tiny cakes on a plate for dessert.

“I should have known you would come completely prepared with a bribe.”

His knowing smile was my answer and I took the plate he held out for me and immediately tucked into my lunch while he poured us some water.

“Were Leliana’s agents able to gather more information on Corypheus’ whereabouts?”

I shook my head, finishing chewing before answering him as he took a bite of his own lunch.

“Not yet. The only information that she has gathered is that the Venatori are heading towards the
We ate in silence and when I finished, he smiled pleased at me for eating everything, including two tiny cakes and pulled me to his side. My eyes felt heavy after eating all that food and the steady sound of his heartbeat only made them heavier. Covering a yawn that Solas clearly did not miss, he laid out on the couch and pulled me with him.

Cuddling into him, I yawned again and snorted.

“Did you put something in the food to make me suddenly tired?”

The soft vibration of his laughter beneath my cheek tickled my senses and I curled into him even more even as his arms slightly tighten around me.

“No vhenan, I did not. Perhaps a small nap is what you need?”

I couldn’t argue with him about that since I couldn’t seem to keep my eyes open.

“You might be right,” I softly mumbled and felt his lips press against the top of my head.

“Then sleep vhenan, I will wake you in a few hours.”

I mumbled something that sounded like an agreement before exhaustion claimed me.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you, my heart
Var bellanaris ma vhenan - for eternity my heart
Thank's everyone for your continued support. You guys are the best!

A wonderful friend of mine, Margalahan, drew a quick Fenlin just for giggles and it turned out fabulous. Heres hoping this link works. If not you may also find it on my Tumblr at https://theallknowingo.z.tumblr.com/image/176074301216. Also, you can follow my friends work on Tumbler at https://morgalahanz.tumblr.com/
Solas leaned against the wall, watching her braid her hair to prepare for traveling to the Frostback Basin. His eyes followed the simple movements of her fingers thinking about their earlier disagreement. They had disagreed for hours before she had given him a choice to stay in Skyhold or go. Even now it made him want to grind his teeth with her idea of a choice. That was no choice, he would never let her travel without him. His eyes narrowed on Andruil’s dagger while she strapped it to her thigh. He wished she wouldn’t wear the dagger that only reminded him of what transpired that day.

He knew why she wore it and the thought of her confronting Andruil now made him uneasy. Fenlin was strong, capable of handling herself but she was also his falon’saota and i’var’linem. Rubbing his
face as if to scrub the thought away, he glanced out the window at the Frostbacks embracing the morning.

“So, tell me, will you be brooding the whole trip?”

Her voice snapped him out of his own thoughts and he saw her gazing at him through the mirror's reflection. Her soft, amber eyes pulled him in as he held her stare. It was like a warm honey that held him captive, drowning him within its warmth and took a small breath to brace himself for the impact.

“It is not brooding, it is internal reflection and contemplation.”

He heard her loud sigh from across the room and folded his arms behind him. His lips twitched at the corners with the sound of her soft groan at seeing the action.

“Mythal’s mercy, do not start this argument again,” she said turning away from the mirror to look at him.

His eyebrow came up, and he took a calming breath wishing she would listen to reason. She could be so stubborn when she thought he was trying to control her actions when he was only trying to keep her and their child safe. He walked towards her feeling her frustration vibrate through their bond.

“It is not my wish to argue with you, vhenan. I only wish for you to consider the danger you put yourself in.”

He saw a flicker of something in her eyes that gave him a breath of hope when she looked at him and then nodded her head in understanding. Her hands pressed against his chest and everything about her soothed him with her tender gesture.

“I am considering the danger and I recognize my limitations, Solas. Can't we find a compromise somewhere? I mean, you can’t keep me hidden and I can’t travel and close rifts much longer. So, will you meet me half-way?”

He knew she meant what she said and that she would agree to a compromise if they could find one. He also couldn’t keep her hidden but his need to protect her was deep-seated in him and he wouldn’t ignore it any more than he would stop breathing.

“What do you suggest then, vhenan?”

The way she was smiling up at him sent licks of flame dancing along his senses and he wrapped his arms around her, pulling her closer to him. He watched the way her fingers wrapped around his pendant as she spoke staring at it.

“Well, it will be winter soon and if need be, I can always send Bull and his Chargers out to handle situations if any arise. My suggestion is to finish closing rifts and find out what the Venatori are doing in the basin. Return to Skyhold and wait for our baby to come in the spring. What do you think?”

She looked up at him and it was a means of meeting him half-way. Solas thought about how long they would stay in the basin. What he didn't like was her being so far along in her pregnancy while out in the field, but he agreed to her suggestion. There was no other option short of keeping her in Skyhold and he already knew she would not allow it.

“On the condition should anything change with you or the baby, you will tell me.”
She pulled on his pendant, beckoning him closer while smiling up at him. Such actions always sent lightning racing over his skin.

“That's a deal now kiss me handsome and seal our agreement.”

He chuckled and pressed his lips against hers feeling the instant rush of desire flow through his blood.

***

We rode closer to the Fallow Mire and my stomach rolled with the rancid smell.

“It is not much further to the pass that will lead to the Basin,” Amund said from his place riding next to Bull.

“Maker, it smells none better than it did the last time we were here,” Dorian exclaimed. Pulling out a handkerchief, he covered his nose. My stomach rolled and my mouth watered in warning.

Shit

I dropped from the Hart just before my stomach gave up my breakfast. Solas' hands were on my back as I heaved, his magic soothing me and my humiliation. Well, it was a good run while it lasted. I had experienced no morning sickness symptoms until now.

Cassandra slipped from her mount, pulling her canteen and walked towards us. Wiping at my mouth, she uncapped it and held it out.

“Are you not feeling well Fenlin?”

I rinsed my mouth out and handed the canteen back to her.

“The smell just hit me wrong is all.”

Technically not a lie and I was proud of how convincing it sounded, now if only my expression didn’t betray me. I sighed in relief when Cassandra clasped my shoulder and nodded her head in understanding.

“It smells dreadful, but we will not be in it for long.”

Solas helped me back onto Inansha before mounting Siugen. His worry flowing through me and I gave him a reassuring smile before squeezing my knees urging Inansha forward.

***

Bull stood next to me while he brushed his mount and I noticed his constant curious glances. I continued brushing Inansha when I heard Bull’s heavy sigh. Glancing at him over my shoulder, my expression full of confusion while watching him run his hand over his face for the third time before looking at me.

“Boss?”

I tilted my head unsure of what he would say. His whole body shouted that something was wrong.

“Yes?”

Bull held my stare for a moment before he shook his large head.
“Fenlin, we need to talk.”

I smiled at him and cocked my head curiously. The Qunari’s whole attitude right now was not like him. Normally he said what was on his mind, not all this dancing around.

“Okay, what about?”

"About you being pregnant."

*Oh my God, how could he know?* I felt the blood drain from my face.

“How…” I stuttered.

“Your scent changed, so did your body language. You unconsciously protect your middle now. I noticed it when we were in the Hissing Wastes and put two and two together. Does Solas know?”

I nodded my head unable to speak. *Am I covering my stomach? Can he smell it? What the fuck.*

“Why didn’t you want to tell us?”

I stared up at him with an eyebrow raised. *Is he serious?*

“That’s a real question?” I snorted and held his grey stare. “I already have one overprotective mate, I don’t need a pack of them dogging me, telling me what I can and cannot do.”

They could hear Bull’s sudden bark of laughter through the camp just before he slipped his arm around my shoulder, pulling me into his side.

"Come on, we aren't all that bad."

His comment made me snort again, my look full of disbelief clear.

"Okay, well maybe some of us are like that."

"Yeah, okay, sure, there's just two like that." I rolled my eyes at him and Bull chuckled against my side. "I don't want to tell anyone yet Bull."

He stopped and looked down at me, his grey eye studying me before nodding his head in agreement.

"Okay boss but you can't hide it from everybody for too long."

"I know, I'm just not ready yet."

***

We arrived at the Inquisitions main camp where Lace was waiting. A tall man with sandy brown hair stood next to her bent over a large ledger writing something down. Glancing around the camp some of the freed slaves from the Hissing Wastes milled about behind us. Smiling, Lace grasped my arm in greeting when I got closer.

“Good to see you Fenlin. Allow me to introduce you to Professor Bram Kenric. We believe he is the reason the Venatori are out here.”

Professor Kenric stood glancing at me.

“This is the Inquisitor?”
Lace nodded her head, and I smiled, holding my hand towards him.

“That’s what they tell me,” I teased.

Grasping my hand, he nodded his head towards me.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Your Worship.”

My face grimaced at the name and Lace laughed.

“Just call me Fenlin, please. I don’t like all the titles.”

He let my hand go with a chuckled.

“As you wish, I am a teacher with the University of Orlais, taking advantage of an exchange program from Starkhaven. While in Val Royeaux, I came across something incredible.” He rubbed his hands together before turning and picking up his ledger. “After eight hundred years, we may have found the final resting place of the last Inquisitor.”

My brow furrowed in confusion.

“But all the books I read about the last Inquisitor said he was a well-known dragon hunter and vanished during his last expedition.”

Kenric nodded his head in agreement and folded his arms.

“Yes, precisely. So, you have read Letrec’s *Precursors to the Chantry.*”

“Not willingly,” I replied with a smirk.

“Inquisitor Ameridan stepped down before the Nevarran Accord brought the Seekers of Truth into the Chantry. What we know of him is that he hunted demons, and dangerous apostates in a time before Templars even existed.”

“But this doesn’t explain why the Venatori is here.”

“Perhaps he carried an artifact like the one we found in Fairel’s tomb,” Dorian suggested.

*There has to be a connection somewhere.* Shrugging my shoulders in confusion, I nodded my head in agreement.

“You might be right, Dorian.” I looked at Kenric and held my hand out for his ledger. Scanning over his writing about what he had found, I studied the small maps and diagrams he had made. “Well, if the last Inquisitor has been missing for over eight hundred years, I suppose it is only right that the current Inquisitor finds him.”

Kenric gave me a large smile.

“Excellent. Your scouts have gathered artifacts from the area. They may help us discover What Inquisitor Ameridan was doing here.”

Lace stepped forward and held a map towards me.

“Also, we’ve encountered hostile Avvar to the north. They call themselves the Jaws of Hakkon. They attack any Inquisition agent or researcher who gets too close to them. We’ve sent soldiers for defense, but the Hakkonites are cunning, merciless, and know the Basin better than we
I turned at the sound of the normally quiet Amund, growling with a snarl on his lips.

“Hakkonites,” he sneered and then spat on the ground in disgust.

My eyebrow came up with the action and I waited to see if he would say any more, but, he kept quiet.

“There is also an Avvar hold to the east. Unlike the Jaws of Hakkon, they’ve been friendly so far.”

With a sharp nod, I gripped her arm and Amund stepped closer.

“We must visit with Svarah Sun-hair, the Thane of Stone-Bear Hold to offer our respect in the morning. I believe she will have information that will help you in your search.”

I smiled tiredly.

“Sounds good. Dinner also sounds good,” I joked pulling a rare smile from the large man.

“Aye, me too,” he replied clapping my shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Falon’saota - bond mate
I’var’linem - pregnant
vhenan - my heart
Thank you, everyone, for your continued support with my story. This whole process has been such a ride and you guys have made it a great one.

Svarah Sun-hair was not what I expected. She was welcoming, and straight to the point, unlike the one standing next to her in black and white-ash covered armor. His helmet had long horns built into it that went wide before curling inward and down towards his chest. I heard Bull snort from beside me and I glanced up at him.

"Wannabe," he muttered making me chuckle.

Amund led the way towards the dais that the Thane of Strong-Bear Hold stood on and the games that were taking place to the right of me caught my attention and I stopped to watch.

Two men, verbally goading each other, are rock climbing, racing for the top while a crowd below cheered or from some, heckled the two on. Amund noticed that I had stopped and followed my gaze to what had caught my attention.

"The Thane has chosen a test of strength to settle a dispute between the two warriors."

I glanced up at him confused.

"That is a test?"

Amund nodded sharply before leading us the rest of the way. Okay then, not a game. As we approached, I overheard the large, horned warrior mock the test.

"Your climbers seem tired Thane. How does your hold fair in hunting this season? Is your hold-beast well?"

What a condescending prick. I didn’t miss the tightening of the woman’s jaw, nor the narrowing of her eyes as she glanced at the warrior beside her.

"We hunt as well as ever, Thane Harofsen."

Her clipped tone kinda made me smile.

"You would be safer behind the shield with the Jaws of Hakkon."

Ah, that’s what this asshole is-a Hakkonite. Figures.

Thane Sun-Hair ignored the other Thane as one climber reached the top before the other and she loudly pronounced his victory to the crowd.

"Haskle Fisherson has taken the victory in view of the Lady of the Skies. Pav you owe four rams to Haskle, not three, and you will hand them over by morning. Now lift your arms and give thanks to
the Lady of the Skies.”

I watched Thane Harofsen glance at Thane Sun-Hair with a smirk on his face as he spoke with false politeness.

“May your hold be as strong as your hold-beast.”

Thane Sun-Hair glanced at him and for a moment and I could see she was studying him carefully. I wonder what she is looking for—because something is clearly up between the two Thane’s. Thane Sun-Hair nodded sharply at him and finally acknowledge our presence.

“Welcome to Stone-Bear Hold, Inquisitor. You may have guest welcome while you are here.”

The loud snort from Thane Harofsen drew my attention and Amund calmly maneuvered closer towards me. The gesture was nice; however, I had woken up feeling nauseous and a bit irritable, so any excuse to slap the stupid out of someone was a welcoming idea.

“You would give these Lowlander’s guest welcome?” He spat on the ground as if the thought left a bitter taste in his mouth. “They would have all of us buried beneath their blades at the first opportunity.”

Perhaps Thane Harofsen, the Inquisitor will begin with you,” she replied with a slight tilt of her lip at the edge. Thane Harofsen’s gaze narrowed on me before waving his arm dismissively and stepping from the dais. Thane Sun-Hair turned to look at me and I could see the small glimpse of mischief dancing in her light-brown gaze.

I smiled at her and held my arm out to her for the greeting that Amund taught me. The instant recognition and the smile that grew on Thane Sun-Hair’s face is welcoming as she grasped my arm and squeezed it in return.

“It is good to meet Lowlanders with manners.”

I chuckled as I held her gaze.

“I had a great teacher,” I told her glancing at Amund.

Thane Sun-Hair glanced at Amund and smiled before gesturing to follow her. We entered an open cave and there was a large, stone-built fire pit in the center with benches surrounding it. At the head of all this, against the wall of the cave, sat a large throne covered in tanned animal leathers, feathers and different beads and bobbles. On one side I even noticed there were small bird skeletons strung together and tied with leather straps to it.

She gestured for us to sit around the fire and I gave her a grateful smile as she moved to sit on her throne. Amund knelt at her knee and bent his large upper body over with respect. I was always curious how Amund would interact with his own kind and watching him now, it certainly began sinking in how great of an honor it truly was to have him amongst us.

“Thane Sun-Hair, The Lady of the Skies brought me to these Lowlanders who showed great respect and honor in a fight with Chief Movran’s son, Korth. There Inquisitor showed respect to our ways by fighting in single combat and defeating the selfish whelp as he demanded. She then showed respect again for the Avvar when confronted by Chief Movran, who by right, smacked their holdings with goat’s blood. Instead of taking offense with his action, she armed him and his clan. Aiding them in their journey to Tevinter and allowing them to go where their skills in battle could be tested.”

I snorted as I recalled the flying goats and everyone around the fire quietly chuckled. I listened to
Amund recant what happened in the Fallow Mire surprised with what he said. One, I didn't realize he would need to retell my story on how we met. Two, I think this is the most I have ever heard him say in one sitting.

Thane Sun-Hair grasped him around the neck and leaned forward, pressing her forehead to Amund’s. The action was peaceful and conveyed an understanding and respect for one another. There was so much about the culture that I wanted to understand.

“I would not have expected less from you Amund Yolfsgen. You have never thoughtlessly followed another, and it is good you have returned. The Lady of the Skies knew I had need of you and your skills.”

She released Amund, and he stood, moving to sit in the seat she gestured to that was next to her before looking at me.

“You and your people have come far from the safety of your Lowlands. I am Svarah Sun-Hare, Thane of Stone-Bear Hold. The Lowlanders have little love for your Dalish clans. I am impressed that you came to lead their Inquisition.”

I chuckled and recalled the first day I woke up in Thedas and glanced at Cassandra with a smile not caring she assumed I was Dalish. It can’t be helped, an elf is an elf to everyone.

“I am Fenlin Lavellan. My journey to becoming the leader has been a long and arduous one.” My eyes fell on Solas and my heart double beat in my chest as a swell of emotion rose in me as he held my gaze for the brief moment. “But worth every step.” I turned my gaze back to Svarah and nodded. “And yes, you are correct, we have traveled far from our home. There is much I would like to talk with you about to explain why we came.”

Svarah leaned forward and tented her fingers, listening to me patiently.

“First, we learned that Venatori were gathering here, for what purpose we didn't know. We intercepted them in the Hissing Wastes where they were searching for a relic that an ancient Dwarven house owned. The artifact turnout to be a weapon, an ax that was unlike any other. The weapon is as big as Amund’s maul and light as my staff, stronger than any metal we’ve ever encountered before, and bore runes in the handle that could make the wielder of such a weapon almost unstoppable.”

Svarah’s eyes grew wide with my information and she looked to Amund for verification.

“It is true, I have held this weapon. It is truly a marvel of ingenuity and craftsmanship.”

She looked back at me, silently pushing for me to continue.

“Now we are here and my scouts met a Professor Kenric from Orlais who believes he has found a lead on the first Inquisitors final resting place. His research points to here in the Frostback Basin, and with that possibility, I do not believe it is a coincidence that the Venatori has come here as well.”

Svarah nodded her head in agreement while I continued.

“Perhaps Inquisitor Ameridan carried an artifact like the one we found in the Hissing Wastes? I am unsure but since I am now the current Inquisitor, it is my duty to bring his remains home if we can recover them.”

My lips flattened with disgust and anger as I thought about the Venatori and the slaves we had freed already expecting to find more of her kind locked in cages.
“It is also my personal promise to my people to remove any Venatori threat that thinks enslaving my kind is for the betterment of Tevinter.”

Svarah nodded sharply and leaned back with a small tilt at the corners of her mouth.

“Giving peace to the dead is a worthy cause,” she said after a moment of silence. “I have never encountered your kind before but from what you have shown me, you are not a weak race. You have a fire in you that I can see and I respect that. Any help we can offer is yours.”

I gratefully smiled with her off and she leaned forward again.

“ Sadly, the Jaws of Hakkon will not offer so warm a welcome. You have met their Thane, Gurd Harofsen. I’ll wager that in your search you will cross blades with them while searching the wilderness. If you would search this place for these Venatori and your Inquisitors body, they will want you to pay in blood.”

I nodded my head in understanding.

“Not much for negotiating, are they?” I commented dryly and shrugged. “That’s okay, the Venatori aren’t big on talking either and with their kind I prefer action over words. I get the impression that I will feel the same towards the Hakkonites.”

I stood with Svarah as we laughed together and grasping my arm, she closed our meeting.

“Take shelter in our camp tonight, Inquisitor. We shall hold a celebration with your arrival to our Hold. The Lady of the Skies has brought you here for a purpose and we will show her our respects with a feast in her honor.”

With my thanks given, I turned to leave and Amund looked at me, his brown eyes holding a question and I knew he wanted to stay and talk more with Svarah but he would never ask. I pressed my hand to his arm and smiled up at him.

“Stay Amund and relax around your people for a change. God’s know you are probably tired of mine,” I teased and saw his small smirk before he bowed his head towards me.

I left the cave and glanced around at the clan of Avvar. They were human for sure, but they are built like mini giants. A young Avvar woman stepped forward, and I held my arm out to her in greeting.

“Howdy Lowlander, I am Sören,” she said with a large smile taking my arm. “I will show you and your people to the cabins you may use for your stay.”

I nodded and followed her.

“After she shows us where we are staying, we need to get word back to the others at the main camp.”

Cassandra nodded her head in agreement and we followed a path down closer to the water’s edge where the cabins sat, separated from the main camp.

The cabins are made from roughly hewn wood, seasoned by the briny air and I am pleased that they were spotless. Solas and I took the smallest one, closest to the water, and further from the others so we could be alone. It was one thing to travel together and have no choice, but when a choice could be made? Yeah.

I glanced around the small room with a fireplace and while I leaned my staff against the wall, Solas
made quick work on lighting us a fire. The room boasted a medium-sized pallet with rolled furs and a few candles on the small table next to the pallet. All in all, the cabin is quite cozy and would be a nice reprieve from sleeping in a tent. A yawn tried to escape and I covered it quickly.

The taste of the ocean air on my tongue as it moved crisply over my senses was pleasant and I turned towards one of the small windows the cabin boasted that faced the sea. Grey, choppy water rushed the rocks shooting seaspray into the air for the breeze to carry ashore. I suddenly yawned watching the tranquil scene not realizing just how tired I was until then. I have never experienced the type of tired that just came over me suddenly, and I yawned again. Solas’ hands slipped around my waist and pulled me back into him and I closed my eyes as I felt the press of his soft lips against my temple.

“Lie down with me for a while?”

Through my closed eyes, I focused on the hum of joy that flowed from him to me. There was such a kaleidoscope of colors that shimmered around me with his affection.

“I could be persuaded to do that,” I commented. The soft thrum of pleasure expanded and flowed from him to me, warming me against the small chill still in the air.

He wordlessly took my hand and led me towards our pallet. His nimble fingers made quick work of my armor and yawning again, I realized I was standing in nothing but a tunic and smalls now and a small snort escaped drawing his attention. He peered at me with his eyebrow raised questioningly. I noticed that from where he stood removing his own armor, he was not as quick with his own as he was with mine and I gestured towards myself with a small grin.

“I close my eyes and yawn for one second and I am suddenly in sleepwear.”

He chuckled and returned his attention to removing his own armor as he replied. “Your weariness beats at me, vhenan.”

I groaned, fighting another yawn. “And here I thought it was because you wanted to get me naked,” I teased.

Solas removed the last of his armor and pulled his tunic off, exposing the expansion of toned stomach and my pulse raced.

“Ah, so you believe my only motivations for undressing you be to make love?”

He folded his tunic and placed it on the small table and I smiled at him, stepping closer, wrapping my fingers around the leather strap of his pendant when he turned towards me.

“A girl can hope, can’t she?” I replied gazing up at him through my lashes all thoughts of sleep gone with the feel of his soft skin beneath my fingers.

His deep laughter vibrated around me and I pressed a kiss to his bare chest. He slipped a hand beneath my chin, tilting it up so he could hold my gaze. The deep, smokey-blue color of his eyes reminded me of the choppy waters that beat against the rocks outside.

“You need not hope vhenan, I am yours to command as you wish.”

Oh, he is smooth.

“Well hot damn, that's what your mate wanted to hear."
His lips pressed against my smiling ones and I wrapped my arms around his neck while he pulled me just that millimeter closer, provoking my body to melt against him. His tongue slid seductively over mine and my body vibrated with a need that only he could fill.

"Take me to bed wolf, I have a better idea than this so-called nap you suggested," I whispered against his lips before nipping at the bottom one to make my point.

His soft moan filled me with anticipation as he bent and swept me up into his arms.

Solas slipped his right arm beneath her knees and lifted her, cradling her to his chest.

"Ma nuvenin," he breathed along the skin of her neck before laying her down on the firs.

Fenlin’s fingers slipped down his chest and lightly pushed him to lie on his back as he watched her eyes shine with mischief when they gazed at him. A thick, warm desire flowed from her filling him as it ignited sparks of excitement through his aura. Everything about her ignited a burn of desire and his edhis grew even as his heart raced when she straddled him, pulling her tunic over her head.

Her dark hair fell around her while he studied the small changes he could see in her body even as his pulse thumped in double time with her nudity.

Her breasts were slightly fuller, and his eyes traveled the small map of veins that appeared beneath her skin that crossed her chest. His fingers traced the pale blue line, following it to where it stopped at the top of her breast. Her eyes studied him as he learned the changes that were taking place with her body. His gaze traveled downward and stopped at the small swell of her stomach and his breath caught. *Our child grows.* He reached out and traced his fingers over the small swell of skin and he glanced up at her and saw her tenderly smiling down at him.

Her hand stroked up and down his shaft attuned to what he liked and he moved his hips in the same rhythm, “vhenan, vin,” he said in a moan of approval. Everything she was doing to him made his magic arc from the skin of his hips. The repeated sensations lighting him on fire coaxed more clear
liquid to escape the tip of his edhis even as his aura flashed blindingly through the room. Her husky laughter caressing his sensitive skin with his lack of control only inflamed him further. The slow, lapping touch of her tongue swirling over him, and the hum of pleasure she made as she tasted the escaping liquid, sent his senses reeling and his breathing became strained.

"Vhenan, ar rosemah'da'din," he panted thickly.

Her excitement and desire at what she was doing to him overwhelmingly filled him. The sound of his own quick breaths filled his ears as his balls tensed up between his legs just as she tightened her hold on him. His muscles from ass to thigh tremored and tensed with the increased pumping motion of her hand. The seductive, teasing touch of her tongue over the sensitive crown of his edhis and the warmth of her mouth surrounding him overwhelmed him.

Solas moaned as a familiar fire swept through him when the warmth of her mouth moved over him, coaxing him closer to release. His fingers tightened reflexively over the furs with each caress of her tongue. His moaning grew louder with each caress of her mouth over him, his magic seeped from his skin now in small arcs of electricity and her pleasure with the sight of his lack of control flowed through their bond with approval. He slipped his hand through her hair, cradling the back of her head while his hips moved slowly in and out of her mouth. She was drowning him with the seductive pull of her mouth over him.

Solas moaned her name when her tongue swirled over the head of his edhis and she lightly suctioned him. Groaning loudly with the action, his toes curled and muscles quaked with each skilled stroke of her warm mouth over him in tandem with her hand. Fire and lightning sped through him with the familiar sensations she was invoking in him. The silken glide of her tongue licking from base to tip tipped him closer to the pleasurable precipice looming before him. Tendrils of desire wrapped around him, filled him, pulling him erotically closer and closer to the edge. His body mesmerized by the plethora of sensations that danced along his skin as she pulled him closer and closer to that blissful edge.

"Fenlin," he groaned in ecstasy.

Her mouth suctioned the head of him again and his eyes closed tightly, the unstoppable throb of sweet release grew from the base of his edhis, warning him. His fingers tightened through her hair, while prayers for deliverance whispered past his lips raggedly. "Vhenan... sathan," he begged. Her gentle hands stroking him quickened and with a final stroke of her tongue over the engorged tip, his jaw clenched, and his hips jerked.

"Ah.....," he moaned loudly.

The flash of heat encased him as desire hurtled him over the cliff with his orgasm. The warm, milking of her mouth over him created tremors and his aura flashed brightly with pleasure as the sensations rushed over him in warm waves, encasing them both.

The roar of blood rang through his ears as his heart pounded forcefully. His breath fast and heavy and a small sheen of sweat covered his chest. His eyes slowly opened with the touch of her smiling lips against the skin of his hipbone. The soft touch created shivers to rush over his senses and he glanced down and saw the curve of her long dark lashes against her cheekbones as she slowly made her way up his body. Her pleasure with what she had given him was filling him, making his skin overly tingly.

He traced his fingers along the side of her cheek, slipping a dark lock of hair behind her ear and when her amber pools met him, his heart double beat in his chest. She is my everything-my home-my heart-mine. His arm slipped around her, holding her to him, smiling when he felt her nose nestle
against his neck and inhale deeply as she settled closer to his side.

“I love you,” she whispered into his ear.

Solas turned his head towards her and pressed a kiss to her lips.

“And I love you,” he whispered back against her lips.

"Perhaps you will allow me to show you how much," he said between trailing kisses down her throat.

Her throaty laughter teased him, and he glanced up at her.

"I will not tell you no if that is what you are waiting for."

He chuckled and still smiling, pressed a warm kiss to her collarbone.

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
edhis - cock
vhenan, vin - my heart, yes
Vhenan, ar rosemah'da'din - My heart, I'm about to cum
Vhenan... satan - My heart... please
I felt much better after my nap. The touch of Solas’ hand running down my spine made me stretch against him and a small groan escaped as I arched my back, moving sore muscles from riding. I was a completely relaxed noodle where I laid partially on him, enjoying the heat he gave. Right until his devious fingers lightly tickled up my side and I squealed, trying to roll away from him.

He chuckled deeply next to my ear in warning as his arms pulled me back to him. Nimble fingers began tickling my sides in earnest as I tried in vain to escape the steel bands of his hold.

“Stop,” I breathlessly begged, laughing, and squirming.

His deft fingers slipped under my arm and my squeals of laughter grew as much as my struggles to escape him. I squirmed, kicking, giggling, trying to catch my breath while his merciless onslaught continued with his laughter at my senseless plight to escape.

“GAAH… I… Solas… please,” I brokenly begged between fits of laughter and gasping breaths.

I hear his soft chuckle with my bodies squirming and inability to escape him and his fingers finally ceased their teasing torture beneath my arms, and slid around me, giving me a backward hug. He buried his nose into my neck, pressing small kisses to my shoulder.

I panted heavily, trying to catch my breath and I playfully slapped his arm making him laugh against my shoulder.

“Ass,” I grumbled.

He laughed again and nuzzled the side of my neck with his nose and sent my now very ticklish skin into overload. Trying to tuck my head and block his path, he laughed and did it again, sending me into another fit of giggles.

“Come on,” I gasped trying to wiggle away.

Solas finally released me and I moved quickly away before turning to look at him, making sure he couldn’t get a hold of me again. His laughter and comfortable actions were such a gift to see. He had his arms folded under his head, completely comfortable. There are soft wrinkles at the corners of his beautiful blue eyes and their depths sparkled with mischief. His wide smile, breaking the normally worried or serious expression he wore, and I reached for his cheek, memorizing this moment because they were so few.

A loud knock at the door brought our moment of seclusion to an end, and I called out while I continued to caress his face, holding his gaze.

“Yeah?”

“Boss, that feast the Avvar invited us too is going to start soon.”
Bull’s loud voice came through the thick, wooden door informing us of our obligations to the outside world. I gave Solas a cheeky smile hearing his answering chuckle while I answered Bull.

“Thanks for the warning Bull, we’ll be out soon.”

His continued low chuckle made me laugh and shake my head. Solas wrapped a lock of my hair around his finger and gently tugged on it, bringing my face closer to his. The soft press of his lips against mine made me melt against him. I felt his answering smile against mine and cradled his face, pressing my forehead against his.

“Come on handsome before I forget myself and let you have your way with me again.”

He laughed and pressed a quick kiss to my cheek before rolling out of our pallet.

The feast the Avvar planned was held in what I could only describe as a Viking longhouse. Looking up, I noticed the huge chimney-like hole in the ceiling for ventilation. Gazing at the roughened wooded walls, I notice there were long tables made of thick, scarred wood on each side of the room. In the center of the room, there is a large fire encircled by rock and a large ram on a spit with an Avvar rotating it to ensure even cooking. At the end of the long room stood a throne on a huge dais where I could only assume the Thane would sit.

Overall, the room smelled pleasant of cooking food and wood smoke, similar to a campfire. There were laughter and cheering echoing through the room and it felt…welcoming. I smiled at Amund as he crossed the huge expansion of room towards me.

“Thane Sun-Hair would be honored if you and Solas would sit with her at her table.”

I nodded and followed Amund to where the Avvar Thane sat. It did not surprise me that she was not sitting up on the dais in her throne but down at a table with others surrounding her. The way she had spoken earlier led me clearly to believe she was all about her people, not appearances. I noticed the large, fur-lined jacket she had been wearing earlier was gone and she wore a wool spun tunic dyed a deep red, cinched with a leather belt at the waist, over dark leather breaches and high boots. Her hair was auburn in color and she had two braids, one on each side of her head while the rest fell to her shoulders.

I studied Thane Sun-Hair’s features as we approached. She sat straight on the bench while she talked with the warrior across from her, leaning towards him with her elbows on the table. Svarah had a proud, slightly sharp looking nose over a generous, wide mouth. Her lips were neither full or thin, they just had a balance that complimented her strong features. We stopped at the table and she stood taking my arm in greeting with a large smile, her light brown eyes holding my gaze. Damn this woman is fucking tall. Overall, the Thane of the Avvar was a beautiful amazon.

“Inquisitor.”

I smiled and let her arm go, waiving the title away.

“It’s just Fenlin, the many titles they’ve given me are longer than I am tall.”

Svarah laughed and clapped me on the shoulder.
“Then you shall refer to me as Svarah.” She gestured towards the table, “come. Let us break bread in friendship. I am curious about your clan.”

During dinner, I overheard one of the warriors ask after someone named Storvacher and I noticed that Svarah instantly stiffened beside me with her fork halfway to her mouth. She set her fork down and looked at the questioning warrior.

“She has not been seen, and our hunters can find no trail. It is as if she has vanished.”

I saw Amund’s look of worry and my curiosity over who this *Storvacher* was increased.

“If you don’t mind me asking, who is Storvacher?”

Svarah shook her head and folded her arms on the table, looking at me.

“Storvacher is our hold beast, she ties us to the Gods. She generally comes and goes as she pleases but she has been gone a long time this time. Our hunters have looked for signs of her in the basin and have found none. Without her…” Svarah sighed heavily and explained. “Avvar derive their strength from the strength of their hold beast. When a hold beast dies or chooses to leave a clan, the clan withers.” Svarah rubbed her face and I could tell she was worried. “I know more of this world than I do of spirits. Speak with our augur if you would know more, for he and I do not believe Storvacher is dead, we simply cannot find her.”

The information was interesting, but something nagged at me. Earlier, when the warriors were climbing to settle a dispute, the Thane of the Hakkonites had commented on their hold beast a few times, almost sarcastically.

“Do you think that maybe your hold beast might have been taken, to make your clan weaker?”

The moment I said the words they felt right, and I saw the gleaming look of agreement in Svarah’s eyes.

“Aye, I do,” she replied tightening her hand into a fist and then snorted in frustration, “but I cannot prove it.”

“We will look while we are out in the basin. If we find her or any signs of her, we will let you know.”

Svarah’s lips widened in a grin and she clasped my shoulder.

“We would be in your debt should you find Storvacher.”

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Solas closed the door behind us as we left our cabin and I took a deep breath of the salty air, it seemed to calm my queasy stomach. *Damn this place is beautiful.* Scanning the water for a moment before I had to get to work, Cassandra came to stand next to me and enjoy the view too.
“It is beautiful,” she commented.

Nodding in agreement, I took one more breath before turning towards her and patting her arm.

“Well, this is definitely not getting anything done.”

Cassandra snorted and turned with me.

“One moment’s peace will not hurt us, I think. Especially after speaking with some of the Avvar warriors last night. They warned me that the Hakkonites would be cunning, ruthless, and to be careful.”

“Nothing we aren’t used to Cass. Sneaky Venatori pricks and now shifty Hakkonite shits. If we are lucky, the two are not working together. If they are… then we do what we have always done,” I told her with a shrug.

“Kill them,” we both said at the same time making us laugh.

I caught Amund with Svarah walking down the path from the main village. He wore his large maul strapped to his back and carried a traveling pack in his left hand. I caught Svarah nudging him with her shoulder and a small smile on her face.

Oh, is it that way between them? This was a new development. Amund appeared to have a softer look to his face as they walked towards us and I was pleased for him. It must be very hard for him to live around people not his own.

“We will use the Cliffside Path to Kulsdotten Swamp. Venatori and Hakkonites have been spotted in that area.”

When Amund mentioned the swamp, I heard Dorian’s groan from behind me. The only thing I was hoping for was that it didn’t smell half as bad as that damnable bog we had to ride through to get here.

“Then that is where we will go,” I replied.

I took Svarah’s outstretched arm and looked up at her.

“Stay strong and fight well. I will look forward to your return.”

“Thank you.”

She nodded towards everyone before she left, and I glanced around.

“Let’s get a move on guys, we’re burning daylight.”

We followed Amund as he led us towards the swamp. The path is wide enough for us but not our mounts and it cut through the mountain, saving us a bunch of time not having to hike around it. The rock walls held large, lit torches to light our path through and I glanced at the rough surface where there were some drawings. They appeared to be about hunting, but I wasn’t sure.

“They are about successful hunts,” Amund commented as if he could read my mind.

“That is uplifting,” Dorian commented.
We exited the mouth of the cave into a purple, hazy fog. The air was thick with vegetation and dirt smells, but it was nothing like the Fallow Mire. The humidity was surprising since through the tunnel it was much cooler.

“The basin is always warmer than the Hold, that is why it is good for hunting.”

I nodded my understanding and followed him down a winding path. Before long we found a group of Venatori studying an area with an alter at the center, surrounded by brambles and overgrown bushes. I couldn’t make out their faces as they had their backs to us, but I could hear them clearly.

“We are wasting our time, we have found no signs that he came this way,” one commented angrily.

“Do you do anything but snivel and whine Vernell? We will search every square inch of this basin as the Elder One commanded.”

“And what about the Avvar? What do you plan on doing with them?”

“They are but mindless brutes. If they get in our way, we kill them, that is all.”

“Leo sent word that the Inquisition is in the area now. They were seen heading towards that large Avvar hold on the mountain. We must not linger here but find what we came for and get out of here before they find us. You know what happened to the others in the Hissing Wastes and she somehow took what the Elder One was looking for.”

“I agree, knife-ear or not, she is cunning. The staff is obviously not here, Purvis, let’s go.”

A staff? They're searching for a staff? I gestured that it was time to close in and take them out as I spoke loudly, startling them.

“Thank you for the information gentleman, I was wondering what the hell you were doing here.”

Startled faces turned towards me while one wore a sneer on his face. His hands glowed with power that rapidly dimmed from the slice of Cole’s dagger over his throat. His angry sneer changed to surprise as he gripped his throat, trying to staunch the flow.

Varric’s arrow struck another right in the forehead as the third one dropped to his knees suddenly begging.

“P… please… I don’t want to d… die.”

Bull snarled in disgust and grabbed the Magister by the throat, hefting him into the air. The Magister wrapped both his hands around Bull’s large wrist, his legs kicking wildly. Bull shook him hard, tightening his grip around his throat before growling into his face menacingly.

“You chose the wrong side mage and should’ve stayed in Tevinter if you didn’t wanna die.”

The crack of his neck lightly echoed before the sound of his limp body followed. I turned away from the scene, a cold rock of uncaring settling into my chest and followed after Amund further into the
swamp. Solas brushed against my fingers with his and I glanced up at him. Our bond hummed with his love for me, filling the sudden coldness I felt from uncaringly watching men die and I softly smiled.

His hand came up and brushed my cheek tenderly and I briefly closed my eyes and leaned into the comforting touch. Something so simple filled my heart to overflowing.

“Fenlin,” Amund said quietly drawing my attention from Solas.

I moved towards him and he bent, pointing towards a small, triangular lantern that hung from a branch as he spoke quietly next to my ear.

“That is no lantern, wait here.”

Amund moved quietly and took the object down. His face became very angry as he looked at it. I stared at the object carefully and saw, blood, bone, fur, and grass. It smelt off, and I waved my hand in front of my face to dispel the scent.

“What is that?”

Solas moved to stand next to me, studying the object Amund held.

“These bones were part of a sacrifice. The Jaws of Hakkon placed a powerful spell here.”

Amund nodded his head sharply in agreement before crushing it within his large hands.

“Blood magic? But why?”

“To protect something, or hide something,” Solas answered and I held his gaze.

“Maybe Storvacher?”

Amund’s expression turned livid.

“They will all die if they have taken the hold-beast. The Thane of Strong-Bear Hold would wage war against them for this grievous treachery.”

We continued through the swamp, finding more of these objects and the more we found the more I grew certain that the Hakkonites had indeed taken Storvacher. When we came to an area where a battle was clearly had by the dead bodies strewn about, there was a large cage and my stomach dropped.

“Look at the ground. Someone fought a beast here, it could be the Avvar bear.”

Amund knelt, studying the ground and pointed towards an opening through the rock wall.

“It leads in that direction.”

Everyone pulled out their weapons and walked slowly towards the opening. I glanced at Cole and he just nodded before disappearing to find out what awaited us inside. After a few moments, he returned and spoke quickly.

“There are seven of the Hakkonites and they have Storvacher. She is hungry…”

I patted his arm and nodded.
“Don’t worry Cole, we will feed her once she is freed.”

Amund strode down the long, well-lit corridor.

“They will pay the blood price for this,” he growled before spitting on the ground.

The corridor was littered with Hakkonite bodies with large tears in flesh from enormous claws.

“Well she was putting up a fight,” I commented quietly.

The corridor opened up to a large chamber full of prison cells and Hakkonites. Amund growled as he charged into them so quickly, I barely had time to place a barrier around him.

“How dare you steal their hold-beast!” He yelled swinging his mighty maul scattering the group of Hakkonites. Those unfortunate to get hit by the large weapon were flung into walls or steel bars. One Hakkonite hit the bars of Storvacher’s cage and the bear roared shaking the ground in greeting before a large paw, with dagger sharpened claws split the Hakkonites head like a melon.

Chaos ensued as Hakkonites yelled and arrows flew, blades flashed and clashed in the torchlight and the smell of ozone permeated the air from our use of magic. The fight was quick and when the last Hakkonite fell from a skull-crushing blow to the head from Amund, Cole worked the lock that held Storvacher.

It was the largest bear I had ever seen in my entire life. It was as big as Bull’s druffalo as she slowly emerged from the cell. Amund slipped his maul over his back and approached the bear.

“It is good to see you old friend,” he said before rubbing the bear's large face.

I saw Cole fidgeting with his fingers as his nature to help the creature was riding him.

“Perhaps a Bog Fisher would be enough to sustain her until we can get her back to the hold.”

Amund glanced at me over his shoulder and then to where Cole stood, waiting for him say it was okay and nodded.

“Aye, that would do.”

“Varric will you go with Cole and get Storvacher some dinner.”

They left quickly and Amund gestured me closer and I swallowed my nerves.

“Fenlin, this is Storvacher. Stone-Bear’s hold-beast.”

I bowed my head towards the creature.

“It is good to finally meet you.”

I stood still as the bear sniffed me and was instantly startled when the large head bumped into my shoulder in greeting and my hands came up automatically to the bears face keeping my balance.

“She is indebted to you for finding her. Thane Sun-Hair will want to know what we have found here.”

I rubbed the bear’s face and nodded my head in agreement while studying the dark, chocolate gaze of an obviously intelligent creature. I wonder how they were able to capture her? I glanced around at the chamber looking for something that they could have used and recognized a symbol of a serpent
on one of the walls. My hands dropped from the bear's face and walked towards the symbol to get a closer look.

“Isn’t this a Tevinter symbol?”

Dorian and Solas came to stand behind me looking at it.

“Yes,” Dorian answered, and I looked around the chamber again.

“So, this is an old Tevinter prison.”

“It would appear so,” Solas commented.

Cole and Varric walked into the chamber carrying a Bog Fisher and Storvacher’s stomach could be heard growling in hunger. Amund chuckled and patted the bear on the shoulder.

“Eat my friend, then we will escort you home.”

I looked at everyone and smiled with understanding as I experienced an *ah-ha* moment.

“That is what the Venatori are doing here. They aren’t just searching Elven ruins, but even their own for something to help Corypheus achieve his goal. The Venatori from earlier said something about a staff. Inquisitor Ameridan may or may not have it, the book said nothing about his weapons or if he was a mage. In fact, the book said very little except that he helped Emperor Drakon and was a man of passion and faith.”

“So, it might be a staff that some ancient Tevinter had,” Cassandra deduced, and I nodded in agreement.

“Exactly.”

Storvacher was finished with her dinner and I gestured for us to leave.

“Come on, let’s get Storvacher back to the hold and tell Svarah what we found. She might have some insight into more of these lost Tevinter ruins.”
I followed Storvacher into Svarah’s cave and she stood immediately and walked towards us.

“Fenlin, you have found our hold-beast, Stone-Bear Hold is truly in your debt. Wherever did you find her?”

I cleared my throat and saw Amund’s expression change to one of anger and disgust.

“She was being held captive by the Jaws of Hakkon in an old Tevinter prison in the swamp.”

Amund stepped forward and held out the remnants of the lantern-like wards we had found.

“They were attempting to bring back and bind Hakkon to Storvacher.”

Svarah took the splintered pieces of bone, wood, moss, and blood. While we stood silently as she absorbed the information. Once Svarah understood what the Hakkonites intentions were, she clenched her fist around the bits and snarled at the fire.

I already knew that she had suspected the Hakkonites were involved with their missing hold-beast, but to try and bind their God Hakkon to it, I could see she was livid.

“Hakkonite chicken shits! I will bathe in their blood!”

She looked at me and nodded.

“Stone-Bear Hold will stand with your Inquisition in defeating these… worthless cows.”

Turning towards me, she held out the little bits from the wards and I took them from her, curiously looking at her now.

“You must visit our Augur, he will want to see you and hear about this.”

I nodded my agreement and turned to leave when her hand fell on my shoulder.

“My deepest gratitude for what you and your people have done for us.”

I smiled and took her arm in Avvar fashion, nodded slightly before leaving. Amund led us up a set of stone steps to an area carved out of the mountain. There is a thick stone wall on one side and a line of wooden cabins along the mountainside. As long as I stayed close to the cabins, I could enjoy the spectacular view of the ocean without growing anxious.

Amund stopped at the dwelling at the far end of the path, drawing my gaze from the serene view of the water with the sun shining down on it. This home was carved out of the very rock. The door and windows were the only wooden pieces on the outside and it was amazing. Even Varric gave out a
low whistle with the craftsmanship of the dwelling. Amund turned and looked at me as we stood outside the door.

“The Augur will only want to see you, Fenlin.”

I nodded my understanding and went through the door Amund held open. Once inside, I glanced around and thought the home was no larger than the cabin Solas and I took down by the edge of the water. The difference between this and the cabin is the large firepit in the middle like the one in the longhouse, except this one was lit with veil fire.

“So, she arrives. Don’t throng! Behold worthy ones. The woman who blazes like fire and mends the air.”

His words drew my attention and I glanced from the fire to the Augur and notice the two spirits, one on each side of him. Well… shit.

“I am the augur of Stone-Bear Hold. I greet you, as do our Gods and the Gods of our ancestors.”

His pale blue eyes studied me curiously, it was most unnerving, not unlike Cole when he looked at me or rather through me. He was honestly no different looking to me than Amund except for his eyes. His height and musculature were very similar in that they were both extremely large men. My attention is taken from studying the Avvar when I hear a sing-song tune emanating from the spirits beside him.

“There, it is done. Now come, be welcome. I’d hear news of the North.”

I watched the spirits in their smoky, see-through forms, slowly evaporate before I sat on the bench he gestured towards. I held out the bits we found in the swamp when he sat down across from me and he took them. Studying them for a brief moment before I noticed his expression become disgusted.

“We found bones with spells on them left out by the Hakkonites. Were they really trying to bind your God of Hakkon?”

“You should not have been carrying these,” he admonished, surprising me.

“I don’t understand,” I replied unsure if I had offended the augur somehow.

“You are with child are you not?”

I knew my expression of surprise was enough of an answer and he glanced at the broken bits in his hand.

“This is a spell of blood disguised in bone to bind a God to this world.”

My hand went protectively to my stomach. Have I hurt our child with my ignorance? My expression must have conveyed my thoughts and the augur answered my own inner dialog.

“No harm has come to your unborn child but before you leave me today, I would show you two spells to keep your child safe for while you are here and when you travel. Soon you will be unable to hide that you are with child and the Hakkonites will not hesitate to kill you and your unborn. You must learn a spell to disguise this weakness and learn the spell that places a barrier around the child, not unlike your own body. It will give your child added protection should you be harmed.”

My hand trembled over the small bean growing inside me. Every time I actually thought about what Solas and I had created it scared the hell out of me.
“I would be grateful for the lesson augur,” I replied with a shaky voice.

He patted my shoulder and gave me an almost paternal smile.

“But first, you need to hear one of our oldest stories, taught to us as children by the skalds about our Gods.”

*Skalds must be like their history keepers or storytellers. Not unlike the Dalish Keepers retelling the stories of their history. Even if they weren’t a hundred percent accurate, there is something to respect in the tradition and usually a bit of truth to the story."

“Mountains crack, forests burn, the Gods change and die. Hakkon’s followers want him alive as he was. They will not let him die and return, as he should. The blood magic was to hide the Jaws of Hakkon’s deed from the other Gods.”

“They have powerful magic, why are the Jaws of Hakkon afraid of other spirits?”

He snorted and glanced at the fire.

“The Jaws of Hakkon turned their backs on all other Gods that ever helped their hold. It is not fear that drives them little one. They hide their deeds from shame.”

I leaned forward with my arms on my knees and sighed. *What a wonderful shitfest I have gotten myself into. When will I learn to listen to my mate and stay the fuck home?* Squaring my shoulders with the thought, I sat up. *Oh my God, please don’t let me ever slip and tell him he was right, or I will never live it down.*

We followed the river path Svarah recommended, heading towards the spires that gleamed in the sunshine. If what she said was true, then the path would lead us to the one Tevinter ruin with a magical wall of ice that the Hakkonites had taken over.

Dorian swatted at an insect buzzing around his face and I giggled at his annoyance while he glared at me.

“My dear, you know how much I dislike nature.”

I giggled again and pointed at a large pile of bog fisher shit in the middle of the path.

“Careful where you step, or you’ll get nature all over your boots.”

Dorian’s nose wrinkled, and his groan of disgust only made me laugh even more.

“It would just be nice if this was not so damn steep,” Varric grumbled.

Snorting, I shook my head at the same objections from the two. There was something definitely very comforting in their rambling conversation of complaints.

Halfway up the steep path, we ran into a group of Hakkonites really unhappy to see us. The singing sounds of steel clashing with steel filled the air when Bull used his ax to block the large maul the Hakkonite warrior swung downward towards his head. I could almost see his excitement with the
promise of a good fight.

Dorian took the window of opportunity and threw a fireball into the warrior’s face.

“Get away from my Amatus you brute,” he snarled.

Everything immediately became chaotic. The Hakkonites were fierce fighters that brought a large smile to Bull’s face as he fought a huge warrior. I noticed that Cassandra seemed to also be enjoying the challenge of a strong opponent. Myself, I would feel much better if we weren’t fighting on a fucking hill.

Checking the barrier around bean that the augur taught me, I felt better knowing there is a sturdy cocoon protecting our little one. When I showed Solas what I learned, I could feel his relief through our bond while he helped me place the barrier around our child.

I cast lightning, stunning the warriors and glanced around uneasily. Last time I fought on a hillside it was not long after the fight, I got an arrow in my damn chest and I would rather not repeat that experience. My eyes rolled towards the sky and then back to the fight. *Well, at least it’s not fucking raining.*

Refreshing barriers, I stayed back from the main fray of the chaos, swirling my staff and warping the fade for my spell. With a stab of the blade into the ground, the fluorite crystal hummed from its position at the top of my staff just as my spell cracked through the earth to shift the ground beneath the large warrior fighting Cassandra, knocking him off balance.

“Kill the Inquisitor – kill them all!” The Hakkonite warrior fighting Amund shouted and Bull’s loud growl echoed in response.

“You will die beneath my blade traitor,” Amund warned slamming his maul into a warrior matching his height and build, knocking the breath out of him.

Focused on what was going on in front of me, I was too slow to notice the frost rune appearing beneath my feet. I fade stepped away before it could capture me and scanned the battle area, adrenaline rushing through my blood at the close call. The cool sensation of Solas’ barrier surrounded me, and I glance towards him to see that he is now looking for the mage angrily. His anger flowed through our connection and before I could say a word, he had clearly found the offender and fade stepped behind the Hakkonite mage who was hiding behind one of the larger warriors.

There is a sudden rush of cold through our connection as the void fill me and I watched while my mate used spells from his Dread Wolf nature that sent the Hakkonite mage into a fit of hysterics. The sensation sent discomfort creeping beneath my skin and I pushed the knee-jerk reaction to run away from the feeling.

The mage started clawing at his face, pulling his half helmet off, exposing his terror-filled expression. He began screaming and running blindly in every direction, hitting trees, tripping over roots, trying to escape the mental fear all while pulling out his own hair.

*I am going to have to get used to feeling this connection to the void through him. He is my husband, my one true love, and this is part of him. If I am to accept and love him for who he is, then I must also accept his using this power he has.* I sighed with annoyance in myself. *Magic is magic, it is all about how you use it.*

It did not take long before the mage chose to light himself on fire to escape whatever spell Solas had
cast. Varric looked nervously at the human torch running around and took aim at the completely senseless mage, dropping him quickly.

“Mafarath’s balls, that is the second time I have witnessed someone completely lose their shit,” he said after the mage fell dead.

I noted the way Dorian glanced from Solas and then to me knowingly before focusing on the fight. I don’t think anyone could miss the hard gleam in Solas’ eyes as the mage burned if they were to just look at him. I could feel his sense of triumph through our bond and I ignored Varric’s comment and the slowly receding cold from my chest. Placing a barrier around Cassandra, I chose to file this moment under the file of ‘deal with this shit later’.

I should have brought Raj with me instead of leaving him at the Inquisition camp with Lace. His presence always appears to keep Solas calmer and admit it or not, the animal’s presence keeps me calmer too.

Flicking my wrist outward, a fade fist flew across the small path and hit the last Hakkonite warrior, knocking him back five feet and giving Cole an opportunity to slip his blade beneath his arm. The fighting over, Solas looked me over carefully with a critical eye. Stiffening with his overbearing protection, I refrained from sighing in annoyance. Compromise… remember? He isn’t going to stop anytime soon… deal with it. Plastering a small smile to my lips instead, I sent love and reassurance through our bond before I went to look at the small cut on Cassandra’s cheek.

“They are strong, and they unquestionably hate us. I do not understand what we have done to incite such hatred,” she panted.

I poured some water from my canteen onto a small, linen cloth and gestured for her to sit on the nearest fallen log.

“Does it matter why they hate us, Cass?” I questioned her while pressing the wet cloth to her cheek, cleaning the cut. Her brown eyes held mine for a moment before she let out a whoosh of breath.

“No, I suppose in the end it doesn’t. We are Lowlanders, searching their lands for one of our own. It makes me wonder if these Jaws of Hakkon, had anything to do with the first Inquisitors disappearance.”

Slipping some salve from my side pouch, I applied it to the small wound to keep it from getting infected while mulling over her suggestion. Sometimes her being a Seeker was a pain in the ass since my first aid skills were complete shit. Mentally snorting at the thought, I reminded myself that my magical healing abilities weren’t all that much better. Wiping my hands off on the cloth, I slipped it back into my pouch.

“It’s a good theory. Even Svarah said that there have been Hakkonites for hundreds of years in the Basin and that they have always hated our kind.”

There was a soft howl of greeting carried on the air and I turned quickly, cutting off any further conversation with Cassandra. Raj loped through the forest towards us and I couldn’t stop the immediate joy I felt when I saw him. The damnable creature must be able to read my mind. I knelt as he came towards me and rubbed his head against mine. When did he get so big? I realized that kneeling, put Raj’s head quite a bit over mine, making him bend to press his head to mine in greeting.

“I believe I told you to stay with Lace, Sir,” I said grabbing his face and staring into his eyes.
His blue-green eyes held mine and then flicked away guiltily and I rubbed my face against him again.

“He can’t protect both of you if he is with Lace, it made him very worried.”

I glanced at Cole for a brief second knowing he was not referring to Solas and I focused back on Raj.

“Okay big guy, no more separation. I don’t want you getting hurt trying to find me in this place and I missed you too.”

Ruffling my fingers through his fur, I pointed towards the spires that were not that much further as I stood.

“Come on guys lets at least get to that one before we make camp tonight.”

The first spire we got to was overgrown by the forest mostly. The impressive design of the monument resembled a metal dragon that stood close to six feet tall, with wings stretching upwards to make it closer to seven or eight. On the backside of the metal structure, there was a mechanical lever. Pulling on it did nothing and I was not surprised.

“Well, it was worth a shot. One can always hope that it might actually be simple… just once.”

Dorian chuckled as he slipped his arm over my shoulders and pulled me in for a half-hug against his side.

“My dear, it’s creators are Tevinter. Have I ever been ‘just simple’?”

I snorted and laid my head against the side of his chest and laughed.

“Point made.”

He let me go as others chuckled and we continued towards the ruin.

I glanced around the crumbling ruin and headed towards what appeared the main entrance following behind Bull. A large flight of stone steps covered in moss and leaves led the way. We made our way up the stairs and Raj softly growled in warning before we entered a small courtyard with spiked barriers. Preparing for another skirmish with the Hakkonites, me, Solas, and Dorian placed barriers as Cassandra, Bull, and Amund entered with Cole not far behind and Varric moved for the higher ground under stealth.

There was a loud war cry from one of the Hakkonites as a group of them charged forward from behind a barrier of sharpened wooden poles. With a small hand gesture, I directed Raj to my right and slipped into stealth, ignoring Solas’ instant displeasure that rolled through our bond as I slipped behind one of the barriers behind the fighting. Casting a barrier around me and magically checking the small barrier around the bean, finding it still in place, I called fade fire to fall on the two archers to the left of the fights on a part of the crumbling battlement.

In the chaos of the fight, it was almost too late when we realized the Venatori had found us. The
sight of a large fireball crossing the small area of battle drew my attention and I quickly threw up a barrier of ice between the fireball and Dorian’s back before it could make contact.

Dorian turned in surprise with my sudden spell and noticed the group of Venatori trying to ambush us.

“Vishannte Kaffas,” he snarled angrily before throwing a barrage of fireballs towards the group.

Cole stealthed and moved to get behind the Venatori that had decided to show up to the party. I focused on keeping everyone, including myself, in barriers while our attentions were divided.

There was one Hakkonite archer that was not on the battlements when I had cast my fade fire earlier and was intent on me. My barrier warbled with the hit of the arrow and my gaze found him, on the opposite side of the courtyard, behind a spiked barrier. I felt my magic expand and knew my eyes swirled angrily as my barrier deflected three more arrows, twisting my hand and slowly forming a fist, the ground beneath the archer rose, wrapping around him in the shape of my hand that held the mark.

Making a tight fist, the archer screamed and dropped his bow, more focused on fighting the earthen grip crushing around him.

“Dina” I whispered angrily. The vibration of my Evanuris voice carried over the sounds of clashing steel and grunts of exertion surprising the warriors.

I felt Solas and Dorian’s gazes on me and the sudden connection of Solas’ aura with mine made the mark flare angrily and the green of his magic flared up my arm, lighting up the scars and snapping the archer like a twig with the flash of his magic combined with mine. I glanced at him and his eyes narrowed for a brief second before he returned his focus to the fight. I could already hear the discussion we would be having later. Compromise or not, he was going to try and push for me to return to Skyhold after this.

Sighing with my own thoughts, the fight was finally over, and I glanced down when I felt Raj’s head rub against my hip. I laid my hand on his head, gently caressing one of his ears. His head cocked to the side and looked at me. I could sense the unspoken question from the animal and gently smiled.

“I’m fine,” I told him answering his questioning look.

Solas came to stand in front of me and I looked up at him not surprised that I would need to reassure him as well. His aura was caressing, checking me as thoroughly as a doctors exam.

“Really, I am fine.”

His eyes held mine for a moment longer before he gave me a small nod and I laid my hand on his chest.

“Ar lath ma, Solas.”

His gaze softened before he bent and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“And I you, vhenan.”

We continued into the ruin and found in the middle of the ground what appeared to be a puzzle made from metal and stone. Using a subtle wind enchantment, I cleared the five by five area of debris.
Behind the floor puzzle, there stood a mechanism that had a lever. On either side were doors leading to who knew where and behind the lever was another set of steps. I moved past the puzzle on the ground and walked up the stairs with Raj by my side. At the top, there was a minty green barrier and I held my hand out testing the magic. It was familiar, yet not an unsurprising, Solas’ hand appeared next to mine.

“Old elven magic, curious that we would find this in a Tevinter ruin,” he whispered running his hand over the barrier.

The sound of metal slightly clanking together drew my attention from the barrier and I saw Cassandra and Bull cresting the steps over my shoulder.

“Should we signal for the others to meet us here?”

I nodded before turning back to focus on the barrier.

“Yeah, the Hakkonites are a lot more tenacious than the Venatori.”

“Perhaps that professor will have some idea on the riddle in the courtyard.”

“Well that would be nice,” I joked following behind her back down the stairs. “Let’s get our camp set up while we wait for the others. It’s going to take them a while.”

Tents set up and the fire going, I left Raj outside the entrance of our tent to take a small nap. I had just removed my armor and stood in only a tunic as Solas entered. His eyes scanned me while he raised his hand and effortlessly placed wards on the entrance before walking towards me. He used his teeth to pull off his gloves and he wasted no time before his hand laid on my little bump and I felt his magic move around our small bean, checking the barrier we had placed earlier.

His forehead pressed against mine and a small faltering breath left him.

“I do not like this, vhenan.”

His whispered confession and the flood of fear through our bond had me reaching up and caressing his face tenderly.

“I’m alright, we are alright. Please, trust that I would never do anything or let anything harm me or our baby. You cannot let it distract you, my love, we must stay focused. The sooner we are done here, the sooner you can lock me away in Skyhold.”

My gentle teasing brought a small twitch to the corners of his lips. His eyes opened, and his fixed gaze held mine intently.

“My wolf is as tired as I am.

“Lie down with me for a while?”
He nodded his agreement and I moved to help him remove his armor. When he finally stood in nothing but his leggings, we crawled beneath our blankets and I curled against him. Pressing my cheek against his chest, I listened to the metronome of his heartbeat and yawned tiredly. The rhythmic beat and the feeling of his fingers caressing up and down my back lulled me quickly to sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Vishannne Kaffas - Tevene for shit on my tongue
Dina - die
Ar lath ma vhenan - I love you my heart
Can you guys believe it...140 chapters! Geebus Christmas Cookies, what the hell kind of craziness did I get myself into. Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading and support, you guys rock!

Lace led Professor Kenrick into the camp with the rest of my team bring up the rear along with a small group of Avaar. I noticed Cole is walking with Sera as some of the Avaar abruptly stopped in the middle of the path to stare as Raj, who stood next to me watching everyone entering.

“Is that a…” one of the Avaar warriors began.

“A wolf… yeah, Raj. Just watch your plate, he is wicked sneaky,” Sera warned him.

I snorted with Sera’s words because they were true, Raj was adept at taking things off someone’s plate without them noticing even while they were taking a bite. Lace took my offered arm in greeting while I smiled at her, glad to see them finally make it.

“I hope you didn’t have any trouble getting here.”

Lace shook her head and released my arm.

“Not after the Avaar from Stone-Bear Hold joined us.”

I chuckled, patting her shoulder.

“Yeah, the Hakkonites are a lot harder to fight then the Venatori.”

Lace nodded in agreement as I took Professor Kenrick’s hand.

“Professor, I am hoping you can help us.”

He took the torch Bull handed him and followed behind me to the puzzle on the ground. I stood aside with Bull while he studied the tiles on the ground.

“May I take some time and make a drawing of this. It is most curious in design… I have read about something like this before about Tevinter using tiles like this as a lock, but I doubt it has anything to do with Inquisitor Ameridan. What were the Tevinter’s trying to hide?”

His voice got more and more, quiet as he spoke, and it was as if he was muttering to himself mostly by the end completely oblivious to Bull and I still standing there. Lace was right, this guy does get lost in his own little world.

“Of course,” I replied and saw him absently wave me away.

Bull chuckled as we turned to walk back towards the others.

“Dorian does that too when he is puzzling something out,” he commented.
I glanced up at him and nodded in agreement.

“Solas gets quiet, introspective mostly, no muttering involved but a lot of staring off,” I joked.

Back at the camp, they were cooking fresh fish over the fire and it smelled delicious. My stomach growled, and Bull glanced down at me with a raised eyebrow.

“Well, it has been a couple of hours since I last ate,” I joked making Bull snort before walking towards Dorian.

Cole appeared next to me holding a pear and I smiled at him, taking the offered fruit.

“Thanks, Cole.”

He smiled and waited for me take a bite.

“He worries when you do not eat.”

I snorted and bit into the pear, enjoying the burst of sweet on my tongue.

“When doesn’t he worry,” I commented.

Cole watched silently as I ate.

“When you are in Skyhold, he can protect you better there. ‘I could take her through the Eluvian – out of Andruil’s reach, out of the Forbidden’s view. No one would find her if I took her to the…’”

He stopped, his head tilted a little as he listened and then expelled a loud sigh while I took another bite and waited curiously to hear more of Solas’ thoughts.

His watery, soft blue eyes looked at me with an expression of frustration and I laughed, patting his arm.

“He will tell me when he is ready, Cole. It’s okay,” I reassured him.

Cole left me to finish my pear that only took the edge off my hunger and I glanced at those sitting around the fire. The soft hum of adoration flowed through our bond and it made me smile. I knew he would be studying the barrier and went to join him.

I found him studying the barrier carefully. Letting his aura touch the shimmery, mint green surface. The color reminded me of Veilfire and I leaned against the rock wall next to the barrier. His blue eyes glanced at me for a moment, his annoyance with his inability to puzzle it out clearly written in his expression before he smiled at me.

“Well, you’re the one who knows old elven magic, what have you got old man?” I teased him.

His small smirk, while he rubbed his hand over his head, sent the butterflies buzzing in a small frenzy. He stepped towards me and I smiled up at him cheekily as he bent and pressed a kiss to my lips in greeting. I sighed, pleased with the sensation and placed my hand over his heart, leaning in closer.

“I do not believe you care about my age, vhenan,” he mouthed against the corner of my lips.

“Hmm… however will we explain it to the children that their father likes younger women?”
The soft breath of his laughter teased the skin behind my ear before he pressed a light kiss there, sparking little tingles up and down my back.

“Or we could simply explain that their mother has an affinity towards older men.”

I giggled as the tip of his nose glanced down my neck teasingly before he stepped back.

“But before we tell our children anything, they must first be born,” he answered with a smirk.

I laughed and went to stand next to him in front of the mint green barrier.

“What does the color of the barrier mean something?”

He studied the shimmery surface.

“It does. Whoever placed this barrier was a dreamer, a fade mage like us. Our magic normally manifests itself as the color of the fade unless we so choose to manipulate it to disguise our existence.”

I mulled over his answer for a moment and glanced at the wall next to me where a small brazier sat, unlit.

“It couldn’t be that simple… could it?” I muttered, stepping towards the brazier.

“What could not be that simple?” Solas questioned, watching me curiously.

Lighting the brazier, Veilfire filled the small, metal chamber and I smiled.

“If we can warp the veil and use the fade for our spells, then maybe the answer is to use the veil to also negate one of our spells,” I answered him.

Solas’ expression changed from one of confusion to sudden understanding. His hand instantly glowed with the flame of Veilfire and touched the barrier. The barrier fragmented instantly with the touch of the empathic flame, exposing a medium sized chamber with other Veilfire braziers lit within.

He had a large smile on his face as he extinguished the Veilfire in his hand and cupped my face.

“You are amazing,” he said before kissing me quickly.

Laughing, he took my hand as we entered the chamber and looked around. We saw the statue of Andraste and two other statues of Elven nature depicting Ghilan'nain in the form of Halla. Flowers unlike anything we had seen in the basin, grew around the bases of the statues. The heady scents of earth and spicy flowers drifted on the air and if I closed my eyes, for just a moment, the small shrine reminded me of Wisdoms garden.

Lace and Kenrick came in behind us and a loud breath came from Kenrick at the sight of the shrine.

“Oh, well done, well done indeed.”

“That’s something you don’t see every day,” Lace commented as she stopped next to me.

“A pair of shrines. This one is clearly Andrastian, albeit from a very early period, likely pre-Divine,” he offered, his tone full of awe. He turned towards the two Halla statues, his expression of curiosity.

“But this is Elven. One of their Gods. Um, what was it… ?”

I watched as Kenrick tapped his cheek while he thought about it and I withheld a knowing smile as
both Solas and I kept our silence to see if he would know the Goddess it was for. I was curious if a
human Professor of history would also know elven history, given that most humans ignored the
elven lore entirely.

Touching his head, he closed his eyes tightly as he recanted a pneumatic rhyme to try and help him
remember.

“Every Mother Finds Druffalo Among Sleeping Juniper Groves… G something, the one with the
deer.”

I couldn’t take it anymore and a giggle escaped as he looked at me curiously.

“Ghilan’nain, mother of the Halla… and nice pneumatic trick you got their professor.”

Kenrick threw up his arms, smiling pleased.

“Yes, brilliant, thank you! That would have bothered me all night.”

Lace laughed and glanced between the two shrines.

“Two shrines for two lovers? Inquisitor Ameridan and the woman we found notes about? Telana,
maybe she was an elf.”

I didn’t remember reading anything about Telana when reading about Ameridan and his
companions. But then again, if Ameridan was human and Telana was an elf then it wasn’t surprising
they would leave out that scandal from the history books.

“Oh yes,” Kenrick replied excitedly. “That’s good! The Chantry expunged any references to elves
before the Exalted March on the Dales. They erased the Canticle of Shartan and they must have done
the same to Telana.”

I felt the displeasure from Solas flow between us and I squeezed his fingers that were still laced with
mine. The Chantry had taken many liberties with history and removing elves from the stories was not
all they twisted around to make them sound better.

“That would not be surprising considering the Chantry is only for humans and no other race is to be
considered the ‘Maker’s children’. But besides the Chantry’s offensive distortion of history for any
race other than their own, do you think this might be where Ameridan died?”

Kenrick shook his head and glanced at the shrines.

“No, this would have been a place of preparation, not burial. Ameridan and Telana must have put up
this shrine together.”

Lace knelt and gently touched one of the shimmery, pale yellow flowers.

“Look at these flowers, they’re not native to the area. What if they were left at the shrine as some
kind of offering?”

I shrugged, unsure if she was right and Kenrick nodded in agreement.

“Yes, a night of prayer before a battle against the dragon. But then where… where…” Kenrick
turned and scratched his head. “We’re missing something. What are we missing? Where did they

Solas and I continued searching the chamber until we came across a Veilfire glyph inscribed on a
wall to the right of the entrance into the chamber. Producing Veilfire, we read the glyph and heard a high-pitched ping in the air as if something had just been activated. I looked up at Solas and he too glanced around the chamber uncomfortably.

“I wonder what that was?”

Solas shook his head, his eyes still scanning the room.

“Whatever it was it would appear to not be defensive in nature.”

I nodded in agreement before calling out to Lace and Kenrick.

“Professor you might want to look at this. It reads Shartan 10:7 and Transfigurations 10:1.”

Kenrick tapped his cheek for a moment before he held up his finger and recanted the passages.

“Shartan is dissonant, ‘And before them, empty, outstretched lay the land which led to the gates of Minrathous’. The Transfigurations is, ‘The light shall lead her safely through the paths of this world.’ Why these verses? Why would Inquisitor Ameridan take the time to carve this before going into battle?”

We all stood silently for a while before Solas and I followed the wall and found the next glyph on the opposite side of the entrance. Something about using the Veilfire to read the glyph activated something again and we heard the same high-pitched ping. This time, I could feel a magical energy in the air. There was a soft hum, like walking beneath a power line.

“Do you feel that?” I asked. Solas nodded and he pulled me closer to his side while his eyes and aura felt around us. Kenrick and Lace walked up to us and I read aloud the glyph.

“It says, ‘The gates of Minrathous’. I looked at Lace questioningly. “Isn’t the place where the Hakkonites have made their base camp an old Tevinter fortress?”

“Yes! Oh! Oh, of course! The ritual site! To seal the dragon away, Ameridan’s elven mage must have used a spell at a site of great power.”

“The wall of ice,” I said quietly. Turning towards the sound of footsteps, Dorian entered the chamber.

“You might want to come outside. I don’t know what you did in here, but it did something to the metal spires.”

We went outside, and I saw what Dorian meant. There were two large, metal spires lit with a type of electricity and between them stood a lever. This is what we were feeling. Letting Solas’ hand go, I moved towards the lever and pulled it down. A bright, green bolt of magical electricity flared across the darkening sky towards another large spire.

“Well, now that it is primed. I’d be willing to bet that if we turn them all on, we will find our way through the wall of ice.”

Solas and Dorian stood next to me, staring off in the distance to the next spire as I did.

“Agreed,” they both remarked together making me giggle.

“Good, I am so glad to have both of you agreeing with me.”

Dorian kissed my cheek and smiled at me excitedly.
“This should be fun, I so love traipsing through nature,” he joked.

Solas snorted and shook his head while I chuckled at Dorian’s snarky comment.

“Let’s tell the others,” I said before taking Solas’ hand in mine again and heading down the stairs.

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I saw Amund sitting with the other Avaar cutting up fruit and turn it into something that resembled a relish. Something spicy slipped through my senses and I followed my nose to stand next to where Amund sat and introduced myself to the other Avaar.

“Thank you for joining us. I am Fenlin,” I offered.

“This is Bjarke,” Amund offered as he pointed directly across from him and then went clockwise around the group. “Colborn, Dagfinn, Einar, and Herleif.” As each one was introduced, they crossed their arm over their chest and placed a fist over their heart.

“What are you guys making?”

Amund gestured towards the ingredients while the others continued either cutting up or crushing and the more I smelled, the hungrier I got.

“It is a traditional dish for the Avaar. We use epli and virtr native to our area to put with our dinner.”

I recognized the different fruits and nuts but saw something that resembled a pepper and picked it up. Einar was busy cutting some of those and held out a small slice of it to me. Putting the pepper I held down, I took the offered slice and sniffed it first. It smelled spicy and a bit like a jalapeno. They were all watching me curiously as I popped it in my mouth. I chewed, and the instant heat filled my mouth and I smiled excitedly.

Yes! Thank you, whatever Gods are listening to my deepest desires. I can still have spicy food here. The other Avaar and Amund laughed at my expression of joy over the simple spice and I picked up the pepper studying it. It looked nothing like a jalapeno but more like a small bell pepper.

As the fish came off the fire, they scooped up some of the relish and put it over the fish before handing me a dish. My stomach growled as I accepted the fork Amund held out to me and I dug in with gusto. My eyes closed as my tongue had a food orgasm, and I moaned appreciatively as I chewed. The flaky taste of fire-grilled fish in combination with the sweet fruit combination of pears and apples, the earthy nuts that tasted like hazelnuts, and the spicy pepper was just exactly what this dish needed.

“Amund, this is delicious.”

Bull came over and snorted at me as I continued to almost shovel the food into my mouth, little moans of pleasure escaping with each bite.

“That good, Boss?”

I nodded as Solas took the plate Amund offered and sat beside me. His love for me hummed between us and I briefly smiled at him before taking another bite. I was on my second helping when everyone was finally sitting down to eat. Raj moved to lie down beside me and I ran my hand over his head lovingly just as Herleif spoke.
“How did you come to travel with a filtiarn?”

I glanced at Raj affectionately as I recalled the day Cole found him.

“We were in the Emerald Graves searching for information on the Elder One's commander of his forces, Sampson, and Cole found him. His mother was killed by who knows, but I took him in. We are travel companions and friends, he is free to come and go as he pleases now that he is old enough to take care of himself. He prefers to stay with me and I am glad does because I would miss him.”

Herleif studied Raj for a moment and looked back at me.

“The Gods must believe you worthy to send you a spirit animal.”

I didn’t fully understand what the Avaar believed when it came to their spirituality, but I did understand that what he said was respectful and I smiled. I fed Raj the last piece of my fish finally feeling full and took my plate to the where we kept the water and packs for supplies. Sera walked towards me just as I was finished cleaning my dishes and was stowing them back into the pack.

I turned to leave and heard her clear her throat and stopped, glancing at her to wait for whatever she had to say. We hadn’t resolved what happened between us in the Hissing Wastes and I wondered how long Sera could handle the distance that had grown between us. I missed our friendship, but I wasn’t going to apologize for being who I was just to make her happy.

“Would you braid my hair for me?”

I stared at her for a silent moment and she stepped closer, her fingers twisting nervously.

“Please?”

I finally nodded and followed after her towards her pack. She pulled it open quickly and grabbed her comb before sitting on the nearest log. I stood behind her and untied the leather thong that held her hair up in a ponytail. Her hair really had gotten longer, and I ran the comb through it carefully, removing the little knots.

I parted her hair and began braiding as Sera let a sigh out and cleared her throat again.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

My fingers stilled for a moment when I heard her quiet apology and then continued waiting for whatever else she would say.

“I got caught sealing when I was little, yeah? You get alienage or worse for that, but the ‘Lady Emald’ took me in. She was sick and couldn’t have children, I had no parents. It worked out.”

I finished the first braid and tying it off, started on the second half as Sera let a sigh out and cleared her throat again.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered.

My fingers stilled for a moment when I heard her quiet apology and then continued waiting for whatever else she would say.

“I got caught sealing when I was little, yeah? You get alienage or worse for that, but the ‘Lady Emald’ took me in. She was sick and couldn’t have children, I had no parents. It worked out.”

I finished the first braid and tying it off, started on the second half as Sera continued.

“Anyway, she gets a year sicker, so I ask about her cookies. Because mums make cookies, I can pass that down or something. Turns out, she couldn’t cook. She missed that talk with her mum. The ones she ‘made’ she bought and pretended. Aw, right? Well no, she was a bitch. She hid buying them by keeping me away from the baker. She did that by lying that he didn’t like me, didn’t like elves.”

I finished the braid and tied it off as Sera spoke softly.

“She let me hate so she could protect her pride. I hated him so much, and I hated…”

“Being an elf,” I finished as I sat down next to her.
Her blue eyes briefly glanced at me before she stared at her twisting fingers.

“Well, she died, and I hated pride, ‘pride cookies’.”

I sighed and shook my head wishing there was some way I could go back in time and slap the stupid out Lady Emald. What she did to Sera as a child really set her up to be confused and bitter for the rest of her life.

“I didn’t want to believe any of it you know,” she said with a snort before looking at me. “Elven Gods and all that mess, but what I saw in that Temple and then later in the camp… frightened me. Made me angry you were right-and I let pride get between us because I didn’t want to be wrong.”

I grabbed Sera into a tight hug. Glad she confided in me why she had acted the way she did and felt her arms tighten around me.

“Thank you, Sera.”

“We good, yeah?”

I laughed as we pulled apart.

“Yeah, we are golden.”

Chapter End Notes

Norse Words

Epli - Fruit
Virtr - Spices
Filtiarn - wolf
Stone-Bear Hold was a bustle of activity as we left our cabins for the path that leads to the docks. According to Kenrick, he believed that there might be a clue to Ameridan’s past on the mysterious island. While we headed to the island, the Hold would prepare for the assault planned for tonight. My stomach gurgled ominously, and I nibbled on a piece of bread as we walked and prayed my stomach would settle down before we got into the rowboat.

I walked in the back of our party and gazed out at the choppy waters. Well, this is about to get really damn uncomfortable. Unconsciously, I ran my hand over my stomach while I took another bite of my bread. You gotta work with me here bean, come on, give mama a break today. Warm fingers touched my cheek and I glanced up to see Solas watching me worriedly. With a nervous smile, I laid my hand over his and leaned into the small touch.

“Perhaps we should wait for you to not feel so nauseous before we embark across the water.”

I snorted and leaned away from him, shaking my head. Popping the last of the bread in my mouth, I dusted my hands together.

“Ma’lath, it would seem our child is as stubborn as we are. If we were to wait for it to pass, the sun would rise in the Hissing Wastes first.”

There was a loud burst of laughter from Solas that made everyone turn around to look at us curiously. I smiled cheekily at everyone as Solas pressed a kiss to my head.

“I shall bear that in mind,” he replied, his tone full of humor.

I glanced up at him and tapped him on the nose.

“You do that.”

We approached the docks and my stomach gave a small roll of warning and I swallowed nervously as I stepped onto the boat. The rocking motion of everyone stepping in set my stomach rolling and I clenched my eyes tightly for a moment, trying to control the urge to vomit. Raj was the last to jump in and laid his head in my lap while Solas removed the rope securing the boat and sat next to me. Raj’s blue-green eyes looked at me nervously and I ran my fingers over his head.

Solas pushed us away from the docks and Bull grabbed the oars and started rowing, and my stomach lurched warningly as the boat jolted forward. Oh, God... your just not going to cooperate, are you? My mouth watering, I swallowed and slightly whimpered as I clutched at my stomach. Solas’ hand rubbed my back while his aura surrounded me with comfort.

“You okay Sketch, you look a little green around the gills?”

I shook my head just before I leaned over the side and puked. Everyone on the small vessel was
silent while I heaved my guts up until there was nothing left to give. Taking the small handkerchief Solas held out to me, I wiped my mouth before taking a drink from my canteen and rinsing out the taste, spitting it over the side.

I pocketed the handkerchief and wiped at my eyes while everyone still seemed to watch me nervously except for Bull and Cole.

“This is not the first time you have been ill Fenlin, are you sure you are well?”

Cassandra looked at me worriedly and I shook my head.

“No Cassandra, I am not sick,” I took a deep breath and finally looked at everyone. *Well, its a good a time as any to tell them.*

“The announcement landed like a rock as everyone stared at me. I waited for the shock to wear off and prepared for the onslaught of verbal lashings I was sure I would get.

“Why in Andraste’s ass are we even out here?” Dorian began, his expression angry.

“Mafarath’s balls, Sketch, have you lost your mind?” Varric said shaking his head.

Cassandra’s angry gaze went from me to Solas and stayed.

“You knew, and you allowed her to continue? We should be heading back to Skyhold instead of foolishly traipsing around this damn basin.”

I clenched my teeth together as I tried to gather some patience and understanding. I knew they cared for me and that was the only reason they were angry. The only ones not saying anything were the three who had known for a while and Hawke, Fenris, and Sera, who I am pretty sure is still in shock trying to absorb the information.

Holding my hands up, the angry muttering coming from everyone stopped.

“I am out here because I have a job to do, *we* have a job to do. I have not lost my mind Varric, and Solas doesn’t *allow* me to do anything Cassandra, I am not his property, I am his mate, and in case you might have forgotten, I am quite capable of taking care of myself thank you very damn much.”

I saw Dorian look at Bull questioningly and when Bull wouldn’t look at him, he slapped his arm.

“You knew! You knew and said absolutely nothing!”

Bull rubbed the back of his neck and just nodded his head, looking at me. I think he finally understood why I hadn’t wanted to tell anyone when we had talked about it a couple of months ago.

“It would appear you two have no common sense but I do. Turn this boat around,” Cassandra commanded with a growl.

My anger was instantaneous and I lurched to my feet in the middle of the boat, as my limit of tolerance was reached with the overbearing nature of my friends.

“Enough!”

The sound of my voice vibrating around everyone made them flinch as the water even pushed away from the boat in a large ripple. Only Solas wore a small smirk and shook his head.

“This is not up for fucking debate. We have a job to do and the more you all dick around arguing,
the longer this is going to take.”

My gaze was angry, my words cold and clipped as I stared at each of them, one at a time.

“Bull get us to that damn island, so we can get this over with. We have an assault on the Hakkonites tonight and I would like to get a fucking nap in before we do that.”

“You can’t possibly…” Dorian began and stopped immediately with my angry look.

“It appears she does,” Varric commented and rubbed his face.

Bull nodded his head and picked up the oars again while Cassandra and I had a staring contest. Her jaw was clenched tightly, and then she shook her head and looked out over the water as I sat down. I sagged in frustration and let a small sigh escape as Solas laced his fingers with mine and pressed a kiss to my forehead.

Bull rowed us towards the island and I leaned into Solas’ side as the boat glided through the water.

The rest of our trip over the water was done in silence until we reached the island. Bull rowed us to the broken-down dock and Cole sprang nimbly to the platform, taking the rope Bull threw to him. Our boat tied off, Solas took my hand and helped me from the boat as Raj jumped into the water and swam the few feet to the shore.

Dorian eyeballed him as the large animal left the water and groaned, covering his face as Raj suddenly shook the excess water from himself, spraying everyone within the vicinity.

“Don’t think I don’t know you did that on purpose,” Dorian snarked, wiping at his chest.

I snorted at the bored expression on Raj’s wolven face followed by a low chuff before he trotted away. I glanced around the area that was obviously a fishing camp at one time.

“Ameridan… must find Ameridan,” an eerie voice echoed over the area.

I glanced around carefully before taking a step forward. Spirits floated by us as we walked a narrow path up a small incline. Bull and Cassandra led our way forward and I felt a prickling sensation over my skin. Glancing down at my hand as I rubbed it, I noticed that my skin softly glowed and I looked at Solas and saw that he too had an ethereal glow to his skin.

“The veil is almost non-existent here,” I said to him.

Solas glanced down at me and nodded his head in agreement.

“Be wary vhenan. We do not know what kind of spirits have been called here.”

We crested the small hill and Cassandra and Bull knelt quickly. She threw her hand up in a fist, telling us to stop. I crouched next to her and looked to where she pointed. There was a broken-down hut with barely a roof and only three out of the four walls partially intact. What was amazing was that it was surrounded by a barrier exactly like the one we found at the first Tevinter ruin. What was annoying was that there was already a large group of Venatori trying to figure out how to breach the barrier.

The sound of the eerie voice from before echoed through the air and I realized that the voice was coming from behind the barrier.

“I think we found our source of the voice we all keep hearing,” I whispered.
Cassandra nodded her head while her eyes scanned the group of Venatori.

“We need to try and keep one of them alive to find out more about the staff they are looking for here in the Basin.”

Bull and Cassandra nodded in agreement and I motioned for Fenris to come closer. He knelt next to me and his eyes scanned the Magisters, his expression cold and angry.

“As I just told them, I need one alive.”

His emerald green eyes held mine and he gave me a sharp nod. I moved back down the small incline and directed the others.

“We surround them. Varric, Sera, get up there to those rocks and let me know when you get there,” I said pointing at the small rise that they could use to overlook the small area. “Hawke, you and Dorian take the left side with Cole while Solas and I will come in behind Cassandra, Bull, and Fenris.”

Everyone took off in their perspective directions and I waited for the soft bird call Varric whistled when they were in position. I checked the small barrier around the bean, relieved that it held strong. Smiling when I heard the small trill and glanced down at Raj, running my hand over his large hand.

“Okay, big guy, let them know we are coming.”

Raj’s head drew back and a low, eerie howl sounded through the air. The vibration of the wolf call stilled the Venatori from their discussion and they looked around nervously. I took Solas’ hand and wove the spell removing us from sight and made our way towards the cabin as Bull, Cassandra, Fenris, and Raj charged up the hill.

The fight went smoothly and only one Venatori stood, staring at his dead comrades on the ground around him. I walked towards him with Raj at my side and his eyes narrowed angrily. His focus was solely on me and he missed that Fenris was now standing behind him, his lyrium tattoo’s glowing.

“Why won’t you just die?” The Venatori snarled at me.

I ignored his question and crossed my arms behind me.

“Who do the Venatori think has the staff?” I replied instead.

The Magister stared at me coldly obviously unwilling to answer me. I gave Fenris a subtle nod and the Magister’s expression went from one of cold indifference to painfilled horror as he screamed in agony.

“Answer her, mage,” Fenris growled close to the Magister’s ear.

I couldn’t see what he was doing, but whatever Fenris was doing to the Magister, was obviously causing the man great pain. His face was instantly dotted with sweat, his mouth stuck in an open position, silently screaming.

“W-we are l-look-king for the s-st-aff of H-Hakkon. The l-last I-Inquisitor ca-rried it,” he finally answered.

“That will be all,” Fenris said before killing the Magister.

I crossed my arms and stared down at the dead Venatori, rolling the information around in my head.
“The staff of Hakkon? Maybe Ameridan was a mage after all.”

Everyone looked as confused as I did, and I rubbed my face as the voice from inside the barrier spoke again.

“Must find Ameridan.”

I walked towards the barrier and with my aura studied it for a moment and found it exactly like the one from the Tevinter ruin. Forming Veilfire in my hand, I touched the barrier and the barrier burst like a bubble. In the middle of the bubble was a spirit that floated over a pallet with a small skeleton, surrounded by the same flowers we found in the ruin. Telana.

“Telana slept, I slept… to find him in dreaming. But I-the blood, I… she’s gone. Telana wanted to reach Ameridan again, one more time. But she couldn’t, I couldn’t, I died. I tried to stay but only pieces came through. You opened the sky for the rest of me.”

I glanced at Cole, his expression of painfilled compassion.

“It hurts, she hurts. The wraiths knew only the pain, but she knew why. Daring, dreaming into darkness for Ameridan.”

“Ameridan,” the spirit said with a torn voice. “Yes, Inquisitor, beloved. I-she came with Ameridan to hunt the dragon.”

She must be a spirit of love, I realized sadly.

“The dragon?” I asked.

“Huge, a power like no one had seen. It came from the mountains with the Avvar. Tanks fell, all dead. One last favor for Emperor Drakon. Slay the Avvar dragon, save Orlais.”

“There are no records of a dragon, so he must have killed it and died in the process.”

“Yes, if he had lived, he would have found her-me, but he didn’t, and no one ever knew. They fought at the shore, spirits, and magic-cold… so cold. How I found her-how she found us. They rested here, then up the river, metal spires, a way to stop the dragon. Then Telana returned to here-alone, to wait for him. Forever waiting-dreaming, and then… dead.”

“We’ll find Ameridan, you don’t have to wait here anymore,” I told the spirit, wishing I could hug her.

“You did what she wanted you too. You can let go of her now,” Cole said to the spirit.

“Thank you, it was hard. I-she went a long time ago. I stayed because she asked. Her things are there, she wanted them found.”

The spirit fluttered before completely disappearing and a heavy sigh left me. *If were Solas, I would have tried to find him too, just like Telana had tried.*

Walking towards the skeletal body, I bent and found the small satchel with a diary and parchment inside, enchanted against age and rot. Opening the parchment, the beautiful script was obviously written with a woman’s hand and I read it aloud.

“Whosoever reads this message,

Let it be known that the bearer, Inquisitor Ameridan, Commander of the Seekers of Truth, travels to
the Frostback Basin on the official request of his divine majesty, Kordillus Drakon, Emperor of Orlais, upon business vital to the safety and security of this most holy empire and that he and those who travel with him are to be afforded every service, rendered every assistance, and extended every courtesy in their efforts to protect Orlesian lives from threats both magical and mundane.

Maker watch over him,
Kordillus Drakon I”

I folded the parchment and placed it back within the journal and put it in my pack.

“Maybe Professor Kenrick can explain why none of this was in the history about Inquisitor Ameridan.”

We slowly shuffled from the broken hut and walked back towards the boat. Solas’ hand grasped mine and laced our fingers together. Our bond hummed with our shared love and understanding of what one would do for the other.

He would move mountains and challenge the Gods for you, she remembered from her talk with Mythal. Gazing up into his beautiful eyes, I mentally nodded. Yup, that about sums it up.

We walked into the main Inquisition camp where Kenrick would be and found him going over some notes he had strewn over a large table. His head came up at my approach and gave everyone a friendly smile.

“Did the island hold any answers?”

I nodded my head and pulled out the small journal from my pack.

“A spirit on the island held the memories and possessions of Ameridan’s lover, Telana. It told us that Ameridan was here on orders from Emperor Drakon himself.”

Kenrick took the book from outstretched hands, his expression full of radiant joy.

“Andraste’s dimples, I may have received tenure from that sentence alone. Ameridan and Telana were lovers after all. The Inquisitor’s lady mage! There was much debate over whether she existed! And there were orders? He was sent here by Drakon? This changes everything!”

I chuckled and shook my head.

“I see you don’t have a problem receiving information from spirits.”

Kenrick laughed and opened the journal, reading the parchment folded inside.

“Hu? Oh, no. It’s not ideal, but with this corroborating physical evidence, I see no serious issues. Any study of great wars and battlefields carries an inherent risk of contact with demons or spirits. When spirits are willing to talk, most historians love the chance of a firsthand report.”

I saw Solas smiling at Professor Kenrick, pleased that he was willing to listen to the spirits.

“Why were you so surprised that we found proof that Ameridan had a lover?”
“Of course. Telana’s existence has been hotly debated for years. Some scholars took Inquisitor Ameridan’s respect for the Chantry to imply that he was celibate. In ages past, there were stories about him and his lover, a mage. They made it out to be a star-crossed romance. The Chantry silenced the stories strenuously.”

“So, what does it change now, knowing that Ameridan was on a mission from Emperor Drakon?”

“Everything! One current theory holds that Ameridan was selfish. Throwing off his responsibilities to go hunting. Another suggests that Drakon had him removed or even killed because Ameridan opposed the Nevarran Accord. But with this,” he said holding up the diary and letter with an expression of triumph. “I can prove that Ameridan was a loyal servant of Orlais! He was not an embarrassment. He was a patriot protecting Orlais while Drakon fought in the second blight.”

Covering a yawn, I nodded my head with understanding.

“Well, good then.”

Solas moved to my side and took my hand, lacing his fingers with mine and smiled at Professor Kenrick.

“If you will excuse us, Professor, we must still eat and get some sleep before tonight’s assault on the Tevinter ruin with the Avvar.”

Kenrick nodded, motioning with his hand absently as he read from the journal.

“Yes, yes, of course… we can continue later.”

I shook my head at how quickly the Professor got distracted and let Solas lead me back towards the Avvar hold.

Tonight was definitely going to be a long one.
Everyone was waiting for us outside as I slipped my staff into the harness on my back and rechecked the buckles for my chest piece. Solas walked towards me and ran his hand over my stomach checking that the protective barrier was in place around bean. I pressed my hand to his and gave him a tender smile, my pleasure with how much he loved me flowing through our bond.

“Bean will be fine, Solas.”

A softness fell over his features with the nickname I had given our child even as his eyes held mine and the uneasiness he felt with me going, flowed through our bond.

The anxiety I felt from him reflected in his eyes and I reached up and caressed his jaw. His eyes closed as he leaned into the touch before bending his head and pressing his forehead against mine.

“Promise me that you will not stray from my side.”

I slowly nodded before pulling back and holding his serious gaze.

“I promise.”

He pressed a brief kiss to my lips before opening the door for me. Outside the other’s milled about checking buckles on their armor, sharpening blades or just sitting around the fire waiting.

When everyone saw me, those that were sitting stood up as I approached them.

“I still do not like that you will be leading this assault,” Cassandra muttered.

I held her steely gaze and nodded in agreement. *Hell, I didn’t want me to lead it either.*

“Then you will be pleased to know that I won’t be. Svarah is leading the assault on the Jaw’s of Hakkon while we enter the ruin in search of the staff the Venatori want.”

Dorian snorted and shook his head.

“Do you foresee that the ruin will be empty, my dear?”

His words dripped with sarcasm and I raised my eyebrow at him before crossing my arms.

“Don’t be such a drama queen, Dorian. Of course, the ruin won’t be completely empty, that is why all of us are going inside while the Avvar causes the distraction on the outside. Now park your snarky attitude at the door and play nice.”

Dorian’s eyebrow rose at my own sarcastic tone.

“I always play nice,” he replied, and I snorted in response.

Turning away from them, I headed up the path to Svarah’s cave for the meeting.
Inside Svarah’s cave, Amund was talking with the Augur and some of the other Avvar warriors preparing for battle. As we approached, Svarah turned and held her arm out in greeting.

“With the ice-wall melted, the fortress is open to attack. We must strike soon before our foes recover,” she said, grasping my arm.

“Agreed,” I replied.

Letting her arm go, Lace walked in with Professor Kenrick.

“They’re already trying. I’ve got most of our forces defending the shrine from Hakkonites who want to restore the wall.”

I looked at Lace and rubbed my face knowingly. The bond between Solas and I hummed with understanding as the reality of more lives in my hands lost, set in.

“The fortress was built to be defensible. It’s going to cost us a lot of people to take it.”

Svarah looked from me to Lace and shook her head.

“Why?”

Kenrick, for once was paying full attention and looked at Svarah.

“I am no warrior, but with Lady Harding’s forces defending the shrine and no way to breach the walls…?”

Svarah snorted and smirked at him.

“Lowlanders. Why not climb the walls?”

Lace glanced from me to Svarah with a hopeful expression.

“Can your warriors get over those walls before the Hakkonites can stop them?”

Svarah looked at me and nodded her head before addressing Lace.

“Aye, this is not a war, stone-daughter. This is a raid. We climb the wall and open the gate from the inside.”

I glanced around the room looking for any other input and saw everyone’s expressions were full of contemplation with the possibilities that Svarah offered with the idea. I was just glad she wasn’t trying to talk me into climbing the wall because that was never going to happen.

“Well, then, unless anyone has something that sounds easier than climbing the walls…?”

“I would not offer what I could not give, Fenlin. It will be done. Perhaps, my climbers will earn themselves a legend mark.”

The Avvar warriors gathered, made pleasing sounds as they clapped each other on the shoulders with the possible honor. I nodded and glanced at Lace as she spoke.

“Inquisition forces will feign weakness near the shrine. That will draw some away from the fortress.”
“Not too many I hope,” Kenrick said worriedly. I silently agreed with Kenrick’s worry as I too didn’t want our people the main focus of the Hakkonites.

“Yes, save some for us,” Svarah replied as she slid her sword into the scabbard on her side.

Lace chuckled and nodded her understanding before leaving the room.

When we got to the wall, the Avvar warriors from our earlier meeting, checked their weapons and tightened their gear preparing for the climb. I studied the inner courtyard noticing the large fire in the center and the torches lit along the walls.

“Right, Inquisitor. Hask and I will climb over,” a muscular Avvar said quietly.

He was wearing dark armor, his face also painted black, grey eyes standing out starkly in the contrast of the torch’s glow. Another Avvar snorted and playfully punched his shoulder.

“I’ll be there to catch Parve when he slips.”

“Of course, you will. You’ll be behind me after all.”

The soft chuckles from the warriors lightened the mood and removed the seriousness of the situation as they fanned out quickly and moved silently over the forest floor towards the wall. Me and the others knelt behind a large rock wall that was part of the entryway that was shrouded in shadow.

There were ten or more Hakkonites patrolling the door, while their mages worked feverishly trying to replace the wall the Tevinter spires had destroyed. Narrowing my gaze on the mages, I motioned for Varric and Sera and pointed at them. They gave me a quick nod before they too fanned out for higher ground.

Svarah and I shared a brief look and a quick nod before she too went through the archway leading a group of Avvar and I took a steadying breath before following behind her with Cassandra and Bull leading the way.

A patrolling Hakkonite on the wall of the fortress saw us and shouted loudly.

“There! It’s the Lowlanders.”

The warning sent the Hakkonites in the courtyard scrambling to defend the fortress.

“Kill the Inquisitor! Death to her hold, for Hakkon’s glory!”

I released a fade fist into the one who spoke, knocking him off the wall as we rushed through the opening. Stone Bear-Hold was rushing over the Hakkonites like water rushing through a broken dam and the true meaning to a ‘raid’ made a lot of sense. Svarah flooded the Hakkonites with sheer strength from all sides completely disorientating her enemies.

The loud challenging roar from Storvacher shook the ground as her large body charged into the fray of steel and magic.

“Oh, goodie, we have a bear,” Dorian joked, making me laugh.

Casting a barrier around the hold-beast, Raj’s howl soon followed before I heard his snarls from
beside me as he viciously ripped into the leg of a Hakkonite warrior that dared get close to me.

“And a wolf,” Hawke replied cheekily from behind me.

And if they aren’t careful, they might get an eyeful of a really pissed off cat. Grunts of exertion and clashes of steel against steel filled the air, as my barrier reflected another Hakkonite arrow. Checking the barrier around bean again, I cast fade meteors on the Hakkonites that rushed through the now open door thanks to Svarah’s warriors. Solas’ barrier slipped over us as I kept my promise and we continued moving towards the doors together.

Inside the fortress, there was a bitter cold, unlike anything I had ever felt before. This cold is not natural, I realized as small frozen orbs floated in the air like silent sentinels waiting to attack. Dorian threw large balls of fire, making them explode as we moved further into the fortress.

We slipped quickly down a long hall and my teeth began chattering together. Following the rock-laden hallway, I saw the large fire lit, brazier at the end and moved towards it quickly.

“Bloody hell, it is cold in here,” Dorian complained. The sound of his teeth slightly clicking together like my own was almost comical if I didn’t think I would freeze to death in the next ten seconds.

I nodded my head in agreement and we stopped to gather around the brazier to warm up.

“It is definitely warmer in this room,” Varric commented.

I noticed that my skin was lightly glowing and glanced up at Solas seeing he was too.

“The fade is very thin here and this cold we are experiencing is magical. Perhaps this is Hakkon’s defense against invaders, similar to the wall.”

Dorian shrugged and appeared about to say something when a voice echoed through the ruin.

“Sing the song of savage Hakkon. Born in battle, bloody bladed…”

“The ritual is underway, there is a great deal of magical energy coming from the bottom of the ruin,” Solas said and Dorian, myself, and Hawke all nodded our heads in agreement.

“Wintersbreath to wrack the lowlands, cold to cut and kill the hated…”

Listening to the spell echo in the chamber, I gave Solas a small nod and we followed the voice through winding corridors, stopping at braziers to warm ourselves before moving on.
“We must hurry whenan. The Hakkonite leader is calling the spirit of Hakkon into his own body.”

“Well, that is intelligence at its finest,” I commented.

Following the stairs further down into the ruin, we finally came to a large chamber with Gurd Harofsen in the center. My breath caught at the sight of the frozen dragon, encased in a green barrier and an elven man with dark brown hair. His head was bent where he knelt on the raised rock platform, his still form holding a large staff as he appeared asleep.

*That can’t be…*

“Face me and die, Inquisitor. Your predecessor before you could not stand against me. You shall fall to me as well.”

I held Gurd Harofsen’s black gaze steadily.

“You flatter yourself, Harofsen.”

Solas’ barrier slipped over me while the others fanned out and I traced a rune of fire onto the ground. Harofsen charged, holding his mighty maul over his head and I fade stepped to the side out of his way. Using my staff as a baseball bat, I hit him in the stomach and with a quick move behind him, I shoved him in the back with the head of my staff, sending him into the fire rune.

His laughter echoed through the chamber eerily as he doused the flames that had briefly engulfed his huge form with a show of cold magic.

“I am the cold bite of winter! I am Hakkon reborn!”

“And you’ve mistaken me for someone who gives a shit!” I replied sarcastically.

Casting a fade fist with the speed of a wicked pitcher, it stunned the Avvar as he stumbled back a few steps. It was all the time we needed as Bull, Cole, Cassandra, Raj, and Fenris rushed him, knocking him back even further. Harofsen’s loud growl of anger vibrated the walls causing icicles to fall from the ceiling.

We worked feverishly to make sure everyone had a barrier before Solas, Hawke, Dorian, and myself used the elements to wound him. Fade fire fell with mage fire, electricity concentrated on just one man came out of the air in a thick bolt, immobilizing him while a large boulder-sized ice ball fell on him. In the meantime, Varric and Sera shot from a distance.

Harofsen fell under our siege. I knew he hadn’t had enough time to complete the ritual by bringing Hakkon completely into his body, but he definitely had enough time to make him a difficult son-of-a-bitch to kill.

A wintery fog left his dead body and went back to the large suspended dragon. With Harofsen dead, the barrier around the dragon and the elven man fragmented and the large dragon fell on the floor in a large heap.

“Fen’edhis,” I muttered, casting a barrier over myself and Solas.

The large dragon slowly got to its feet and shook her mighty head to remove her confusion. She roared in warning, exposing huge, sharp teeth as she leaped upward. Large, blue and purple colored wings unfolded from her enormous body, rocketing towards the opening in the ceiling. The beat of her wings blew us all back and I watched her escape.
“Shit,” I growled, scrambling to my feet. “We can’t let Hakkon get away.”

Rocks that had previously been shaken loose from the dragons escape slowly floated to form a stairway to the rock ledge with the elven man. I stepped upward until I got to the rock platform and stared into the palest greenest eyes I had ever witnessed before. His face bore Dirthamen’s vallis’lin, etched in deep forest green that stood out against his pale skin. His armor was similar to sentinel armor with the gilded pauldrons and greaves intermixed with leather and wool. I noticed that he was leaning heavily on his staff and breathing hard as he held my steady gaze.

The staff was what the Venatori were after and standing this close to him, I could sense why. The staff held power… a lot of power. It was not constructed much differently than my own. It was made of Ironbark, with a wicked Silverite blade at the end. What was different was the Emerald sphere at the head of the staff held by many different types of metals woven around it, giving it a beautiful, round, gilded cage and this is what the Venatori wanted.

I bowed my head towards him in greeting.

“Inquisitor.”

“Inquisitor,” he replied. The soft cadence of his accent reminded me of Solas’. “Andaran atish’an. I am glad that Drakon’s friendship with our people has remained strong.”

“How long do you think you have been here?”

His head cocked to the side as he studied me.

“You say it as though it has…” he suddenly looked down at the rock beneath him. “How long?”

“There has not been an Inquisitor since you disappeared… 800 years ago.”

Ameridan shook his head, unwilling to accept this reality.

“Drakon was my oldest friend. He would have sent someone to find me.”

Solas stepped forward and held Ameridan’s gaze.

“He never had the chance. The Darkspawn that rose in the Anderfels threatened all of Orlais.”

Ameridan’s gaze dropped back to the rocky ground beneath him and a heavy sigh escaped.

“I see.” He suddenly looked up and stared at me, his expression full of hope. “Telana escaped the battle. Did she… do the records say what became of her?”

I felt my heart squeeze with his question and a massive part of me didn’t want to tell him what had become of her. Solas’ support flooded our bond and I cleared my throat.

“She returned to the island. From what we can tell…” I cleared my throat again and clenched my hands into fists, pushing myself to answer him. “She died trying to reach you through dreams.”

His hopeful expression fell, and he shook his head. Small tears formed in his eyes as he let out a shuddering breath.

“I asked her not to. She was a good hunter… and the love of my life, but she never…” sighing heavily again, I could see his shoulders sagging in defeat. “I never wanted this job. Hunting demons were so much simpler than politics. But Drakon told me I was needed…” he looked up at me and I could see the compassion and understanding reflecting back from the pale gaze. “As I suspect, you
were needed.”

Cassandra cleared her throat to gather his attention and he looked at her.

“Inquisitor Ameridan, how could the leader of the Seekers be a mage?”

“Has history forgotten so much? I was not a Seeker myself, as most Inquisitors were. I used my magical gifts in the hunting of demons and Maleficarum. Do the Seekers no longer welcome the aid of mages?”

Cassandra shook her head.

“No, that was forgotten… among many other things.”

I gestured towards Cassandra, introducing her.

“This is Cassandra Pentaghast. She is a member of the Order of Seekers.”

Cassandra bowed towards him.

“I am honored, Inquisitor.”

Ameridan bowed his head towards her.

“As am I. Your predecessors were good men and women in difficult times. As the Inquisition joined the Chantry, we required a leader who inspired loyalty, not fear. Drakon asked that I lead, to show a united front. I was needed… and I see that has not changed as you have chosen another that is also magically gifted.”

I shook my head and glanced at Cassandra before I gave him a small smile.

“I wasn’t Inquisitor by choice. Whatever my life was before…” I shrugged, and his look was full of understanding.

“Take moments of happiness where you find them. The world will take the rest from you,” he offered.

There was a wealth of truth in that simple statement and I nodded in agreement with him.

“The dragon carries the spirit of the Avvar God, Hakkon. I lacked the strength to kill it. My own magic was able to bind us all, locked in time. But when the cultists drew part of that spirit into another vessel, it disrupted my bindings and it broke free.”

“I will finish what you have started.”

“Thank you,” he replied with relief. “The passage of years can be delayed, but not ignored. I will soon join Telana at Andraste’s side.” He held out his staff to me with a small smile. “Take this, you will need it to fight the dragon. It also holds the last memories of an old hunter who was neither as wise nor as strong as he thought. Fight well Inquisitor, I am honored to have met you.”

I never knew that pregnancy was going to turn me into an emotional ball of feelings and I knelt in front of him. Wrapping him in a tight hug, I felt his arm return the gesture. Sniffling, I wiped at the tears I was shedding for him and all he had endured as I took the staff.

“Dareth shiral, Inquisitor,” I whispered as his body slowly dissolved into dust and blew away.
I took Solas’ hand that he held out for me and stood. Wiping the last of the tears away, I took a shaky breath before looking at the others.

“We have no time to waste, there is an Avvar God trapped in a dragon’s body that needs to be released.”

I glanced back at the rocky platform one last time before following the others down the rocky steps.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Fen'edhis - wolf dick (universal curse word)
Adaran atish'an - Formal elven greeting
Dareth shiral - Safe journey
Freeing an Avvar God of War

Chapter Notes

I do apologize for not posting this last week. With hurricane Florence (I have dubbed her Aunt Flo since she was not wanted) her rains flooded some of our areas here in Virginia and took out my internet access. Trust me when I say that I raged at the hurricane as much as her rains slapped against my windows. After a week our internet provider decided to not live up to their name and fixed it. (Oh yes, calling you out COX Cable - you truly suck)

Anyhoo, rant finished, I really appreciate everyone who has patiently waited for the next chapter.
Thank you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once we stepped from the ruin, the night sky was filled with a beautiful pink and green aurora. It resembled a wispy river that lazily flowed through the darkened night like a beacon leading us towards the shoreline.

We moved hastily down the path, Raj bounding ahead of everyone, leading the pursuit of the dragon. I held the staff Ameridan gave me and I caught Solas’ glance at the weapon. I had never really taken the time to really look at it and glanced at the huge emerald sphere at the head and inside the crystal, it swirled with a green smoke. The smoke reminded me of how Mythal brought me here, the idea of the tendrils escaping and hog tying me sent a shiver of apprehension down my back. It was definitely no ordinary crystal.

“Is that…”

Solas took the staff I held out to him. His aura expanded and a small, knowing smile stretch across his beautiful lips.

“It is indeed. How Ameridan was able to obtain such an orb is astonishing.”

My mind spun with the possibilities and I couldn’t discount that niggling feeling that Mythal had something to do with Ameridan obtaining it. Come on… now you’re just chasing unicorns! There’s no damn way, the ancient had anything to do with it. Though my words sounded convincing, I didn’t believe them. My eyes were drawn to the pattern of the smoke and I couldn’t tear my eyes away from the seductive swirl of the fade within the crystal.

My attention strayed when we made it to the edge of the water and I shivered as the instant cold rushed over me. Hakkon had frozen a large area, including the dock and small fishing camp that sat along the shoreline. Well, this looks like a wonderful place to fight an Avvar God bound to a dragon. Not!

“Lovely, it is almost like we are back in Emprise Du Lion,” Dorian snarked, rubbing his hands together.

Laughing softly, it is like he can read my mind sometimes. I nodded my agreement with him as Bull
spoke up.

“The good news is that there are no mountains of Red lyrium.”

“Or lyrium giants,” Varric quipped.

“But there is cold... a lot a friggin cold,” Sara said while running her hands up and down her arms.

Snorting a bit with the joking, I glance around at everyone and my face grew serious.

“Hakkon will not be easy, or the typical dragon fight. Everyone, stay alert, work together, we all
know what needs to be done so let’s do it so we can leave.”

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement. Raj walked with me and Solas as we followed
Cassandra and Bull. The energy was high as we walked over the icy surface towards the dragon that
sat on a large icy perch. The loud roar from Hakkon shook the ground beneath our feet and the
sound of cracking ice made me nervous.

I do not want to go swimming. Checking the barrier around bean, a feeling of relief flowed through
our shared bond and Solas glanced down at me with a soft look. His aura caressed over mind as we
entered the flat area where Hakkon glared down at us from its perch and its loud growling laughter
echoed around us.

“Lowlanders, I am the breath of winter, the cold of war! Join me in battle and die!”

“Today is a good day... Today is a VERY good day,” Bull growled pulling his large ax from the
harness on his back.

Cassandra slammed her sword against the side of her shield and gave Bull a smile of agreement.
Hakkon blew a large ball of ice at us as he suddenly launched from his icy perch towards us, and we
all dove in different directions.

“Well, if that’s how you want it,” Hawke quipped as she shot a ball of electrical energy towards the
flying dragon.

We quickly started with placing barriers while Sera, Varric, Hawke, Dorian, and I began the volley
of magic and arrows back. Hakkon swirled and spiraled in the air trying to miss our attacks and only
one of Dorian’s fireballs hit the dragon on the side.

Hakkon landed and roared. The ground shook with the deafening sound and the staff that Ameridan
gave me almost hummed in my hand. What the actual hell is this thing doing? Without me essentially
casting anything, I felt the fade warp around me and a large fade meteor fell from the sky, hitting
Hakkon in the middle of its back.

Well, okay then. The damn thing has an attitude and a mind of its own. If Mythal didn’t give
Ameridan this staff, then someone with her warped sense of humor did. I couldn’t help the small
smile that formed as I focused on channeling the fade through the crystal, powering my attacks.

Dorian kept the ground beneath Hakkon littered with fire runes. Everywhere the dragon stepped, one
set off beneath the Avvar God causing him to either jump or dance to an opposite side and trigger
another one.

“I will soak the ground with lowlanders’ blood! Starting with yours!”

The roared threat echoed in the air along with Bull’s loud taunting shout. I felt a strong connection
with the fade through this new staff and each of my spells was getting more and more powerful. I noticed that my skin softly glowed with the direct connection of the fade within the staff. Fade meteors alight with flame fell from the sky with but a flick of my wrist, pounding into Hakkon mercilessly. We were wearing the dragon down and the Avvar God growled in frustration.

The dragons angry gaze swung towards me and narrowed into small slits in the large creature’s head. My barrier was strong, and I continued casting, ignoring the dragons angry gaze. Hakkon’s head reared back, taking in a deep breath and blew a focused stream of frost directly at me. The ice surrounded my barrier making a perfect little bubble around me.

I watched the magical frost crystalize against the barrier and I tried to cast another barrier, but it would not go over the current barrier. Hakkon’s magic was encasing me in ice and using my own barrier against me. Adrenaline rushed my system as I realized that I could not escape the Avvar Gods magic.

Shit... shit... shit... what the fuck do I do?

The frost thickened into strong layers of ice and I could no longer hear the fighting around me. Only the cold surrounded me, and I panicked. Solas’ own fear flowed through our bond and I shivered violently. I felt a small flutter in my stomach and I dropped my staff and immediately placed my hands over bean. Don’t you worry bean, I got this.

My fear of the cold spell hurting our unborn child, hastened the change and my large animal form broke through the frozen barrier Hakkon had built around me. I let out a challenging roar of my own that shook the ground the dragon stood on and the dragon’s eyes turned towards me.

My power as an Evanuris flowed through my veins in a rush. Using this ability out of the fade felt heavy. But this time, I had control over my emotions… control over this form. My eyes stared coldly at Hakkon as he returned my challenging roar and I leaped towards them. My fade magic targeted the dragon mercilessly as my feline form dodged his frost magic. You will not hurt my baby.

“This cannot be,” Hakkon growled.

The dragon’s large wings began beating, pulling the air around it, making a small whirlwind that sucked anyone or anything close to the creature towards it.

There are green tendrils of the fade, flickering from beneath my large paws with my distress and anger as I charged towards the dragon. I could feel Solas’ distress unlike anything I had ever felt from him before and I silently apologized for breaking my promise and not staying right next to him. I knew he would chastise me later for breaking the promise, but for now, I needed to focus on killing this dragon.

I leaped from the ground and landed on the back of the dragon, surprising Hakkon… hell, surprising myself too. All of my fears were suddenly forgotten as my long nails dug into the dragon’s shoulders and my fangs sank into the side of its neck. My magic crackled and sparked against the dragon’s plate-like skin. My singular focus was to rip out the throat of this dragon.

Hakkon’s roar of pain echoed and shook the ground. The dragon reared up trying to dislodge me from my tenacious perch. It was the opening that the warriors on the ground needed, and they thrust their blades into the soft underside of the creature.

I felt the shudder of the dragon beneath me as it staggered and roared again from the attack. The dragon started to fall to the side and I released my hold on Hakkon and leaped from its back to the ground.
“Finally, worthy adversaries,” Hakkon remarked just as its eyes slipped closed and its head fell heavily to the ground.

We watched the Avvar God’s spirit slip from the dragon and shoot into the night's sky in a frosty trail. Solas’ hand touched the side of my face, his dismay flowing heavily through our bond. I gazed down at him as his fingers slipped through my fur around my neck.

“You swore to me.”

I heard the small crack in his voice and I changed quickly back to my elven form. His arms crushed me to him and the fear he experienced flowed through our bond in waves. I ran my fingers over his head, trying to reassure him that we were okay as I felt his shuddering breaths against my neck.

“We’re okay, I promise,” I whispered into his ear.

His magic sought out the barrier around bean and found that it was still intact. His fear turned to relief and his arms tightened even more.

“Never again,” he whispered.

“Never again,” I repeated.

He finally released me and wiped at the tears that had escaped as I gave him a tender smile. Raj’s large head rubbed against my side and I glanced at him. The animal’s blue-green gaze was studying me carefully. I ran my fingers through the fur along his neck and gave him a reassuring smile.

“Come on guys, let’s head back to the Avvar hold and let them know that Hakkon has been returned.”

We entered the Avvar hold and saw that they were in the midst of a large party. From where I walked next to Solas, we watched warriors drinking and toasting, dancing, and loud, riotous, laughter filled the night air. Svarah strode towards us, a large smile on her wide mouth. Taking her arm in Avvar greeting she pulled me into a tight hug.

“You are definitely much tougher than you look.”

I laughed as I leaned back and looked up at her.

“You should know that big things come in small packages.”

Svarah’s throaty laughter filled the air with my own. The others were being pulled away by the warriors that helped us assault the Tevinter ruin except for Solas and Raj stayed behind with me. Svarah took the moment finally to look at Raj and made a slow bow towards him.

“Greetings Spirit Guide.”

I had no idea what the hell they meant by all the ‘spirit guide’ talk, but I could see that Raj enjoyed the attention. Svarah’s attention was once again on me and she gestured for us to follow her to the longhouse where the major festivities were going on.

“Come, we celebrate.”

Solas took my hand and laced his fingers with mine before kissing the tips and making me smile. His eyes twinkled with affection and devotion and a healthy dose of desire flowed like honey through
our bond and my pulse sped up with the sight. *I will never get tired of that look or this feeling he gives me.*

After eating a large meal of roasted ram and vegetables, I watched some of the Avvar men and women dance. The smiles on their faces as they enjoyed the night's festivities was contagious. I laughed when Bull dragged Dorian into the fray of dancers and it was not long before Varric and Cassandra joined them. The dance was not difficult, nothing like what I had to learn for the Winter Palace. They danced in a large circle around the fire, arms linked as they kicked out one leg or the other with loud shouts accompanying each kick. They would then walk forward three steps then back three and then they broke and wove amongst each other linking arms in a swing-like step.

The augur sat next to me and my attention was diverted from the dancers to him as his pale eyes held mine. He held a fur-wrapped bundle in his hands and then put it in my lap. I stared down at the bundle and ran my fingers over the fur that felt downy soft beneath my fingers. My expression of confusion apparent as he laid his large hand on my shoulder in a paternal way.

“It will be warm for your travel through the Frostbacks and also protect what must stay hidden until you reach your Skyhold.”

I stared at him in surprise and quickly looked down at the bundle in my lap trying not to cry. *This is just the sweetest thing.*

“What you have done for us will never be forgotten. You will be known to all Avvar as Inquisitor First-Thaw, it is a title worthy of your deeds.”

Clearing my throat, I couldn’t help the watery smile that I gave him.

“Thank you.”

He patted my shoulder and stood to leave Solas and me alone. I stared at the fur and leather armor that he had given me and sighed when I felt Solas’ warm lips pressed against my temple.

“You need sleep, vhenan. The morning will come swiftly if we stay much longer.”

His long, capable fingers took the bundle from me before he stood and held his hand towards me. Smiling up at him, I took his hand and caught Cassandra’s eye as we passed. We shared an understanding nod before leaving the longhouse.

Our fingers loosely laced together, we moved down the smoothly worn stone steps towards the oceanfront cabins. We entered the one furthest away from the others that were loaned to us while we had been staying here and I slipped off my cloak and laid it over the chair. Ameridan’s staff stood in the corner next to mine and Solas’. The enticing swirl of wispy green smoke inside the sphere was mesmerizing.

Solas’ hands laid on my shoulders and I leaned back against him watching the dancing smoke of the fade. His arms embraced me, and I sighed when I felt the gentle press of his kiss to the crown of my head.

His nimble fingers uncinched my belt and tossed it towards the chair carelessly before he worked on the buckles of my chainmail and I chuckled.

“Hmm, is there something on your mind?”
“There is indeed,” he replied, pressing a gentle kiss to the side of my neck.

The simple gesture sent sparks of lightning racing over my skin. Our bond vibrated with his need for reassurance that everything was truly okay. I rolled my shoulders as he pushed off the armor and it fell to the floor with a dull, clinking, thud. I stepped out of it and turned towards him in nothing but my smalls and a linen tunic.

His fingers delved into my hair and held my head while he devoured my lips and desired roared through my veins as I gripped his wrists. His lips skimmed over the corner of my mouth and down my neck, his fingers unlacing the thin tunic while he made me tremble. He pushed the flimsy shirt over my shoulders and kissed the exposed skin as it slid down.

I gazed down at him as he knelt in front of me. His tapered fingers spread over the curve of my hips, his gaze intently focused on the mound of my stomach that grew every day. He pressed a gentle kiss to my stomach and a warm smile lifted the corner of my lips while I watched him. His love and the devotion I felt flowing through our bond was a warm, fuzzy blanket that cocooned me.

His eyes gazed up and held mine. The tenderness in them brought tears to my eyes. It would never stop amazing me how with a simple look, he could render me a puddling mass of emotional goo. His hands splayed over the mound and as he gazed at me he kissed my stomach again.

I caressed his jaw as I held his gaze. Our bond conveyed all his feelings and emotions he had kept quietly hidden throughout the night. His moments of impotency when I fought the dragon flowed through the bond. His indecision and strict control over himself as his emotions wared with him, encouraging him to change into his wolven form and fight with me.

I continued to caress his face tenderly, trying to reassure him that it was over, that he would not need to worry so much anymore. We would leave here, and I knew that the further we could get away from here the more relaxed he would feel. Today had been an emotional rollercoaster for him and I never wanted him to feel so helpless again.

“Take me to bed ma’lath, I need to feel your arms around me.”

He pressed another brief kiss to my tummy before rising and pressing a more lingering kiss against my lips.

“Ma nuvenin,” he whispered.

I slipped my arms around his neck as he picked me up and carried me towards our pallet. He laid me down and pulled his armor off in quick movements, letting the pieces fall where they would. His need for reassurance was obviously pushing him. His eyes never left mine as he undressed and then slipped beneath the furs I held open for him. I felt the urgency through our bond, yet his fingers slipped slowly along the outline of my face. His kiss demanding and yet so very gentle.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I melted against him with a soft moan. We held each other’s gaze as he slowly entered me.

“Ar lath ma, Solas.”

My whispered words calmed the beast that rode him, and his head fell into the crook of my neck. His lips nuzzled the sensitive skin, burning a trail towards my shoulder.

“Sul bel’annar’is, vhenan,” he mouthed against the sensitive skin behind my ear.

Our lovemaking was tender and slow. We felt no rush to find that blissful peak of release, only a
slow, almost, meandering stroll towards it together. Each movement bringing us closer to our
pleasure, each soft kiss and caress brought a peace to his anxious thoughts.

Our panting breaths echoed in the small cabin, and I kissed his chin tenderly. I rolled to my side and
curled against him, listening to the strong, steady thrum of his heartbeat beneath my ear. The
continuous pulse lulled me into sleep as comfortingly as the arm he had around me, holding me close
to him.

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My eyes slowly opened with the clinking sounds of chainmail and I lazily gazed at Solas packing. I
leaned up on my elbow to watch him fastening buckles on one of our packs. He wore only his
leggings, his chest and feet bare. He moved with a sensual ease that never ceased to make my heart
skip like a stone over a water's surface. _Damn, he is beautiful._

He glanced at me over his shoulder and gave me a small smile before setting the pack next to the
staves near the door. I noticed that my armor was not on the chair next to his and I raised an eyebrow
inquiringly.

“I appreciate that you prefer me naked Solas, but I can’t ride back to Skyhold that way.”

My teasing brought a deep laugh from him and I sighed with the relaxed expression he wore. The
lines that had carved around his mouth and eyes yesterday were gone. He shook his head slowly at
me and my teasing as he walked towards me.

“I set out the gear the augur gave you for you to wear, vhenan. It will give you more…” his eyes
glanced down at my stomach and then looked up at me with a smug smirk, “room.”

His gaze glittered with teasing and mischief and I pretended to be offended, chewing on my lower lip
while looking at him indignantly.

“Are you trying to tell me, I am fat?”

He laughed and knelt down cupping my chin, holding my gaze.

“Never vhenan, but you are quite clearly very pregnant.”

His expression was a proud, smug one and I gently shoved his shoulder making him laugh.

“Well don’t you look just pleased with yourself at the condition you got your mate into.”

His lips captured mine in a swift and desire-filled kiss. His tongue danced with mine and when he
pulled away, I was breathless.

“Yes.”

By his smug expression, he knew what he did to me and I slapped his shoulder again making him
laugh.

“Ass,” I mumbled, and his laughter grew.

I took the hand he held out for me and rose from our pallet to get dressed, with a silly grin on my
face.
We left the small cabin and those waiting for us outside stared at me as I was wearing the Avvar’s gift. The augur had been kind in giving it to me and to my chagrin, Solas had been right, I could move and breathe easier in the light leather armor. The black leather was indeed warm but breathable and butter soft. It was also deceptively layered, hiding bean effectively beneath. The leather breaches made narrow in the leg but wide at the waist, with leather laces allowing my stomach room to stretch. I had not realized how much I had grown in the past month here in the basin.

Bull took one of the packs Solas carried and loaded it on one of the horses as Svarah and Amund walked down the stone steps towards us together. I saw the tenderness and the edge of sorrow they shared as they looked at each other and I knew what I had to do. Amund had traveled with us long enough and it was time for him to be with his people again. The decision was clear.

Svarah took my outstretched arm with a large smile and that brief look of sorrow was gone.

“My friend, I will miss you and pray to the Lady of the Skies you reach your home safely and swiftly.”

“Thank you Svarah, I too will miss you and the hold.”

I turned towards Amund and held my arm out to him, surprising him.

“And you my friend, I will miss you as well.”

Amund cleared his throat and shook his head in confusion.

“But I am…”

“To stay with your people, Amund. It was fate that we meet and that I learn about you and your people. It was hard work to earn your trust and loyalty and I regret none of it. Stay Amund, your duty to me is completed now, it is time for you to focus on your people, your thane.”

His unreadable grey eyes held mine for a moment before he clasped my arm and bowed his head.

“If that is your wish, it has been my honor.”

He let go of my arm and Svarah held my gaze for a moment before nodding a silent thank you, her gaze full of relief. I looked around at everyone and gestured towards our mounts.

“Come on guys, let’s go home.”

“About bloody time,” Dorian muttered cheekily.

I chuckled as Solas helped me mount Inansha and took the path along the edge of the water as Raj played through the water beside me.

***

We left the basin and all its wild, jungle-like foliage behind us, taking the path towards the Fallow Mire. We were getting close to the fork in the path that would lead us to the smelly bog when Varric maneuvered his pony close to me.

“Aren’t we going to take a break and eat a bit, Sketch?”

I shook my head and smiled.
“I want to make it through the Fallow Mire and reach the Crossroads by night. If we ride straight through, we will make it.”

Varric pointed at my stomach and slightly grimaced at me.

“That won’t be good for the kid.”

I laughed and laid my hand over my stomach where bean slept snuggly cocooned inside a barrier that protected it.

“Varric, thank you for your concern but the baby will be fine. Trust me, women have been having children in far worse conditions than this and somehow they did it.”

Varric scratched his head and I heard Cassandra laugh. I glanced at her over my shoulder and gave her a wink as Varric reigned up and rode next to Cassandra. I chuckled and focused on getting through the Fallow Mire as quickly as possible. With the first whiff of rotten air, I pulled out a handkerchief that smelled of lavender and held it over my nose.

“Maker, this place really smells horrid,” Hawke said from beside me.

I laughed but kept my cloth over my nose, my reply sounding muffled.

“Just wait, your eyes will start watering soon from the rancid ammonia in the air.”

Hawke too held a cloth over her mouth and she grimly glanced ahead.

“I would rather fight a horde of rampaging Qunari than smell this.”

I winked at her and nodded my agreement.

“You and me both, sister.”

No one argued at the pace I set as they were just as eager to get through the stench of the Fallow Mire and back to Skyhold.

By twilight, we reached the Crossroads. We were all tired, hungry, and definitely road weary from the thirteen-hour ride. Sitting around the fire we ate our roasted ram and I listened as Varric shared a story about one of his and Hawkes adventures. I laughed and smiled, listening to Hawke’s interruptions here and there and the way Fenris would smile and shake his head as Varric spun the tale.

I tried to cover a yawn so that I could listen longer but Solas didn’t miss it and took my hand without a word and led me to our tent. I removed the layers of the Avvar armor and folded it before laying it on my pack. Just as I stood up I felt bean flutter and I immediately laid my hand over the spot. I had felt this during the fight with Hakkon, but I thought it was my own fear that had made the small movement.

I glanced over at Solas and saw he was busily folding his own clothes and I grabbed his hand, startling him enough that he dropped his tunic.

“Bean’s moving,” I said excitedly.

With my hand over his, I pressed where the movement could be felt and stared at him as bean graciously moved again so he could feel it. His eyes rounded with surprise at the feeling as I knew I
was smiling up at him like an emotional fool. His free hand came up and caressed my face as he pressed his forehead to mine.

I didn’t have the words to describe the moment. Everything he was feeling in this moment flowed through our bond warming me as we stood silently enjoying our babies first movements. Up until now, it never really seemed real. The constant exhaustion, the slow swelling of my middle, the morning sickness, none of it really sank in that I was going to be a mother-until now. I was excited and frightened in equal measure as I felt bean wiggle again.

Solas’ gaze held mine and I could see that he too understood and felt the same way and I cupped his face and kissed him. Everything else-Corypheus, Andruil, and the Forbidden Ones wouldn’t stand a chance. Not as long as I had him and our baby, together, we would remove any threat to our family.

Chapter End Notes

- Vhenan - my heart
- Ar lath ma - I love you
- Sul bel'annar'is - For eternity
Skyhold

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Three weeks… it would take three weeks to get back to Skyhold. The weather in the Hinterlands is completely in fall mode. The changed colors of the leaves in the poplar trees, the clean smell of pine mixing with the crisp morning air. I looked up towards the Frostback mountains and saw that it was not just the tips that were covered in snow now, but it had moved down. *There will be snow around Skyhold.* I pulled the fur-lined cloak closer around me as if I could ward off the impending chill I knew we were heading towards.

Hawke rode along one side of me while Cassandra flanked my other, they too looked at the mountain as I did.

“The snow has moved lower,” Cassandra commented, shifting in her saddle.

I glanced at her with a teasing smile.

“It does tend to do that as we get closer to Saturnalia.”

Cassandra gave me a slightly disgusted snort and shook her head while Hawke and I snickered at her.

“What are you looking forward to when we get back to Skyhold?”

I looked at Hawke with a large smile.

“My enormous bathtub,” I immediately replied with a dreamy sigh. “I am going to fill it up, put some oil in the steaming water and then soak for a week. You?”

“The bed… I am going to sleep for a week,” she replied instantly.

I laughed and nodded in agreement.

“It was a tie between the bed or the bathtub for me too. The bath won out only because of the very cold, very quick bath I had this morning.”

They chuckled with me and we fell silent.

“Solas tells me that you will be staying in Skyhold until the child is born.”

I glanced at Cassandra briefly before answering her.

“Yes, it was our deal. He would stop arguing with me about going to the basin if I promised that after it was finished that I would return to Skyhold and stay there until the baby is born.”

“He only argues with you because he loves you.”
I chuckled and held Cassandra’s gaze and we share a knowing look.

“Fenris gets like that with me at times… it is…”

“Frustrating? Exasperating? Tiring?”

Both women laugh with my glib answer and I glance at Solas over my shoulder. I knew he could hear every word we said, and his eyes held a gleam of humor.

The trip to the first camp was mostly uneventful. We ran into a few small groups of bandits that attacked but nothing worthy of even leaving my mount for. By the time we reached the base camp at the foot of the Frostbacks, my lower back was sore, and I was starved.

I turned as Varric and Sera went to gather up dinner and called out quickly.

“Anything but ram… if you were ever my friend, anything, but ram.”

Sera gave me a two-fingered salute and a wide smile while Varric chuckled.

“You got it Sketch.”

“Tired of ram, Boss?”

I turned towards Bull who was busily unloading his druffalo.

“Yes, I am. I know if I eat another bite of ram our baby is going to be born with horns.”

Bull snorted and shook his head and I realized what I had just said and giggled.

“Not that horns are a bad thing, Bull.”

His lone eyebrow lifted while his grey eye held mine and I saw the humor in his steady gaze.

“Sure, sure,” he replied, and I snorted and giggled as I blew him a kiss.

I brushed our mounts enjoying the quiet, peaceful feeling the menial task gave me and slightly stared off into the trees. The flutter of dark wings caught my eye and I focused on the raven perched on the branch. The dark eyes, forever watchful, head tilting as if hearing something interesting before slightly stretching out its wings with indifference and settle back on the branch. Thinking back to college English, the poem by Edgar Allen Poe came to mind while I studied the bird.

“Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
   Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—
   While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
   As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
   ”'Tis some visitor," I muttered, "tapping at my chamber door—
   Only this and nothing more.”

I reflected over the words and found that many visitors were tapping at my own door. Corypheus, Andruil… even our child. I smiled sardonically at the raven as I thought that some doors I would like to keep closed. The soft kiss on my head brought me out of my small daze and I leaned back looking up at him, his curiosity clearly written on his face.

“It is a poem about a raven,” I explain and look towards the branch where the raven had perched and
found it empty. “Guess the raven was unimpressed and decided to move on.”

Solas pressed a kiss to my neck and hugged me from behind.

“Our tent is prepared, you should try to lay down for a bit before dinner.”

No need to fight against the truth, my body was sore, and I was tired, so I turned my face towards his and kissed him.

“I believe I will, will you nap with me?”

He pressed another kiss to my lips and laced our fingers together.

“I cannot say no to the notion of holding you in my arms.”

I chuckle and slightly shake my head.

“Still need to start that book, Solas. Men would pay for your smooth answers.”

He kissed my fingertips, smiling at me and my heart double-beat in my chest.

***

The Inquisition banners flew almost lazily in the winds over Skyhold. The loud trumpets blare echoed over the valley as we crested the hill and though most times I thought the sound obnoxious, this time it was comforting. Home

I heard the howls of the wolf pack that ran the forest outside of Skyhold and glanced at Raj whose ears twitched, listening to the calls. His large head raised back, and he answered their call with a low howl of his own. He glanced at me and I smiled at him.

“Go on.”

It was all he needed, and his large body veered off into the forest at a lazy lope. I went back to staring at the castle and a small sigh of sheer enjoyment escaped me. We were home.

A strong flood of warmth filled me, and I pressed my hand to my stomach. We’re home, bean. There was a small thump against my side and a smile formed at the little action. I felt the relief flow from Solas through our bond as we crossed over the bridge, into the main courtyard. I mentally groaned at this half of our deal because it would never just be enough that I stay here until bean arrived, oh no, he would hover. If there are any Gods listening… please, grant me the patience to accept his hovering with grace and a sense of damn humor.

We led the animals to the barn and the comfortable seventy-degree weather that was a constant in Skyhold had me pulling my cloak away from me a little bit. It was definitely a nice welcome in comparison to the thirty-degree weather outside its gates. Preparing to dismount from Inansha, Bull grabbed me by the waist and lifted me off before I could swing my leg over.

“Oh, come on, not you too.”

Bull pressed a quick kiss to my cheek and patted my head.

“Yup, afraid so.”

I watched him walk back towards Dorian and saw that he held a smirk on his handsome, mustached lips and I groaned. I went to pull my pack from Cole’s mount since their refusal to let me strap it on
since we left the basin and Cole unstrapped it and carried it towards Solas before I could even blink.

“Seriously?” I muttered, walking towards Solas, internally groaning at his smug expression.

“Thank you, Cole.”

"It appears you have allies now."

Before I could say anything to Cole, he was gone, and I crossed my arms in a huff. Solas pressed a kiss to my forehead and I looked at him not hiding my annoyance.

“I believe our agreement was that we would address the problems in the Frostback Basin, and then we would return so that you could rest in Skyhold until the spring.”

“Yes, but…”

“Is this not Skyhold?”

I glared at him.

“Yes, but…”

“Have we not concluded our business in the Frostback Basin?”

I knew what he was doing, and my eyebrow rose with his controlled manner. Damn it... grace and humor remember?

“Of course, but that is not…”

“Then the discussion is concluded,” he replied slipping my pack over his shoulder. “I believe you said you wanted to take a long bath on your return, come vhenan. I shall draw one for you.”

I roll my eyes, sticking my tongue out at his back and sigh in frustrated defeat before I follow after him through the kitchens and up the stairs to the main hall. Cullen, Leliana, and Josephine stood waiting for us and Solas slipped an arm around me and continued to propel us towards our chamber door as Josephine stepped forward.

“Inquisitor, we would appreciate just a moment of your…”

I opened my mouth to reply to Josephine and Solas answered her not breaking stride.

“Tomorrow Lady Ambassador, after she has rested.”

I snorted, and he pulled open our door, ushering me through it quickly before anyone could say another word. Closing the door, he warded it swiftly and I glanced at him over my shoulder.

“Are you going to be like this for the next four months?”

He held my gaze quietly and butterflies fluttered through me with the way his lips formed a self-satisfied smirk around the edges.

“Like what, vhenan?”

His eyes shined with mischief and I groaned aloud as I continued up the stairs.

“Like an overprotective ass.”
His rich laughter followed after me as I walked into our room. The sounds of our packs hitting the floor met my back as I was busy removing my cloak.

“I do not consider it overprotective when one chooses to care for their mate.”

I rolled my eyes before turning around. He still wore a self-satisfied expression on his handsome face and I couldn’t hold back the laughter.

“Mythal’s mercy, you are a stubborn man.”

His face broke into a large smile and he stepped towards me, wrapping his arms around me.

“If you imagine so, it is only because one needs to be to get you to listen.”

His lips pressed against mine, cutting off anything I was about to say. The way his teeth dragged over my lower lip had me melting against him and a soft sigh escaped me when his teasing kiss turned into a deeper exploration.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” he breathed against my lips.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I pressed closer to him, my fingers toying with the soft skin of his neck.

“And I, you.”

***

I woke to the smell of sausage and eggs and rubbed the sleep from my eyes as I sat up. Solas had brought up breakfast and I couldn’t help the small smile that formed watching him set about the plates and eating utensils. Pulling the blankets away, I slipped out of bed and pulled my robe on, knotting it above the swell of my stomach. I know I looked a scary sight with my hair all crazy and my face still sleepy and yet the small look he gave me was full of desire and love.

I went to the bathroom to complete my morning duties and run a comb through my rats’ nest and wash my face. When I came out of the bathroom, Solas was pouring juice.

“Good morning, vhenan.”

His smile of greeting was enough to make me want to drag him back to our bed and he gave me a knowing look.

“Break your fast first and then I will consider your idea.”

I blushed and took the hand he held out to me. He pressed small kisses to my fingertips before pressing a brief kiss to my lips.

“You’ll do more than consider husband.”

His laughter was quick, and he kissed me again.

“Incorrigible.”

I laughed and sat down, spearing a piece of sausage, I popped it into my mouth. The immediate flavors of spices and meat slipped over my taste buds as I chewed, and I gave him a cheeky grin.

“All your fault.”
We shared a playful look as we ate until the soft knock on the door below broke the spell. Solas stood and went to let whoever in while I continued to fork more eggs into my mouth. I glanced towards the stairs as Leliana’s head came into view.

“Is what Cassandra wrote true?”

I chewed on my honey slathered piece of bread and held her gaze. I knew that Cassandra had sent a raven when we left the basin informing her of my condition and our impending return to Skyhold. I finished chewing and gestured towards the chair for her to have a seat.

“Five months.”

Her blue eyes grew round, and it appeared that my answer was not exactly what she had expected.

“Spring.”

I smiled at her and nodded, forking another mouthful of eggs in. Leliana chuckled and took a slice of bread, sitting back and peeling a piece off. She chewed with a sense of concentration before she looked at me.

“Josephine will want to throw a party. She has already planned for Saturnalia and this time it promises to be a weeklong celebration.”

I groaned, sitting back on the couch. Of course, she would our little party demon. I looked over at Solas and saw that he was relaxed in his chair just listening. Leliana stood and I pulled my gaze from him to her.

“What time should I inform the others that you would like the meeting to begin.”

“In two hours.”

Leliana nodded turning away and then stopping to turn back around and look at both of us, a soft smile teasing her normally unreadable face.

“I am very happy for you both.”

My eyes filled as she turned and left. Solas had moved to sit beside me and pulled me into his side, pressing a tender kiss to my temple. I turned in his embrace and straddled his lap when I heard the door close. I loved the way his eyes would turn smoky with desire and I pressed small kisses down the side of his neck, his hands resting on my hips.

“I believe you required some persuasion on that idea I had earlier?”

His husky laughter vibrated deliciously against my chest and I nipped at his collarbone eliciting a small groan from him. He quickly stood, holding my hips while I wrapped my legs around his waist giggling with his sudden movement.

“Your form of persuasion is quite compelling.”

I laughed huskily and nibbled at his ear, his low moan of desire speared through me.

“Good,” I replied smiling up at him as he lay me down.

“Indeed,” he said before covering my lips with his.

Running my hands over his head, I smiled against his lips. Damn, I love this man.
Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you, my heart

Edgar Allen Poe - The Raven (I used the beginning of it in a short clip.)
And the Hovering Begins

Chapter Notes

What a fabulous week! Thank you, everyone, for your continued reading of my little drabble of nonsense. You guys are fabulous and I hope you enjoy the update.

"I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love." ~ Mother Teresa

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Meet with me for our afternoon meal.”

His soft blue eyes held me captive and I tilted my chin up at him with a small defiant gesture, I knew my eyes danced teasingly.

“And if I don’t? Whatever will you do with me then?”

My cheeky answer earned me the sound of his exasperated sigh echoing in our stairwell and I held back the small laugh. He slowly pressed me against the wall and I continued staring up at him. His eyes traveled over my face as he pressed one hand against the wall on either side of my head, effectively trapping me. Although it’s not much of a trap since this is exactly where I preferred to be.

“Must you insist on testing my patience? Must I persuade you that sharing your noontime meal with me is to your benefit?”

His lips traveled over my jaw till he reached my earlobe and gently bit it, pulling a low moan from me. Oh, he is definitely not going to play fair if he is going straight for my ears. My fingers caressed the nape of his neck while his mouth explored the delicious spot behind my ear and I melted against him, pliant as silly putty.

“When this is my reward for testing your patience then you’re damn right I am going to test them.”

His low rumbling laugh danced along the column of my neck and desire rushed through me with delicious swirls and flutters of electricity along my nerve endings.

“You are incorrigible,” he mouthed against my lips and I dove into his kiss.

The sensual dance of our lips was as consuming as the feel of his hands molding my hips pulling me that little bit closer. There would never be a time I wouldn’t want this man with every molecule of my being. His mouth trailed down my throat and I smiled as I thought at how easy it was to bring him to a place of complete need. I ran my fingers over his head and he leaned up to look at me. The sight of his desire in his smoky eyes made my pulse race even faster.

“I could always push the meeting back a couple of hours.”

My offer made him smile and press a brief kiss to my lips.
“That will not be necessary, I only require your assurance that we will share our meal together.”

I traced my fingers over his jaw, tilting my head down just a bit, I pouted prettily while staring at him through my eyelashes.

“You make it sound as if I could ever stay away from you.”

He laughed and pressed another kiss to my lips and then surprisingly knelt and pressed a kiss to my stomach and spoke softly.

“Try not to be as stubborn as your mother when you arrive.”

My burst of laughter echoed at his softly spoken wish in elven.

“You ask too much Fen’Harel… especially knowing who the father of this child is.”

He gave me a mischievous smile and pressed another kiss to my stomach before standing.

“Perhaps,” he replied, making me laugh again.

We finally broke apart at the doorway with my solemn promise to eat lunch with him and I watched Solas walk away for the Rotunda. I stood for a moment just enjoying his easy movements before I crossed the main hall for the war room. Walking down the long hallway, I passed through Josephine’s office unsurprised that she was not there and pushed the door to the war room open.

Everyone stopped talking as I entered and stared down at my stomach. I stopped and self-consciously looked down for a spot or something as everyone continued to stare at my rounded middle with quiet surprise.

Well, this is uncomfortable. I was still able to fit into my tunics, though they were a bit snug around the waist now and I realized that the shirt accentuated the fact that I was, indeed, five months pregnant. I self-consciously tugged on the edges that kept creeping up and shut the door. Cullen clears his throat while Josephine instantly cooed excitedly as the door closed.

“Maker! You are further along than we anticipated… there is so much that needs to be planned. Gatherings that must be arranged, invitations sent…”

I internally moaned, physically flinching with Josephine’s words and intentionally rolled my eyes listening to her ramble on while she scribbled furiously on her clipboard. Cullen and Leliana quickly covered their mouths to hide their smiles at my obvious annoyance.

“Josephine, I would prefer that you not make a fuss about this.”

Her hazel eyes flashed at me with exasperation before focusing on her clipboard and writing furiously again. I couldn’t help but think that Josephine must see me as the Grinch of parties.

“Don’t be absurd. You are the Inquisitor, there will need to be celebrations planned, announcements made…”

“Josephine,” I interrupted, quickly cutting her off. “Like with my wedding, I will allow you to plan something intimate for us here. But I need to make it perfectly clear, I do not want any formal announcement of my pregnancy made.”

Josephine frowned at me while I held her gaze steadily.

“It is hardly possible to disguise the situation Inquisitor, you must understand that you have a
responsibility…”

I held up my hand again, staring at her with an expression that I knew appeared harsh, but I needed her to understand me and stop. Good intentions aside, I would not change my mind on this.

“Josephine, my responsibility with the Inquisition is to the people and the people only. Not nobles, not kings and empress’, not even to the three of you. My child is not a part of the Inquisition but a part of my private life. I need you to understand that I have enemies… we, have enemies and what this type of information could do for them.” I left the rest unsaid and Josephine grew very pensive and I could tell she was finally absorbing what I was trying to explain to her while Cullen and Leliana shared a look. “I am quite aware that rumors will spread that I am expecting because of the many bloody nobles we already have here in Skyhold, that can’t be helped, but I will not announce it to the world and make it official.”

“Of course, Inquisitor. I had not thought about…”

I patted her arm and smiled at her with understanding quickly losing my cold look. “I know, Josephine.”

I understood that Josephine was a political creature by nature but at the heart of her was a good woman. She, like us all, made mistakes but when I explained to her my motivations for trying to curb her nature to politic, she never failed to see reason. Cullen cleared his throat drawing my attention and I noticed that he looked very well rested. Perhaps his ordered day off was better for him than he thought. *I will need to check up with Rayna*, I reminded myself.

“We will double our patrols along the battlements and below the castle in the valley.”

I laughed and shook my head. Mythal’s mercy… men!

“That will not be necessary Cullen. Solas and Dorian have devised a plan of sorts and are talking with the mages about a magical barrier for the castle. He said something about an alarm system of sorts.” I shook my head and shrugged. “I will let them explain it to you.”

Cullen nodded his head in understanding, but I got the distinct impression that he was going to do what he wanted on that score regardless of what I said and turned my focus to Leliana and waited for her report. I had received very few ravens while in the basin with updates on her progress with tracking down the Duke. Solas had convinced me that she couldn’t do what I asked her to do, I just needed to let her do it. After her failure to do what I asked before it was hard for me to believe in her but Solas was right, I didn’t have to so much trust her but believe in her ability to do the job.

I knew that the way I had left things between all of us had been stiff. They were all aware of how much little trust I truly had in them and that was probably more destructive than anything. After what had happened, the way I felt could not be helped. Leliana cleared her throat and pushed a few papers in my direction, her expressionless face the picture of cool aloofness.

“I have good news.”

I stared at her wishing with everything I had that she had found the Duke and waited for her to continue.

“My agents came across a lone Dalish warrior in their search for Duke Antoine… it was Towen.”

I almost didn’t dare believe that he survived. The breath stopped in my chest and I snatched up the papers that she had slid towards me and scanned the reports greedily. Luna, another of Leliana’s best agents, found him wounded in a cave not far from the Clan’s former encampment. The agents were
able to heal his wounds and he chose to join them in their search for the Duke. My gaze slid up from the papers and for the first time since this whole shit show had begun, I smiled.

“This is good news… and the Duke?”

Leliana’s expression was no longer aloof but full of cold anger as her eyes took on a hardened glare and her lip pulled back into a small snarl. This was the same expression I had seen on her face when we had gone to Valance and she had threatened that sister.

“We found him. He has taken refuge with the Ghislain’s at their Estate outside of Val Royeaux.”

An exacting coldness washed over and through me, filling me with dread. Vivienne… could it be possible?… would she?… I know my horrified expression was enough as Leliana answered all my unspoken questions while I slowly started to have a panic attack.

“It would appear that she has had a hand in what transpired in Wycombe. My agents found information that links her to hiring the mercenaries that attacked the Lavellan clan.”

My hands started to shake, and I pressed them to the surface of the table to disguise the tremor. Closing my eyes, I focused on my breathing while little flashes of light flew behind my closed eyes. How could she?... I knew we hated each other. Our ending had been hard, but I had never wanted to kill her, I just felt sorry for her. I had taken no more than three breaths to try and calm down the rising panic that grew within me when the large door behind me swung open startling everyone but me. Solas stalked into the room angrily, his aura instantly flared out angrily before caressing mine. He moved towards me with two large strides and before I could even try to say a word to calm him, he had wrapped his arms around me and pulled me to him while angrily staring at the three around the large table.

“What has happened to put her in such a state of distress? I could feel her pain all the way across the keep in the mage tower?”

I buried my face into his chest, focusing on the sound of his heartbeat while Leliana answered him.

“My agents discovered that Duke Antoine of Wycombe has taken refuge with Vivienne at Duke Ghislain’s estate. There is evidence that leads to Vivienne’s involvement with the murders of Clan Lavellan.”

My eyes clenched tightly together at hearing this again and a broken sob escaped from between my trembling lips. If she was capable of killing all of them to get back at me, would she try to go after our baby? The thought brought paralyzing fear and it breathed down my neck like dragon fire. My anxiety tripled with the idea and Solas’ arms tightened around me as I began trembling, his whispered words pulling me towards a light at the end of my dark tunnel full of terrors that prayed on the imagination.

“Shh, shh vhenan, breathe, all will be taken care of, you have my word.”

Solas was the only one I trusted implicitly, and I let out a shaky sigh. If he promised it would be handled, it would be handled. I could hear the barely veiled threat in his voice as he spoke coldly to the others.

“Then I trust that you have a plan to handle this blatant, personal attack on the Inquisitor?”

Solas’ hands moved over my back soothingly, calming my internal struggle. How could she do something so horrible? I knew she was not a nice person, but to have them all murdered because of her hatred for me… it just seemed so unthinkable.
“I do, it requires a… subtle hand to implement such a plan…”

Josephine cut in abruptly.

“Do you know what you are saying, Leliana? You are talking about murdering them…”

“We already tried diplomacy and all it got was Fenlin’s entire clan murdered,” Cullen angrily interrupted with a slash of his hand. “Forget it. You may not want justice for what was done, but I do.”

I could hear Josephine’s mouth snapping shut and even I flinched with Cullen’s cold words. I understood why Josephine was questioning the method and it had nothing to do with her feelings on what happened. I knew she was upset over what happened to the clan and I took a deep breath, stepping back from Solas’ warm embrace. *I need to handle this, not fucking fall apart.* I held his gaze for a moment before turning to look at my council.

“Josephine is right. We do not need to resort to murder to extract our justice, no matter how much it would please me to kill the woman myself for what she has done.” Everyone but Solas stared at me in open surprise as I continued. “We will use Vivienne’s lust for political power against her,” I told them quietly. I had everyone’s attention with this idea and turned towards Josephine. “As a personal favor, I want you to request Empress Celine turn Vivienne into a political pariah for what she did. I also want you to request that she detain Duke Antoine and then release him into our custody to answer for his crimes against Clan Lavellan. Towen deserves his justice and so do I.”

Solas laced his fingers with mine and nodded his head in agreement. His gentle smile gave me courage as did the steady flow of love through our bond and I glanced at the others around the table.

“Now if you would please excuse me, I think I am going to lay down for a bit.”

The emotional rollercoaster had completely wiped me, and I was now emotionally exhausted. Bean moved against my side and I pressed my hand to where it moved. *I know, way too early for so much drama.* Everyone murmured their agreements and Solas led me from the war room quickly, not stopping until he had me behind the door leading up to our chamber.

I walked up the stairs, my thoughts a churning mess and headed towards my desk. The sound of Solas clearing his throat stopped me.

“You said you needed to rest.”

I turned towards him and sighed.

“I don’t think I can sleep with everything rolling through my mind like one giant shit storm.”

His eyes never left mine as he walked towards me. The mysterious swirl of grey within the blue depths mesmerized me and made my skin tingle. His gaze never broke contact as he took my hands within his and brought them to his lips, pressing little kisses along my fingers.

“What if I help you sleep?”

The deep rumble of his voice caressed me and though his offer innocent, it was anything but if his mischievous gaze said anything about it and I laughed. *The man definitely knew how to distract me.*

“That look in your eye tells me that sleep is not what is on your mind, Fen’Harel.”

The self-satisfied little smirk that tugged on the corners of his lips forever seduced me.
“I promise vhenan, I have no other intentions than to help you sleep.”

“Really? No thoughts of finishing what you started in the stairwell?”

“Absolutely not.”

I shrugged and pulled my hands out of his, surprising him with my sudden movement.

“Well that’s too bad,” I replied turning away from him towards my desk.

His arms quickly snaked around me and held me to him. The quick press of his lips against my neck made me giggle as he growled close to my ear.

“Perhaps, I was not completely honest.”

“Clearly,” I teased, and he nipped my ear before brushing his nose down the column of my neck.

“Vhenan, you would have me convince you then?”

The sentence made me melt and I wrapped an arm around his neck as he kissed his way down my throat.

“Of course, you do it so well.”

His husky laughter mixed with a groan made me laugh. He quickly scooped me up and carried me towards the bed and I giggled.

“I could definitely grow used to your idea of a nap.”

He pressed a kiss to my lips that grew deeper and a throaty moan escaped me as he laid me down.

“Indeed,” he answered pressing kisses to my neck while his fingers worked my shirt off.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Playing Catch Up

The kitchen was bustling with people, each of them busily preparing lunch. The smell of cooking meats and vegetables filled my senses when I opened the door. I waved at Francois that stood at the wood cooking stove, smiling and nodding at me in greeting from his post. Making my way through the servants, I was pleased to see that they had the new aprons I requisitioned for them and snagged a sticky bun from one of the passing trays before walking towards Rayna. I noticed that my favorite lavender eyed elf had a dreamy but sad look about her while she stirred batter in a huge wooden bowl.

“Hey, Rayna.”

She jolted at the sound of my voice and glanced at me a moment before her face blushed a lovely shade of pink. *Well, well, what have we here?*

“Fenlin, I am glad you are back.” Her eyes fell to my waist and widened. “The rumors are true… you and Solas really are building a family.”

I nodded and shoved the last piece of the sticky bun into my mouth. Rayna set her bowl down and hugged me hard before letting me go.

“It will be good to have something to celebrate other than victories in battle.”

I laughed, snagging a muffin from a passing tray.

“We shall see. I have a feeling that Solas and I might have created a little monster.”

Rayna laughed with me and she began stirring her batter again.

“So, tell me, did our Commander follow orders?”

I saw the quick flush of color over Rayna’s cheeks and ears again and began to wonder. Her lovely eyes darted towards me for a second then focused on her bowl as she nodded, biting at her lip nervously.

“Yes, he chose Wednesday’s to take off. I have packed lunches for him for the times he has chosen to go riding. Most times, he will sit in the gardens and read and the dark circles under his eyes have diminished, he is not so tired looking. He even shows a sense of humor now instead of growling about your ordering him to take one day a week for himself.”

“So, you keep him company?”

Rayna darted another glance at me, her blush growing darker even as she worried her lower lip.

“Ah… well, yes—sometimes he will ask me to sit with him.”

I kept my silence for a long moment until Rayna finally looked at me and saw the knowing little smirk on my lips and stopped stirring.

“What is that look about?”

My face split into a huge smile. *Hot damn! She has the hots for the Commander.*

“You like him.”
Rayna turned a deeper shade of pink before sputtering her objections and drying her hands with her apron nervously.

“Th—that’s preposterous, don’t be silly.”

I smiled at her and cocked my head to the side, studying her expression. I had never seen someone look happy and sad all at the same time. I could see that my look embarrassed her even more and leaned against the counter.

“Why is that such a ridiculous notion, Rayna? Cullen is a single, handsome man. I know that he has a good heart, if not a stubborn head at times. Would finding him to be more than just a friend be so upsetting to you?”

I watched her eyes fall and a sad look crosses her lovely features.

“He is all those things—and much more, but it could never be between us.”

I heard the hurt in her tone and stepped closer, laying my hand on her arm.

“Why not?”

When she looked at me, I could see she held back the tears that were welling in the corners of her lavender depths.

“Because I am an elf, Fenlin. It is frowned upon for such a pairing, you know that.”

I felt a bubble of irritation with such limitations. Even in this day, nothing had changed in that regard from Assan’s memories of Arlathan. The narrow-minded views of elves mixing with others other than the ones within their own race or station still survived.

“Oh, bullocks that!” My outburst shocked her, and I tightened my grip around her arm. “Why should it matter what the shape of his damn ears is any more than yours. If he is a good and honorable man that loves you and you him, then that is what matters.”

“I know you are right but my parents…”

“Your parents will love him because of the type of man he is, Rayna, not the shape of his bloody ears.”

She looked at me and I saw the first twinkles of hope light her eyes.

“You really believe so?”

“I know so. Now stop moping and going without because you are worried about what everyone else will think. Your personal life is just that, personal. Life is way to short to not take it with both hands and enjoy every moment given to you.”

Rayna nodded her head and smiled brightly.

“You are right, it shouldn’t matter if he is human or not. It is time for me to make my own life the way that I want to make it.” She looked determined and then looked at me anxiously, biting at her lower lip. “But what if he doesn’t want to be with an elf?”

I laughed and shook my head at her question. I thanked whatever Gods that had heard my prayer when I asked for them to send someone to enter Cullen’s life. As his friend, I knew he needed that warmth of someone who would love him, and I was glad to see that it was Rayna that had caught his
interest.

“Trust me, Rayna—he is not looking at the shape of your ears.”

She stared at me for a moment and began blushing before covering her mouth, giggling.

“You are incorrigible, Fenlin.”

I smiled at her cheekily and winked before grabbing some apples and snagging another muffin, barely dodging Rayna’s swatting hand.

“Go on with you before you eat all my muffins.”

I laughed at her and headed out the door leading to the stables, wolfing down my filched muffin. Walking into the barn, I smiled at Master Dennet as I entered his church. The familiar smell of hay and animals a comfort, like campfires and smores or a warm blanket around your shoulders while drinking a hot cup of coffee on an early, foggy morning.

“How are your charges doing today?”

Dennet leaned his shovel against the wall and fell in beside me to walk with me towards Etta’s stall.

“Pampered, especially if you are bringing treats to those three.” I saw him glance at my stomach as we walked towards Etta’s stall. “My wife and I heard you and your man were expecting,” he replied with a large grin, gesturing towards my middle.

“News travels fast around here, like a sewing circle,” I replied cheekily, patting my swollen middle making him laugh. “Besides needing exercise and wanting to escape the nobles, I wanted to check on Etta and see how her hoof was healing. Plus bring them treats.”

Dennet laughed and opened up Etta’s stall for me. I held out the apple for her as she took bites of it and I crooned to her as she chewed.

“How is my pretty girl, hmm?”

Dennet knelt and ran his hand expertly up and down Etta’s leg.

“She is right as can be. The hoof is fully healed, and she is getting exercise from some of Skyhold’s young boys.”

I nuzzled her nose with mine, smiling with the tickle of her wiry whiskers over my face when I felt Solas’ aura reach me. Mythal’s mercy! I’m within the damn walls. Will he ever just fucking relax? All’s I need is a few moments and some damn breathing room. I held back a sigh of annoyance knowing it was barely past noon and he was already looking for me. Remember? Grace and a sense of humor—where’s your sense of humor chicka? I continued nuzzling Etta while Dennet turned towards the opening of the barn.

“Master Solas, fine day seeing you.”

I kept my back to the barn doorway where I knew he stood and moved on to Siugen and Inansha’s stalls.

“It is good to see you as well Master Dennet.”

I continued stroking Inansha’s regal head with one hand while he ate the apple I held in the palm of my other hand. His soft footsteps fell in behind me and he pressed a brief kiss to the top of my head.
“I had a feeling I would find you here. I requested for a picknick to be prepared for us to take in the garden today. I thought perhaps spending some time with each other outside would be a nice change.”

Now I feel like a giant ass. *Okay, well apparently, I’m more than just a little bitchy today.* I patted Inansha’s large neck and turned around.

“That sounds quite romantic.”

He placed a small kiss to my forehead and smiled, lacing his fingers with mine. I turned towards Dennet just as his wife Elaina came around the corner.

“Oh, my sweet child, just look at you,” she said walking towards us.

Solas let go of my hand just as the woman wrapped me in a hard hug and kissed both of my cheeks before turning towards him and surprising him by repeating the gesture. I covered my mouth, trying to suppress the giggle that wanted to escape by his shocked expression.

“Oh, my sweet child, just look at you,” she said walking towards us.

Solas let go of my hand just as the woman wrapped me in a hard hug and kissed both of my cheeks before turning towards him and surprising him by repeating the gesture. I covered my mouth, trying to suppress the giggle that wanted to escape by his shocked expression.

“Why aren’t you two just the sight. You see this husband,” she said gesturing at Solas and I. “This is what love looks like.”

Solas wrapped his arm around me and pulled me into his side while we both blushed with embarrassment. Dennet snorted and waved a dismissive hand at Elaina.

“Oh, go on with you, woman. I know what it looks like, I still look at you the same way.”

I giggled and winked up at Solas as he led me out of the barn, leaving the couple to continue their bickering that sounded more like flirting. He kissed the top of my head and I wrapped my arm around his waist.

“Ar lath ma vhenan.”

I laid my head against him and sighed happily knowing that what the Dennet’s had together, I wanted.

“And I you.”

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I sat at my desk, reading the letter from Empress Celine that Josephine delivered to me about ten minutes ago. Scanning the contents that discussed my request for a personal favor in regards to Vivienne. Bean bumped around, and I felt a bit like a jungle gym as it maneuvered, and I rubbed absently at my side, continuing to read. It appeared that Celine was only too happy to help me. Her only request was that I send her a mage of worth to fill the Enchanter to the Court position that Vivienne would leave vacant.

I thought about it for a moment, pulling out a sheet of parchment and began writing back to her. I questioned if she would accept an elven mage for the position or would she find that uncomfortable. I thought it would be the perfect slap in the face to Vivienne if she was replaced by an elf. Tapping my head as I thought about what I wanted to write, my door opened and Bull’s voice rang out.

“Boss, you up there?”

Setting my pen down, I pushed away from my desk as I stood.
“Yeah, I'm up here, Bull.”

His large body made its way up the stairs and I gestured towards one of the chairs for him to sit and he shook his head.

“I need your help.”

I know I looked surprised with his request and Bull chuckled, holding his hand out.

“With Krem. Guys still healing and won’t take it easy. I have caught him training on Cassandra's dummies twice now. He doesn’t seem to care that Stitches has already told him that he is going to reinjure something if he keeps this up,” he said. I hid my smile with his exasperated tone and sat on the arm of the chair.

“Ah, and you need me to find something to occupy his time.”

Bull’s large head nodded in agreement.

“Please, Boss, he’ll listen to you.”

I tapped my fingers over my thigh as I thought about what I could possibly do and snapped my fingers with an idea.

“I got it. Where is Krem now?”

“The boys got him occupied in the tavern for now.”

I went to my desk and starting grabbing correspondence and writing implements before I turned to look at Bull.

“Lead the way, Bull.”

I followed after Bull across the keep and down the outside steps, crossing the courtyard towards the tavern. I smiled at those I passed, slightly waved at one of the housekeepers, Joan, I believe her name is and walked into the tavern. The smells of stale ale mixed with sweat and wood smoke permeated the air. I choked and began coughing while stepping back outside. Bull looked down at me as I wrinkled my nose.

“Mythal’s mercy, leave the fucking door open, this place stinks.”

Bull laughed and propped a rock against the wooden door, keeping it open as I requested while Cabot came around the bar towards us.

“Were you born in a barn, Bull? Close that damn door.”

The dwarf hadn’t seen me standing behind Bull and I stepped around him to hold Cabot’s angry gaze.

“Don’t touch that door Bull, this place smells like swamp ass and needs not only a good airing out, but by the looks of it a fucking mop and some soap.”

Cabot stopped his approach and rubbed his face groaning.

“Bloody hell, I should have known it was a woman’s request.”

My eyebrow arched warningly at him.
“Yes Cabot, women like to drink to. We just prefer to not do it in a place that smells like the void’s asshole.”

Cabot barked out a laugh and shook his head.

“Stubborn damn woman, fine, you win. I’ll have the place cleaned so it smells like a bloody daisy, would that please you my lady?”

I grinned at him cheekily and walked towards him, pressing a kiss to his weathered, scruffy cheek.

“Thank you, Cabot, you’re my knight in shining armor.”

Cabot blushed and waved his hands at me.

“Off with you, woman.”

I giggled and moved towards Krem’s table, setting down my stack of correspondence with a thunk. Krem looked at the stack with surprise before looking up at me.

“What’s all this about?”

Bull must have gestured at the others because they all started leaving the table with little waves or pats on my shoulder as they passed. Only Grim stopped and pressed a kiss to my cheek before leaving and I sat down across from Krem.

“I need an assistant to help me with my paperwork. You need something to do until you are medically released to begin training again.”

“Oh, for the… listen Fenlin. I don’t know what that big horned idiot told you, but-”

I raised my eyebrow at him waiting for the lie and Krem stopped talking and rubbed his neck.

“He told you.”

“What do you think? Of course, he told me, you stubborn ass.”

Krem looked at me sheepishly and let out a heavy sigh full of resignation to his situation.

“What do you need me to do?”

I gave him a bright smile as I put a pen and some ink in front of him and started going through the stack of correspondence.

“Answer these.” I placed the stack of marriage proposals in front of him that Josephine brought me. She knew I didn’t want them, but because these were from well-known families, she believed that it entitled them to be answered by the Inquisitor. I bit the inside of my cheek while I watched Krem’s expression as he read the first letter.

I watched his eyes grow round with shock and then narrow as his mouth turned severe and angry. His brown eyes moved upward and finally met mine full of disgust.

“They know your married to the man, and yet they insist on calling Solas your bloody concubine?”

I laughed and slapped the table. *This is exactly what I needed.*

“I know, and he is one hell of a concubine at that,” I replied cheekily, making Krem laugh. “but that
is the reaction I was looking for Krem. Now all’s you need to do is reply to them.”
Krem looked at me a bit anxiously.
“Fenlin—um—are you quite sure about that? I don’t know how to write diplomatically.”
I burst out laughing and shook my head.
“Good, I don’t need you to. You can tell them to fuck off seven ways from Sunday for all I care.”
Krem laughed and picked up his pen, dipping it into the ink.
“I always wanted to tell some of these self-intitled tits to go soak their head.”
I picked up my own pen and gave him an understanding smile.
“I can confirm that it does indeed feel very good.”
Laughing together, I glanced over at Bull and gave him a wink before replying to my own letters.

After laughing with Krem as we worked for a few hours, Bull came over and interrupted us with as much tact as an arrow in the ass.
"Boss, you're looking wiped out, you should take a break."
I stared at him with annoyance and laid my pen down. I was tired... tired of all of them telling me what to do.
"Am I now."
Krem leaned back in his chair with a large smile on his lips as he watched us. I knew my tone was cool, and my expression very unhappy.
"I'm just saying that you look tired is all. You can always finish this paperwork later."
I clenched my fingers tightly together under the table trying to control my temper that was quickly escalating.
"I'm pregnant Bull, not a bloody invalid."
My tone was clearly pissed off and I stood, picking up the correspondence as he moved to take it from me and I growled at him.
"Don't you dare, you overgrown lummox! I can carry my own damn papers."
Bull stepped back, holding his hands up in retreat while Krem laughed. I grabbed up the correspondence and writing implements and stalked from the tavern. Overbearing, smothering assholes!

Back in my chambers, I cooled down and continued going over accounts and requests when I felt Solas’ aura before I heard the door open. When he crested the top step, I gave him a tired smile and
his expression was one of exasperation as he walked towards me.

“Did you rest at all today?”

I shook my head and pushed my hair out of my face as I sat back in my chair. Today is going to be one of those days- grace and humor, I silently chanted to myself as I held Solas’ gaze. If he wanted to scold me, I didn’t need to stand up for it and rubbed at the side of my stomach where bean thumped on me. Solas looked at me for a moment and let out a sigh full of frustration.

“You are not going to make this easy,” he mumbled, rubbing his neck and I sat up.

“What was that?”

Solas looked at me frustrated and saw my arched eyebrow.

“I said, vhenan, that you are not going to make this easy. It was foolish to believe otherwise.”

My grace and humor snapped and I slapped the table top angrily.

“Why? Because I missed one bloody nap? Don’t be ridiculous, Solas. I have been a good little prisoner. I eat my meals and snacks, I drink plenty of water and juice and limit myself to one damn cup of coffee in the mornings, though I am pretty sure two wouldn’t kill bean. I haven’t taken one damn step past the walls of the castle, even though I would love to see what the weather is like and you are standing here frustrated at me over a fucking missed nap.”

Solas seemed to slightly rock back on his heels with the slap of my own frustration and I stood up, coming around the desk to stand in front of him.

“Did you come to take your prisoner to dinner before you tuck her quickly into bed?”

I knew I was provoking him, and his eyes narrowed with the taunt.

“You are not a prisoner, vhenan.”

His cool tone should have been warning enough but I was frustrated with the constant hovering from everyone. If it wasn’t him, it was others like Bull or Varric, even Hawke and Cassandra seemed to have teamed up to follow me around.

“That’s not what I have experienced so far. If it isn’t you telling me what I can and can’t do, then it’s all the enlisted help you’ve acquired to make sure I don’t do too much of anything.”

I heard his loud sigh of annoyance, our bond vibrated with our shared frustration with each other.

“I have gained this help because you don’t know when to slow down. I will not apologize for wanting to keep you and our child healthy, vhenan.”

I gritted my teeth against the instant welling of tears and walked around him for the stairway. His hand took my arm stopping me and I stared at the floor.

“Vhenan”

His voice had softened, and I looked at him with a small lopsided smile as a tear slipped out. He pulled me into him and I hugged him tightly.

“I’m sorry for getting so angry with you, Solas. I love you, I don’t know why I got so instantly angry like that,” I sighed heavily. “Bean is turning me into a hormonal mess, I can’t think straight.”
I felt his laughter rumbling through his chest where my cheek lies. His hands cupped my face, making me look at him before he pressed a gentle kiss to my lips.

“You are my hormonal mess,” he mouthed against my lips and I smiled.

“Why yes, I am,” I replied kissing him quickly. “Now take me downstairs, after all that emotional puking I am starved.”

“Ma nuvenin,” he replied with a chuckle.

Lacing our fingers together we went down the stairs and headed for the dining hall.
I stretched my arms over my head, yawning, while my eyes slowly opened. The soft glow of morning was just starting to touch the tips of the mountains turning the black to a deep purple. Solas’ hand rubbed lovingly over bean who was kicking up a storm and the reason I was wide awake now. He kissed my shoulder tenderly and I curled back into him, wanting to go back to sleep. Closing my eyes thinking I might just do that, bean gave my bladder a hard knock and I groaned.

“Your child doesn’t understand the concept of sleeping in,” I grumbled, making my way out of his arms and to the edge of the bed.

I awkwardly got out of bed and made my way to the bathroom while Solas’ eyes followed me, a self-satisfied smile resting on his lips.

“Just like it's mother,” he commented as I passed.

Relieving myself, I washed my hands and face before combing my hair and loosely braiding it. I walked out of the bathroom and smiled at him cheekily.

“Hey, I resemble that remark.”

His laughter filled the chamber as he got out of bed and made his way to the bathroom, pressing a small kiss to my forehead as he passed.

I opened our wardrobe and pulled out one of my maternity dresses that was a soft plum color and had an empire waist. Pulling off my linen nightgown and draping it over the back of the chair, I slipped on a pair of smalls. I rubbed my hand over my stomach and stared at it. It still surprised me to see it and as Helene said when she took my measurements for my dresses’, I was indeed all belly. I picked up the bottle of oil preparing to rub it onto my stomach as I did every morning to keep the itching at bay from my extending skin when Solas took it from my hand.

“Allow me.”

I smiled up at him as he poured oil onto the palm of his hand from the small glass bottle.

“Any opportunity for you to get your hands on me I see.”

He rubbed his hands together and then began slow easy circles on my stomach, spreading the oil. The light smell of vanilla filled my nostrils while he chuckled.

“Perhaps,” he replied with a smug grin and I giggled.

“The fact that you find your whale of a wife even remotely attractive like this is very encouraging, wolf.”
His blue eyes met mine tenderly as his hands continued to spread the oil in small, circular motions. Our bond hummed with his love for me, warming me from the tips of my toes to the roots of my hair.

“Vhenan, when I look into your eyes the only thoughts I have are about how beautiful you are to me and how much I love you. The simple beauty in the way you look at me, the warmth of your touch and the comfort in your voice tells me that I am cared for. When you wrap your arms around me, it fills me with the assurance that it is forever you promised me. There is a gentle look I catch in your eyes when you glance at me sometimes and it tells me everything I need to know. Even your heart tells me that every moment I am loved by you, making sure I am filled with its beautiful music. Believe me when I tell you, carrying our child is breathtaking to me and I have never found you more beautiful.”

I cupped his face and brought his lips to mine unable to say a word as my throat was constricted with emotion. The gentle coupling of our lips conveyed everything as did our bond that hummed with our feelings for each other.

“Sweet talker,” I finally choked out before pressing my lips against his again.

After my meeting and leaving Krem with some ridiculous correspondence, I left the keep with Raj walking next to me for the garden, carrying a few drawing supplies. When I stepped outside, the sun was slightly covered by the clouds, but I went towards the nearest bench and sat anyway. One thing that amazed me was how Skyhold stayed a comfortable seventy degrees day or night. Every day there would be sunshine always overhead. It could be blizzarding beyond the castle's walls and no one would know unless they stepped out.

I remember Solas explaining to me that when Skyhold was built, him and a few others casted the barrier around the castle to maintain a pleasant weather pattern at all times. The place was originally built as a strategic military facility for the Evanuris, and I sighed, turning my face towards the sun. After him telling me about it, I had laughed because it explained the barracks beneath the castle and the so-called ‘back door’ to the castle from the valley below for the military to come and go. While I set up, the clouds moved, and the sunshine returned, and I rubbed Raj’s head as he settled down next to me before picking up my drawing pencil and my pad.

I focused my mind on Svarah and Amund and smiled as I thought of the perfect setting and let my fingers fly. It was nice having Krem’s help with some of the ridiculous correspondence I received because it loosened the leash that kept me tethered to my desk. I knew that I couldn’t keep Krem as my assistant, Bull had reminded me of that quick enough when he had stood over us at a table in the tavern as we worked yesterday.

‘Krem is my second in command, don’t go getting all attached, Boss’. The thought made me chuckle again like it did when he had said it. But he was right, at some point I was going to have to get some help with the never-ending stacks of paperwork. I scanned the paper and smiled, pleased with my progress on the seascape, roughly depicting the sheer cliffs beaten by the force of the water against them. As I filled in little areas here and there, I created the space where Svarah and Amund would stand together, looking out over the turbulent water I had roughly sketched in. Oh, yes, I think I will be painting this for them. I lifted my head up as one of the kitchen staff walked towards me carrying a tray.

“Your Worship, Master Solas requested that you start without him today. He asked that I inform you that he is with Master Pavus and Commander Cullen in a meeting.”

I had a feeling that his explanation of what he and Dorian with the help of the mages created around
the castle would take time, Cullen would want to know every little detail.

“That’s quite alright, thank you for bringing this out to me and letting me know.”

She bowed quickly towards me and I held back my sigh of annoyance with the titles and actions as she left. Setting my drawing down, I sat back and picked up a piece of apple, rubbing the side of my belly where bean was practicing its Kung foo kick. Raj lifted his head to look at me when I picked up a slice of cold meat.

With a small snort, I couldn’t ignore the big beggar and held it out to him, smiling as he took the offered treat delicately.

“We wouldn’t want you to starve, now would we?” I joked, ruffling the fur around his ears.

I picked up the bowl with the barley stew and sat back to enjoy my lunch in the quiet of the garden. *Today is a really good day.*

Magic crackled around her as she flew along the edge of the barrier that surrounded the castle grounds. She knew that the grounds were enchanted from long ago, but this barrier was different—new. The wind beat against her avian form making it difficult for her to continue to stay hovering over the new barrier. Her frustration grew as another gust of wind hit her, prohibiting her from seeing anything inside. She veered a hard right and dove closer to the ground to escape the gale-like force of the wind, anger bubbling beneath her golden feathers.

She morphed into her elven form as she landed on the snowy ground and turned back towards the barrier. Long blonde hair blew wildly around her with the strong gusts of the Frostback’s winter winds beat at her. Piercing yellow eyes bordered with red around the iris’ studied the different barrier. Snarling her displeasure, Andruil paced back and forth while she contemplated her options like a penned animal.

The forbidden were resourceful and served a purpose in keeping her informed, but she needed to see them for herself. Her heart thirsted for vengeance and she wanted to see his expression when she killed her mother’s slave in front of him… again. Realizing that there was no way through the magical barrier without alerting everyone within, she clenched her fists and yelled into the gusting, winter wind. Swirling snow flew around her, slashing into her eyes as she railed against the barrier.

“You couldn’t protect her then, Fen’Harel. You can’t protect her now, it’s only a matter of time… and I will have my due!”

Lightning thundered overhead, keeping pace with Andruil’s irrational wrath as she turned away from the barrier and into the storm angrily, her eyes wild with revenge and mania. Her mind replayed the twisted scenario of sliding her blade over Assan’s throat, separating her head from her body. She slipped a red vial from a small pouch at her side and uncorked it, drinking it back hungrily. She liked the taste of the lyrium that fool, Imshael brought her. Since awakening, she found herself weakened from the separation of the land and the fade, but this lyrium gave her a fierce rush of power. Licking
her lips, she savored the last drop and shattered the vial into dust. Letting the wind carry its remnants away as she flickered her fingers absently and glanced back at the castle. The fire of the lyrium rushed through her veins, alighting her eyes with an eerie red glow and a disturbing smile grew on her porcelain features.

“Oh yes, my love… mother can’t save your precious Assan this time. I promise to make the little chattel suffer for her interfering, you will finally see that it was always me that you truly loved.”

Her diabolical laughter was swept away by a burst of winter wind as she stared back at the castle. “And if you refuse to see it, my love,” her gaze narrowed angrily, and a malicious snarl formed on her lips. “I will be forced to leash you like the animal you are and make you,” she snarled ominously before morphing into a golden hawk. The sleek avian body flew low along the ground, away from the castle to avoid the harsh, winter winds.

The dining hall was warm and full of delicious smells of savory meats and pastries. I sat next to Krem, surrounded by the other Chargers enjoying my dinner when I saw Bull, Dorian, and Solas entered the hall. I smiled at him, our gazes locking as they made their way towards us. I felt the small flush heat my cheeks while my heart fluttered just at the sight of him. The man was dangerous on hormones with his easy, unhurried gait and the small tilt at the corner of his mouth that begged to be kissed.

“Hey, Fenlin.”

I turned back towards Krem a little confused and his smile was huge on his face as a mischievous sparkle lit his hazelnut brown eyes.

“You got drool, right there,” he teased, pointing towards the edges of my mouth.

Everyone around the table burst out laughing as I blushed and chuckled myself.

“Oh, hush it, you,” I replied as Solas pressed a kiss to my cheek and sat beside me. I slapped Krem’s shoulder and turned towards Solas.

“Is your alarm system working to your specifications?”

He nodded as he chewed on a piece of meat.

“For the time being it is working very well. Commander Cullen is pleased with the protection it offers once Master Pavus and I was able to explain it to him effectively. The only way in and out of Skyhold now is through the main gate and Cullen’s men are guarding the entrance effectively with mages mixed within the watches. But enough about that, what did you do today?”

“After my meeting this morning, I worked on correspondence for a few hours, then sat in the garden drawing, waiting for you,” I said looking at him pointedly since he had not come. “But because you sent me some lunch, I forgive you,” I teased before I continued. “After lunch, I drew for a while
longer before I decided to come down here for an early dinner.”

His eyes studied my face for a moment before he went back to his dinner and speared a carrot with his fork. I could feel the pleasure he felt hum through our bond and restrained from letting an annoyed sigh escape with his need to hover. I continued eating my own dinner and continued to listen to the Chargers tease each other and Bull.

“Does anyone know what the pool is up to now?” Rocky asked before taking a drink of his ale and looking at Solas and me.

“Two-fifty,” Bull answered absently taking a bite of his dinner.

I stared at him curiously as Solas leaned towards me and answered my unspoken question.

“Varric has devised a betting pool on whether our child will be a boy or a girl and what day will it be born.”

I slightly shook my head, finally understanding what they were talking about now and glanced at Solas with humor dancing in my gaze.

“I take it we don’t get to participate in this game.”

Solas chuckled and shook his head no.

“Perhaps it is because you would have inside information,” Dorian commented with a cheeky grin. “But we are all listening if you would like to share your thoughts on the matter.”

Everyone around the table stopped talking to listen to whether Solas or I would say anything. I looked at Solas with a mischievous smile and he started chuckling before leaning closer to me to whisper in my ear.

“What you are thinking vhenan, is most naughty of you.”

I plucked a piece of cheese from his plate and popped it into my mouth, shrugging my shoulders.

“Sure, but everyone has conspired to make sure I have nothing better to do with my time,” I replied.

Solas and Dorian shared a knowing look and Dorian laughed loudly.

“Oh, you truly are a wicked, wicked woman… I knew there was something about you that I liked.”

I stuck my tongue out at him and bumped Solas’ arm.

“Tattletale.”

Solas chuckled before taking a drink of his wine. I saw the relaxed expression around his eyes and mouth and it was good to see. It had been far too long since I had seen it. Reaching up, I ran my thumb over his eyebrow, smiling softly towards him. His blue gaze met mine curiously and I pressed a quick kiss to his cheek before whispering in his ear.

“It is good to see you finally relax.”

I leaned away, and his gaze held mine with an intensity that always stole my breath and made my heart race. His hand reached up and took my hand that was cupping his chin and kissed the pads of my fingertips.
“Come vhenan, I shall draw you a bath.”

The look in his eye clearly told me I wouldn’t be bathing alone, and I knew my smile grew wider.

“I think I would enjoy that—a lot.”

I allowed him to help me up and I waved at the guys as I followed Solas across the dining hall.

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My head came up with the sound of Krem’s laughter as he stared at a letter shaking his head. His eyes were dancing with humor when they finally met mine from across the tavern table.

“Maker’s balls, this one has got to be the best that was ever written.”

I took the letter and began reading and it was not long before I too, started laughing.

“Well, it is creative,” I said while wiping moisture from the corners of my eyes.

Bull walked to our table and I handed the letter to him to read and started laughing again as he read it aloud for the Chargers to hear.

“My Lady Herald, you have bewitched me for there is no other word for it. Your skin is the color of rams milk and it makes me thirst for you.” Bull started chuckling as did those that listened. “Your hair is unlike any color of black I have seen before and yet it makes me want to drown in its darkness.” Bull groaned and shook his head as I winked at him and twirled a lock of hair around my finger. “Your lips are the color of fresh raspberries, and they beg for me to sip from the sweet nectar I know they hold.” I blew a kiss at him and Bull laughed and slapped his knee as he continued. “But it is your breasts and your small waist that has beguiled me the most and put me under your spell. I imagine the suppleness of your skin and what the Lady Herald hid beneath all that cloth at the Winter Palace. It would be an honor if you would accept my offer of marriage. I can arrive at Skyhold within the month and together, we can lead your forces to victory as you strive to bring peace to Thedas.”

Bull handed the letter back as he read the name of who wrote the letter.

“Signed Lord Pelharmon.”

Krem took the letter and grinned as he picked up his pen and dipped it into the ink. Those around the tavern were getting a good laugh with the rubbish and I winked up at Bull.

“He did do better than the one that compared me to his hunting dog.”

Bull shook his head laughing as he went back towards another table. A messenger slipped through the tavern door and hurried towards me holding a small missive. I nodded at him as I took the missive and read the short note from Leliana. *Towen and my agents have arrived with Duke Antoine. We are in the dungeon. L.*
I stared at the paper anxiously. *How can I face Towen knowing that his clan was killed because of me?* Fisting the missive in my hand, I got up shakily, staring at the table. Krem glances up at me from his writing, a frown on his lips.

“You okay, Fenlin? You don’t look so good.”

I gave him a wobbly smile meant to assure him and gestured towards the papers laying on the table in front of him while I squared my shoulders.

“I am fine, Krem. I will send someone to gather all this.”

I felt the scrutiny of Krem’s hazelnut stare and knew he didn’t quite believe me even as he waved me off.

“Don’t worry about it, I’ll take everything to Lady Josephine. Maybe you should go lay down for a while.”

I nodded at him and left the tavern not sure if I was just grateful he didn’t give me the third degree for once or wished he had because it would delay my inevitable meeting with Towen. Standing in the sunshine, I took a deep breath and smoothed the lines of my dress. *Best to get this over with before I chicken out and go hide under my blankets.* I walked across the courtyard towards the outside entrance that led to the dungeons. I was a ball of nervousness as I expected to hear Towen lash out and blame me for the death of his people. I had no defense, no excuse for what happened and wouldn’t blame him if he did lash out at me, it was my fault that it happened.

I swung open the heavy, wooden door and made my way down the stone stairs. I kept my hand to the rocky wall as I carefully stepped, my distorted shadow flickered along the rock wall from torchlight and I heard the echo of angry voices as I approached the landing. I could hear the duke protesting loudly and petty as it may be, I felt a small piece of me very happy with his objections.

“This is absurd—you can’t do this! I have done nothing wrong. The Empress will see this as an act of war…”

“The Empress is the one that released you to me,” I replied as I entered the chamber glancing at Towen and the others. There was a tall blonde elf standing next to Leliana that I had never seen before with an air of seduction and playfulness surrounding him. There was something about the cocky grin on his lips and the cold expression in his honey colored eyes that felt very familiar.

The Duke's eyes narrowed on me, taking in my pregnant state and snarled at me.

“There is a reason we refer to your kind as rabbits, it is because you breed as often as one. I demand that you release me at once, I will not be judged by some lowly knife-ear.”
My curious glance moved from the man at Leliana’s side to the duke. Pregnancy hormones were unpredictable at best and I could not restrain my sudden burst of anger. With a flick of my wrist, a fade fist slammed into the Duke’s middle, knocking him back against the cell bars. The two guards charged with holding him, scattered for safety as the magic hit the duke harshly.

The man beside Leliana shook his head and a ‘tsk’ing’ sound came from him while he smiled wickedly and whispered into Leliana’s ear.

“She is everything you said she was.”

I ignored them because right now all my anger was focused on the noble lying in a crumpled heap trying to catch his breath. Every particle of my being wanted to rip this man’s head off and shove it up his noble ass.

“You are in a precarious position Duke Antoine,” I snarled before walking towards him while the guards pulled the Duke roughly back to his feet. “You not only conspired to have an entire clan of innocent people murdered, but you also carried it out. You hired the mercenaries who did your dirty work for you and they killed men, women, and children who couldn’t defend themselves against so many soldiers.” I was breathing heavy as I stood in front of him and jabbed him in the chest with my finger. “Yet you stand here spitting out slurs like you have any right to do anything other than getting on your fucking knees and beg for your life.”

His brown eyes narrowed at me and his lips formed an ugly snarl.

“I will never—beg a knife-ear!”

My eyebrow came up and I smiled at him threateningly as my voice softly vibrated around the chamber and I noticed Leliana stiffen out of the corner of my eye.

“Never is a long time, but I promise you, you will before it is done because you will suffer for every single death of those that were Clan Lavellan.”

I nodded towards the guards to take him away and they drug him away kicking and yelling. I turned away from the scene, taking a deep breath to calm down and motioned for Towen to follow me. I knew Leliana watched me carefully and I held up my hand at her when she made a move towards us. I knew she would try to explain what happened to Towen and it was not her duty to do so. I was the one that was ultimately responsible for their fuck up. Shit always rolls uphill.

“No, Leliana.”

She nodded her head at me with an angry slash to her lips and I made my way up the stairs with Towen following behind me with a look of confusion. At the top of the landing, I took a left in the corridor that would lead us to the garden. Opening the thick, wooden door, we left the darkness of the dungeon and were immediately blinded before we were enveloped with the smells of herbs and flowers that permeated the air of the garden. We sat on the nearest bench and I scratched at the side of my stomach where it always itched. I am going to have to start putting oil on my skin more often or this is going to drive me nuts.

Towen’s gaze dropped to the large mound and smiled at me, pulling me from my own mundane thoughts.

“I see that congratulations are in order.”

My heart squeezed as I quietly thanked him. Okay, I can do this.
“Thank you but that is not why I wanted to talk with you alone.”

I cleared my throat and stopped fiddling with the material of my dress and looked at him.

“Sorry is such an inadequate word for what I feel but I am sorry, Towen. Your clan would be alive if it wasn’t for me.”

Towen’s expression was full of surprise and he quickly started shaking his head at me in disagreement.

“No Fenlin, it was not because…”

I interrupted him quickly.

“Just listen—please.” Town quieted, and I took a deep breath for the courage to continue. “At first it was not. It was because red lyrium was found in the towns water supply, making everyone in the town irrational. I believed, as did my council, that was the reason all along.” Towen was nodding his head in agreement with me and my voice grew unsteady as I continued. “Then I received your letter describing the new attacks and realized that wasn’t all. I asked for agents to be sent to help the clan move away from Wycombe with some horses. My orders were not followed as I had directed and that is how I believed the clan was killed, at first.”

I knew I was crying now, and I lowered my head in shame unable to look at him any longer. My fingers twisted in the material of my dress as I continued.

“But the chaos of the nobles of the town was used as a diversion while a former woman that used to work for the Inquisition, used the diversion to shape a plan to kill them because she thought that to do so it would hurt me.”

I heard Towen’s heavily escaped breath, not chancing a look at him, my tears fell quicker. Solas’ aura hummed angrily through our bond and I cried even harder knowing that once he saw me like this, he would interrupt my confession to Towen. I felt Solas’ entrance into the garden as one would an icy storm and his eyes were angry as he approached us. I shook my head at him as I held up my shaky hand, silently pleading with him to stop his angry march towards Towen. He glanced from me to Towen and I saw that he quickly understood why I was so upset. His anger and overprotective intentions did not completely evaporate as he continued to move towards us, but at least he was not looking openly hostile. I could feel his need to comfort me instead and he sat next to me, taking my hand in his.

I stared at our laced fingers for a moment before turning my gaze back to Towen. His eyes were closed, and his face was filled with hurt and anger.

“I can only hope that one day you will forgive me because I never meant for this to happen. If I could do it all over again, I would have gone to Wycombe myself and not…”

Towen opened his eyes and stared at me, slowly shaking his head.

“Your actions did not kill my people, lethal’lan,” he said with a heavy reply. “The actions of some soulless, noble bastard killed my people because they wanted to hurt you and it obviously did. You honored them by demanding him and this other conspirator be found and brought to justice. What was done to them, was not your fault.”

I hiccupped on a broken sob and all the guilt I felt was slowly dissolving and I quickly hugged Towen tightly as I replied.
“And you will continue to honor them when you carry out their justice against this man.”

His arms tightened around me for a moment before we pulled apart and I grabbed Solas’ hand again. I knew he could feel through our bond my elation that Towen did not hold me responsible for the clan’s death. For months I had carried that burden of responsibility. Towen’s thumb pointed at his own chest as he spoke.

“You want me to…”

I nodded my head and wiped at my eyes.

“I want you to judge him, lethal’lin. It is your right to do so as the last living member of the clan.”

He silently stared at me for a long moment before giving me a gentle smile.

“But I am not the last lethal’lan as there is also you. You are a Lavellan as much as I. Keeper Dishana believed in you. I explained to her what you told me, and she was honored that you chose our clan to represent and was proud of what you accomplished. She knew that you would do a lot of good for the people and I do not think she was wrong. It would only be right that we both decide his fate together.”

New tears started to fall, and I squeezed Solas’ hand tightly.

“It’s a deal, we shall do it together.”

The keep held a flock of nobles all front and center but as I looked around I saw my team of crazies lining the keep walls in silent support. Then as I let my gaze travel, I noticed that the room was filled to capacity with elves. I sat in the Inquisitor’s chair on the dais that overlooked the room while Towen stood to my right with a longbow draped over his back. Josephine stood to my left while the guards brought in Duke Antoine who appeared to still be struggling with his current situation. Josephine held her clipboard and spoke loudly for the entire room to be heard.

“Brought before you today Inquisitor, is Duke Antoine, of Wycombe. He and another noble house plotted the death of your clan. The Duke hired mercenaries out of Navara to attack Clan Lavellan during diplomatic discussions. His actions with the machinations of another carried out the plan and murdered innocent elven men, women, and children.”

My fingers gripped the armrests tightly as I stared at the duke. His expression looked bored and uncaring, his posture full of self-entitlement and pomposity.

“I recognize none of this proceeding. You have no authority to judge me for any perceived crimes against savages on my lands. I demand that you release me this instant, rabbit.”

The guard kicked him behind the knee, dropping the duke to the ground for the spoken slur.

It took me a few silent moments and a couple of deep breaths to quiet my instant need to sever this man’s head from his body and hurl it out the door like a bowling ball. I glanced around the keep and
noticed Emalien standing next to Loranil and Sera. Each of them had longbows draped over their backs waiting for my signal. As my eyes scanned the crowd there were more than a dozen elves with longbows and I finally brought my gaze to the Dukes, who continued to look at me contemptuously from his knelt position on the keeps floor.

I tapped my finger on the arm of the chair and shook my head at him. Had he at least asked for mercy, his death would have been quicker than what Towen and I had planned. Towen’s eyes glanced over his shoulder at me and I nodded while he pulled his bow with a malicious twist to his handsome features.

“Alright Duke, I will release you—to them,” I answered. Gesturing around him at the elves that held bows and his angry gaze glared at me.

“You expect me to…”

I interrupted him angrily before he could spew any more of his vile words. If he wanted elves to be barbaric then he would get it.

“Die, Duke Antoine. I expect you to die. Today, you will be hunted like you have hunted my people for your crimes.”

The guards removed his shackles and he took a step towards me and Towen aimed an arrow at him.

“Run—rabbit.”

The Duke stopped and finally looked unsure of himself.

“I don’t…”

“RUN” Towen yelled at him as he shot an arrow into the floor at the duke’s feet.

The Duke wasted no more time on questions and ran from the keep out the front doors. Towen jumped from the dais and yanked the arrow from the floor on his way out, following after the others with bows. I knew that the Duke would not make it to far from the front gate. Josephine looked at me worriedly as many of the nobles in the room glanced at each other nervously. Each expression held one-part discomfort, one-part censure and a whole crapton of anxiety.

“Inquisitor, perhaps it would have been more merciful…”

My eyes narrowed at Josephine as she tried to speak quietly so as not to be heard.

“You wanted me to be merciful? To the man that murdered an entire clan of people for no other reason than the shape of their ears and some bigoted bitch’s need for revenge?”

I was not quiet and my astonishment at Josephine’s thoughtless comment angered me, even more, when I noticed that there were other nobles that shared her sentiment. I stood up and stared at them all angrily, pulling out the small dagger I kept on me at all times. Dragging it harshly over my hand I held it up to everyone in the room as I yelled.

“Is our blood not the same damn color as your own?”

Josephine flinched with my angry tone as many looked at my hand in horror as the blood dripped on the keeps floor.

“It’s okay for me and my kind to shed our blood as long as you get to stay safely tucked into your
estates because we are nothing in your eyes but fodder. We do not deserve respect or recognition for that sacrifice, is that it? We do not deserve to live in peace?”

I noticed Solas moving through the crowd towards me and I shook my head at him, angry with the whole situation that tears were silently slipping down my cheeks as I turned my gaze on the room with utter disgust and contempt for them all.

“What is wrong with you people?”

I stepped off the dais and walked towards my chamber doors with Solas following closely behind me.

I laid on the bed with a cool cloth over my eyes completely cried out. Solas sat next to me in silence and I let out a heavy sigh.

“Days like today help me understand why you would want to just rip the veil down and let it all burn.”

I felt his lips on mine and let out a small, pleased sigh.

“Perhaps I have something that might cheer you up.”

I pulled the cloth from my eyes and stared up at him with a little smirk, our bond humming with humor and he started laughing.

“That is not what I was talking about, however, we shall revisit that idea in a moment.”

I laughed, shrugging at him.

“Can’t blame a girl for trying.”

He pressed another kiss to my lips and laughed again.

“Incorrigible,” he whispered against my lips. “The Empress has agreed to your idea of an Elven Mage replacing Madam De’Fer.”

I think my jaw just fell off.

“Seriously… she will allow an elf as the Court Enchanter to the Throne.”

He smiled at me and our bond hummed with how proud he was of me.

“It is quite the accomplishment, vhenan. Elves in the royal palace have been nothing but servants.”

“I wish I could be a fly on the wall when Vivienne learns that she was replaced by an elf.”

I knew I was being childish about the whole thing, but I wanted to make the woman suffer publicly and if that was petty of me, then so be it, I didn’t care. I caught Solas’ look before he bent and shook his head trying not to laugh.

“I know, I’m being juvenile. I might as well stick out my tongue and start chanting ‘nana na nana’”

Now Solas is laughing and he pressed his lips against mine hushing me and my taunting chant.
“Ar lath ma, vhenan. I would have you no other way.”

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I pull him back with me, smiling against his lips as I tease him.

“We could be juvenile together.”

His hands skimming over my hips was all the answer I needed and deepened the kiss. The man drove me crazy.

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After dropping kisses on Solas’ head as I passed through the rotunda, I took the stairs that led to Leliana’s rookery. Passing the library, I waved at Dorian as I passed, and he put his book down, motioning me to wait a moment. He walked towards me and pressed a kiss to my cheek in greeting.

“How is my beautiful friend feeling today?”

I smiled up at him cheekily enjoying the way his hazel eyes danced with good humor.

“Round, she feels very damn round,” I replied making him laugh.

“Saturnalia festivities will begin tomorrow, and I would like to buy the baby something, but I am having a hard time unsure if I should buy for a boy or a girl.”

His face looked properly confounded and I laughed knowing exactly what he was up to.

“I know what your doing, Dorian. I can’t help you, Solas and I don’t know.”

He looked at me a bit shocked.

“But it is a simple spell for you to use to determine the sex of the child.”

I nodded in agreement and patted his shoulder.

“Yes, it is and we elected to be surprised instead of knowing.”

He looked at me speechless and I laughed at him again.

“Andraste’s ass, you're serious. Why in the void would you choose to do that to yourselves?”

Still laughing and now I am wiping tears from my eyes because of his expression, I pulled him down and pressed a kiss to his cheek.

“Because we are sadistic like that, my dear.”

I continued towards the stairs to the rookery listening to Dorian’s grumbling behind me. Stopping at the top, I saw the blonde elf that was with her the day before sitting on the edge of the table. He wore dark leathers and calf-skinned boots that matched. His shirt was woolen colored and loosely tucked with a thick, leather belt around his narrow waist. His blonde hair was long and held away from his face by two braids that met in the back. The style accentuated the two dark tattoos that lined his high cheekbones. Something about him was still so familiar but I just couldn’t put my finger on it.

Leliana glanced up as I approached and smiled.

“Zevran, this is Fenlin, the Inquisitor.”
Oh—shit! That’s who it is… Zevran Arainai. I totally crushed on this guy in the first game. I knew I was staring at him like some crazed fan and he hopped off the table and bowed elegantly towards me before taking my hand and pressing a kiss to it. Oh, sweet geebus, he is smooth too.

“It is my pleasure to meet such a beautiful woman as you.”

His voice was like his eyes, pure warm honey. I knew I was blushing and patted my cheek with embarrassment, my eyes moved to where Leliana stood rolling her eyes at him. Clearing my throat nervously, he let my hand go and I slightly waved it in front of my face in a fanning motion.

“Mythal’s mercy, you are a smooth one.”

Leliana chuckled as Zevran held an expression of ‘who me?’ Making us both laugh all the more.

“Okay, so what has brought you to Skyhold, Zevran?”

His eyes traveled Leliana’s form and a natural smile sat on his full lips.

“I am here at the request of my beautiful friend.”

I glanced at Leliana questioningly and caught a slight pinking around her cheeks with his compliment. I watched her gather her composure quickly before addressing me.

“Zevran has contacts that could help us find Corypheus and he would be an asset to have around now that word has spread you are with child.”

I stared at her for a moment before it sunk in that she too was going to hover like the others and I made a face of annoyance which made Zevran laugh.

“I do not believe she likes your motivations my lotus blossom.”

I looked from her to him and nodded my agreement.

“You would be right. I already have a team of over protective turds that won’t let me do anything other than eat, sleep, and pee. Then there is my mate, who is by all accounts the most over protective man on the planet that if I allowed it, he would make sure I never left our chambers.” I rubbed the side of my stomach that bean was kicking and sighed. “For crying out loud, I need a fucking assistant to help with the mountains of paperwork, not more guards to hover over me.”

I noticed Zevran’s smile at my outburst and Leliana was trying to cover hers. It was Leliana that finally spoke up.

“If she knew about Andruil, she would shit kittens trying to figure out how to protect me. I nodded my head in understanding and sighed again.

“Fine, I get it.” I looked at Zevran and pointed back towards the stairs with my thumb. “Come on Zevran, I will introduce you to Solas and you two can conspire new and eventful ways to keep me from working too much.”

Zevran’s laughter followed after me as we headed for the rotunda. Raj was laying by the desk while Solas read until I entered walking towards him. His eyes came up to meet mine and only narrowed.
just slightly as he saw Zevran following closely behind me. Our bond hummed with a jealousy that
made me smile and slightly shake my head at him. *Silly man, there is only one elf that makes my
heart bounce and it will always be you.* I stopped in front of him and pressed a kiss to his cheek
before introducing them to each other.

“Ma lath, this is Zevran, Zevran this is my mate, Solas. Leliana has asked him to come to Skyhold
for a while. She believes that his skills would be better used in a protection compacity and since you
are coordinating the effort to make sure your mate has zero things to do, I thought you and him could
plan it out.”

His eyes held the glimmer of annoyance before he stood and kissed my forehead and addressed
Zevran.

“As you can see, I have my hands full.”

I elbowed his ribs and smiled up at him wickedly. *I like filling those hands handsome.* I kept the
thought to myself, but I knew he could tell how much I loved him through our bond. Zevran was
laughing as he glanced from me to Solas.

“You do not appear to be unwilling in meeting the challenge.”

Solas chuckled and shook his head while they continued to talk about me as if I were not present.
After a few moments of listening to them talk, I gave Solas a cheeky smile.

“Well it looks like you don’t need me, and I have paperwork to finish.”

Solas grabbed my hand before I could take two steps and held my gaze.

“Please try to get in a nap today, vhenan.”

I gave him a teasing smile as I answered him.

“Maybe.”

Zevran’s laugh followed me out of the rotunda where I found Josephine and a group of people
decorating for the holidays. I walked towards her and saw that she was looking at me nervously. I
smiled at her as I approached, I could tell that she thought I would be angry with her, but I wasn’t. I
knew where she was trying to come from as the ambassador to the Inquisition. My problem is that I
am no diplomat and gave not one fuck about kissing their ass. Since coming to Thedas, the
experiences I have had has shaped me, changed me. *I am no longer the sensitive artist who wouldn’t
hurt a fly.* I mentally laughed at myself and stopped next to her.

“The decorations look fabulous, Josephine.”

She beamed at me with the small praise and I realized that I needed to move past my disappointment
with her and the actions she made.

“Thank you, Inquisitor. I will need to know who you would like to choose as the town fool to rule
for a day.”

I laughed and without a thought spoke.

“Sera”

Josephine looked at me with huge, hazel eyes and then started laughing.
“I will be sure to have her crown made for the day’s festivities.”

I started laughing and with a mischievous glint to my eyes, put my hand over my mouth as I spoke in a conspiring tone.

“And a golden sash.”

Josephine and I shared a knowing look and she giggled as did I.

“I will make it so, Inquisitor.”

Lightening the mood between us was a good step and I stepped closer to Josephine, her head was tilted down so she could hear my soft words.

“No matter what has happened Josephine, I still think you’re the best. Don’t ever doubt it.”

Her eyes quickly darted to mine and I saw the small swell of water in the hazel depths and pulled her in for a quick hug.

“Thank you,” she whispered.

We broke apart smiling and I patted her arm before heading for my room to get some tedious paperwork done.

Chapter End Notes

Ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you my heart
ma lath - my love
Satinalia Week

Chapter Summary

Hope everyone enjoys the update and thank you for your continued support. You guys are awesome!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Little shivers of desire snaked their way through my body like lightning were what woke me this morning. My unassuming dream where I was having a conversation with Cassandra about the costs of iron turned very embarrassing – especially when I started moaning. My eyes stayed firmly closed as I moaned again when I felt his teeth scrape over my shoulder blade. I gripped the sheets just as his hand caressed up my side to come to rest over my breast, his thumb lazily teasing my nipple.

“Mmm… good morning to you too.”

My voice was thick with wanting him and husky from sleep. His groan vibrated through me like delicious tickles and I pressed myself back against him. His hand slipped from teasing my breast to slide languorously down my body to where my body clenched with wanting him, and I bit my lip with the action. His other arm slid under me, pulling me closer to him. I felt his need for me pressed between us and I wiggled against him, making him groan again.

His caresses over my body were making my blood boil. The sensations that trailed after his lips as pressed moist kisses over my neck and shoulder made my body tremble, and what his nimble fingers were doing to me were driving me quietly insane. My pulse was racing, and panting moans escaped my mouth with each gentle caress of his fingers over me. I reached back and wrapped my arm around his neck.

“Are you going to tease me all morning or take me, ma lath?”

His growled acknowledgment was unintelligible as he finally slid into me. Finally, my body sighed as the rest of me sparkled like a fourth of July night show in our room. His slow movements had me careening into a bliss-filled white light before I could catch my breath. His teeth latch onto my shoulder as his pace hastened and my body raced to keep up with him. The feel of him touching me, his husky moans set my skin on fire and my aura dove into him causing his desire to skyrocket.

His hands tightened around my hips as he drew closer to his release and my body was ready for it. The feel of his lips on my sensitive earlobe while his aura dove into me was too much and the combination sent my body over for the second time. Our sounds of completion filled the chamber, out bodies damp from our morning’s escapades. With my eyes still closed, his hands outlined my body while he trailed kisses down the side of my neck. There was nothing about this man that I would ever tire of and I knew I was smiling when his lips touched my cheek. Turning my head towards him, inviting him to kiss me, I did not wait long. His mouth caressed mine making me smile again. I opened my eyes when his hand caressed my jaw and I saw that Solas was intently studying my face.

“I awake some days thinking you are a beautiful dream I experienced in the fade.”
I turned in his arms and cradled his face in my hands. Pressing little kisses over his cheeks, his eyes slipped closed and I pressed gentle kisses to his eyelids.

“Solas, you sweet talker, there is nowhere I would rather be than with you.”

I pressed my lips to his and felt his arms tighten around me as our kiss deepened and through our bond, my love for him and how he makes me feel, poured into him.

The keep was full of holiday cheer. Bows of silver, gold, and red adorning wreaths were hung everywhere. Tables covered in a cloth lined the walls of the dining hall and they were littered with different types of foods. The kitchen staff was rushing from the room to the kitchen and returning with armloads laden with food. I glanced around the room that was full of nobles and internally cringed at the sight of them. Resigned to allow Josephine her party, I made my way through the clusters of small groups made of two or three nobles before I heard the dreaded title.

“Your Worship?”

Yuck! I turned towards the voice where I saw a tall man wearing an Orlesian mask walking towards me. Piercing blue eyes peered at me from behind the silver albatross that covered half his face, leaving only his lower jaw exposed. He stopped in front of me and bowed making me want to groan aloud.

“It is a pleasure to finally make your acquaintance, your Worship. I am Duke De’Galen. My daughter and I were sent by the Empress to accompany her new mage and her assistant back to the Winter Palace.”

I quietly stared at him for a moment and then looked around for the daughter he spoke of expecting to see a teenager. The Empress had said nothing about sending an escort in her correspondence and there was something about this guy that just made my sixth sense ring warningly. The Duke gestured towards a masked woman talking with a couple and I studied the woman carefully. Definitely not a teenager. I couldn’t miss the low cut of her gown exposing a chest about to burst out, her narrow waist and delicate fingers with multiple rings on them that she gestured with. Her golden hair was piled on her head in a fashionable knot and her painted lips smiled at something one of the nobles said and she too wore a mask similar to the Duke’s. If this girl is his daughter, I will eat a plate of goat’s liver and run naked through the keep. My gaze came back to the Duke and I pasted a fake smile on my lips hating the Orlesian game.

“You have a very beautiful daughter Duke De'Galen.”

He wore his own fake smile and lied artfully.

“She takes after her mother naturally.”

“Naturally,” I commented. I glanced back at the woman that was ending her conversation and slowly walking towards us. She bowed to me and I refrained from rolling my eyes with the gesture.

“Your Worship, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. I am Marquess Marjolaine De’Galen.”

I studied the two, my fake smile in place and about to address them when a thick Antivan accent
spoke from behind me. I had to give the man his due. As my new shadow in Solas' operation, 'Keep Fenlin Out of Trouble', he knew how to keep his distance without actually keeping any.

“Skyhold is full of many beauties for this holiday and yet I have never seen such a vision of beauty like yours, my lady.”

I turned to look at Zevran who was bowed low, his eyes focused on the Marquess. He rose smoothly and walked towards the Duke and his fake daughter.

“I apologize, where are my manners. I am Zevran Arainai.”

I noticed he subtly inserted himself between me and the couple so smoothly that had I not been watching I wouldn’t even have noticed what he was doing. The Duke’s jaw tightened as Zevran took the Marquess’ hand and pressed a kiss over her knuckles. The blush that colored her skin proved that the Marquess was not indifferent to Zevran’s attention and it dawned on me how really good he was at disarming people with charm. It must make him absolutely deadly in his line of work.

Anyone paying attention could see that the Duke was about ready to snarl at Zevran and I swallowed the laugh that I wanted to let escape, instead, I joined Zevran in his fun. Between the gang and Solas, I was under surveillance around the clock. Every one of them making sure I didn’t ‘overdue’ anything and I needed to have a good laugh.

“Pay no attention to my cousin, Duke De’Galen. He is completely harmless and means no disrespect.”

The Dukes hardened blue eyes turned towards me as I slipped my arm loosely through Zevran’s.

“Your cousin?”

I nodded as Zevran answered carrying the charade through.

“Yes, on my mother’s side.”

I subtly studied the Marquess and saw her eyes consuming Zevran where he stood and hid a smile.

“I was unaware that you had any family left after the slaughter of your clan that was ordered by Duke Antoine.”

I stiffened beside Zevran and felt his fingers tighten subtly over my hand in a silent warning as he smoothly answered the Duke with a pleasant smile on his face.

“I am sure you are unaware of many Dalish traditions. It was a horrible atrocity what happened to the Clan. I came as soon as I heard to help my cousin avenge the grievous wrong done to them.”

The Duke’s eyes studied Zevran carefully while his ‘so-called’ daughter kept biting her lower lip and rubbing a finger seductively over her puffed out chest trying to get Zevran’s attention. Just watching the blatant want in the woman’s eyes was enough to make me want to gag. Mythal’s mercy bitch, go dunk your head before you get any more obvious.

“I overheard a rumor tonight that Duke Antoine was hunted down by elves, but I believe it an absurd notion and nothing but tales to shock the nobles into complacency.”

My back was starting to ache standing here talking with this jackass and my fake smile fell while I stared at the Duke not masking my loathing for him.
“It is not a rumor, of that I assure you, Duke. I will hunt down any murderer like game that dare hurts my family. It was not done as a scare tactic, it was and is a fact and it is not complacency I long for but coexistence.”

The Duke stared at me quietly and appeared about to speak as I looked up at Zevran and cut the Duke off.

“Zevran, I am suddenly very bored of this crowd, will you please take me to my mate.”

He patted my hand and winked at me.

“My pleasure, little one.”

We walked away from the couple without another word. Passing through the arches that held bows of mistletoe, Zevran stopped and I looked up at him questioningly. He gazed upward drawing my gaze and then glanced at me mischievously. I held my hand up and started laughing.

“You have got to be kidding.”

“But I am not. I would be a poor man of character if I did not take this golden opportunity.”

“Oh bullshit,” sighing, I looked up at him and folded my arms, letting them rest on my stomach. “Okay, let’s get this over with.”

My reply made him laugh as his head bent towards mine. I don’t know what I expected but the chaste kiss he gave me was not it and I stared at him slightly surprised.

“I am many things my dear, foolish is not one of them. I am well aware of what your mate is capable of.”

I started laughing and took his arm as we continued towards the rotunda.

“Sexy and smart—no wonder the women trip over themselves around you.”

His laughter was full and deep as we started up the stairs leading to the main hall.

“The Duke said he was sent by the Empress.”

When we got to the landing, Zevran took my hand and wrapped it around his arm again before we crossed the main hall.

“He said that he and his daughter were to escort the Empress’ mage back to the Winter Palace.”

Zevran smiled and glanced down at me winking.

“She was no more his daughter than you and I are cousins.”

I chuckled in agreement.

“Then you believe as I do, that he is lying. The question is why, and for who?”

“That my dear, you will leave up to me to find out.”

Zevran opened the door to the rotunda and we walked in while I digested his words. Solas glanced up from a book he had laying open on his desk and stood as we approached. I tilted my head up and tapped my lips with my fingertip while looking at him making him smile.
“I believe greetings are in order.”

I smiled as Solas swiftly bent and pressed a delicious kiss to my lips that made my toes curl.

“Yes, greetings are in order if you are passing out kisses.”

Zevran’s joke made Solas chuckle as he pulled away and took my hand, lacing our fingers together.

“Perhaps I could find you someone else for you to greet instead.”

Zevran’s smile was quick as he shook a finger at us.

“I like the way you think.” He laughed and then glanced at him with a glint of seriousness in his honey colored eyes. “She should stay with you the rest of the day and not mingle with those in the dining hall without an escort.”

Solas held his gaze and I could feel the alarm rising in him through our shared bond.

“Is there something I should be aware of?”

Zevran stepped closer and all appearances of the carefree playboy were gone from his expression. His eyes were those of a trained assassin who was born in battle and his voice pitched lower so as not to be heard.

“As we know the walls have ears, but you must know that we encountered a Duke and his daughter who I believe are not who they say they are. I will need time to acquire information on why they have really come to Skyhold.”

Solas only gave him a sharp nod of understanding as Zevran backed away and left the rotunda. I watched him go and felt Solas’ hands take my chin and tilt it towards him. Looking at him, his eyes were serious, and I wanted to groan as I knew that the leash that kept me tethered to Skyhold was about to shorten… substantially.

“Vhenan, do not look so unhappy. Perhaps you will not find it so difficult having your mate at your side during all the festivities.”

His eyes held mine and I felt like a horrible, selfish mate for wanting more freedom when he only wanted to keep me and bean safe. I reached up and touched his face tenderly.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to be so difficult, Solas. I am struggling with all the changes and having you at my side as my shadow will be a pleasant change from having them follow me from a distance.”

His hand rested on the side of my stomach and bean kicked, letting him know it was aware of him. His smile with the feeling was breathtaking and he pressed a kiss to my lips with his joy before kneeling and talking directly to my stomach.

“I agree with you little one. We must make sure you mamae eats some of the tiny cakes I saw earlier.”

I raised my eyebrow at him knowing that it was him that wanted the cakes more than the baby and gave him a knowing look.

“Oh, so our child is telling you that it has a sweet tooth like its father now?”

Solas stood back up chuckling and kissed my forehead.
“Our child tells me many things when you are sleeping.”

I laughed and shook my head at him as he took my hand and led me from the rotunda for the dining hall.

***

I walked down the corridor leading to the meeting room with Solas. It was different but really nice having him go everywhere with me. I thought it might be difficult at first but having him with me all the time brought me a comfort I didn’t know about. His overprotective nature didn’t seem so oppressive now. He opened the door to the war room and followed me in. Glancing around, I noticed that Zevran was joining our meeting this morning as well. As the door closed, I looked at Leliana to begin.

“Our instincts about the Duke and his daughter were correct. Zevran was able to get information from the Marquess. She is not the Duke's daughter, but his sister and they were hired by Vivienne, not the Empress.”

I sighed with this new information as Leliana continued.

“It appears that she was not pleased when she was released from her position and replaced with an elven mage. Upon her release from the Empress’ court, she swore vengeance against you.”

I laughed and gazed at her.

“Her anger with what happened does not surprise me, in fact, that is what I was hoping for. Kind of like the cherry on top of a large cake. The fact that she sent these two idiots into the lion’s den was a desperate act on her part and a foolish one. I was willing to allow her to live, I am no longer inclined to do so.”

Leliana held my gaze understandingly until Zevran spoke drawing our eyes to him.

“Little one, you understand that they were sent to kill you, yes?”

The bond between Solas and I hummed with his anger and my own.

“Perfectly.”

The vibration of my voice caused Cullen to slightly flinch and I felt Solas’ fingers tighten around mine and I took a calming breath, looking at Cullen apologetically. He gave me a reassuring smile and I looked at Leliana again.

“Well, as my Spymaster, what would you suggest we do with the two fools?”

Leliana’s expression did not change as she answered, making Josephine gasp.

“We detain them and question them for whatever information they have on Vivienne.”

“You mean to torture them,” Josephine replied with an accusing tone full of disapproval.

“What would you have her do? Allow them to move freely through the castle and wait for them to attack her?” Cullen spat out angrily.

I glanced between them waiting to hear her thoughts on the option. Josephine was a pain in the ass sometimes, but Gods love her, she was not an idiot and she sometimes had some really good ideas.
“Of course not, don’t be absurd,” Josephine replied angrily. “I am suggesting a more… delicate approach is all.”

Cullen didn’t look convinced and I ignored him as I held Josephine’s gaze.

“Go on Josephine, what do you suggest?”

Josephine ran her hand down the front of her skirt, straightening the already straight line before she spoke.

“I would suggest we use potions to get the information we need. After we have everything they know, then I propose we use a mage to remove the memory for their original reason for being in Skyhold. Put them under a sleeping spell and transport them out of Skyhold where they will wake with no memory of what happened here and a new command.”

Everyone was silent as we digested the idea and it was Solas who broke the silence.

“That is a brilliant plan, Lady Josephine. Depending on the information that we can obtain from them will depend on the orders we give them.”

Josephine blushed prettily with the praise as Cullen questioned the idea.

“It sounds brilliant, but is there even a mage that can do what you suggest?”

I glanced at Cullen and gestured towards Solas.

“You are looking at the mage who can make you think you’re a puppy if you would like a demonstration.”

Zevran chuckled as Cullen looked uncomfortable with Solas’ cool gaze.

“That will not be necessary.”

I looked from Cullen back to Leliana.

“Then make it happen and keep this quiet. We don’t need people talking about a missing Duke and his daughter from Skyhold.”

***

Solas stared at the two prisoners tied to the wooden chairs. Leliana had removed their masks as she questioned them. He listened as they revealed they were not nobles but hired assassins from Val Royeaux. He could barely contain the rage he was feeling as the duo spilled everything they knew.

“Do you know where she is now?”

Leliana’s question echoed through the dungeon as the prisoners gazed at her with glossy eyes full of a potion made from embrium and black lotus blossoms.

“Redcliff village’s tavern,” the woman answered.

Solas held Leliana’s gaze and she nodded at him. He moved quietly from his position against the wall towards the prisoners. Stopping in front of them, he reached out and placed a hand on each of them.

“Era,” he said quietly.
Both heads dropped forward as they instantly fell asleep. Solas looked at Leliana awaiting to hear her thoughts on how they should proceed. If he had his way, he would imprint in their minds to walk off the falls that were just outside the chamber.

“They would need to return to her to inform her if the job is done or not, no?” Zevran spoke while staring at the sleeping couple.

“Perhaps or send at least some form of communication if not in person.”

Solas shook his head and folded his arms behind him. He knew that Vivienne’s proximity to Skyhold was because she waited for them.

“She would not be so close by if they were not to report to her in person.”

Zevran nodded his head in agreement with him while Leliana tapped her finger on the hilt of her dagger.

“So, we return them to her. Let her believe they accomplished their goal.”

Solas listened to Leliana’s suggestion and the darker part of his nature howled angrily at the weak action. His hands clenched behind his back at his wish to dispose of the vile woman himself.

“Spymaster, might I suggest a slightly… different approach?”

Leliana nodded quickly while Solas continued.

“Sending them back to her will not accomplish anything except inviting her to try this again. I propose that we dispose of these two imbeciles here and then dispose of Vivienne once and for all?”

His suggestion did not surprise anyone in the room and he was grateful for it.

“And who would you entrust with such a contract, Solas?”

“Cole,” he replied without hesitation.

Zevran looked at him unsure of who he spoke of as he listened to Solas’ explanation.

“She will never know he is there until it is too late.”

“Who is this Cole?” Zevran asked.

“He is a spirit of Compassion who took a human form,” Leliana replied.

“Andraste’s dimpled ass, are you serious?”

“Yes, I am. You probably have met Cole and don’t remember it. He is known for doing that.”

“He has also been Fenlin’s constant shadow since we returned to Skyhold. He is the only one she can’t see unless he wants her too.”

Leliana gave him an approving smile.

“Oh, that was very clever of you.”

Solas only gave her a small bow of his head as Cole suddenly appeared in the room and Zevran jerked back in surprise.
"What the..."

“I want to,” he said standing next to Solas. “Twisted, angry, red with rage—she cannot do this to me—I will not return to nothing—she will die first.”

Solas listened while Zevran was still staring at Cole cautiously.

“If it is your wish, Cole.”

Cole’s watery blue eyes finally looked at him and something about the spirit was almost human and he knew it would be Fenlin’s influence that had caused the subtle changes in him.

“I want to protect her and bean, she would do it for me.”

Solas nodded his head in agreement. Cole was correct. Fenlin would do anything to keep him protected and safe because she feared that what happened to Wisdom, could happen to him. Cole quickly disappeared startling Zevran again and Leliana laughed, patting his shoulder.

“That is a bit unnerving,” he whispered.

“You get used to it,” she replied.

The three of them turned back to the sleeping prisoners and Zevran gestured towards them.

“How shall we dispose of them then?”

Solas felt the part of him that he preferred to keep under control rise to the surface quickly and his eyes quietly swirled with quicksilver with the banked magic.

“The Falls.”

Zevran chuckled and shook his head. Solas firmly controlled the Dread Wolf and his eyes returned to normal before Zevran looked at him.

“Just promise me you will let me know when I make you angry because I am not a good swimmer.”

Solas slightly smirked at him and turned his focus on the duo tied to chairs.

“Shall we get this over with then?”

Chapter End Notes

Era - sleep
Ma lath - my love
Vhenan - my heart
Thank you, everyone, for your comments and your continued reading of my little drabble. You make writing this story so much fun.

“Flirting with madness was one thing; when madness started flirting back, it was time to call the whole thing off.”
— Rohinton Mistry, A Fine Balance

Andruil paced the floor her eyes looking suspiciously around the room unsure if what she had just heard was real. Lately, she heard voices or whispers in her ear and found herself becoming confused between what is real and what is not, she only hoped this was not one of those moments. She was so tired of the voices telling her one thing and then realizing that it was an untruth. She looked at Imshael crossly, her yellow eyes piercing him where he stood.

He smiled internally with glee when he saw the vein throbbing her forehead. There is a reddening madness encroaching around the irises of her yellow eyes. She is changing, just like the red Templars, I helped change in Emprise De’Lion. Imshael was pleased to see that their plan was moving along very nicely, and it would only take one more, gentle nudge for the ancient to finally succumb to her insanity.

“Repeat that again,” she snarled.

Imshael did not flinch from the angry vibration of her voice that filled the air of the chamber. She is not as powerful as the wolf’s mate. She required more and more lyrium to sustain any magical ability she had, and he knew if he desired, he could end her with little exertion.

“She is with child,” he repeated again.

Andruil’s fingers crackled with lightning and she threw a bolt into the wall next to Imshael’s head. His lack of flinching only infuriated her further. Why does he not fear me? Why does no one fear me? What kind of world is this that the people have forsaken their Gods?

“Impossible! There is no way he would breed with her. She is a slave, beneath him.”

Imshael let her rant, keeping his eyes steady on her movements and between a blink and a breath, Andruil had him by the throat and pressed against the wall. The huntress had grown irrational with her belief that the Dread Wolf loved her, and he was going to continue to use it against the ancient to ensure his plans came to fruition. The mere fact that Andruil believed the wolf’s mate was still a sentinel and bound to her mother only made the victory sweeter. She will be very surprised when she finds out that her dear mother has released her and ascended her.

“I will kill you—if you are lying.”

He heard the uneven sound of her voice. His blood raced with excitement hearing the sound of her insecurity even as it shook with her anger. He gazed at her out of black, emotionless eyes without
concern for his own wellbeing. Just a little bit more and she would be his own personal puppet.

“I am not lying, my Queen.”

Andruil appeared to be ill with this information and dropped Imshael like her hand was suddenly on fire and walked away from him. It can’t be true… he loves only me. Our forced separation was only because of my mother and father’s scheming. Tapping her fingers against her waist as she paced, she was trying very hard to not scream with this betrayal.

“He must be under some type of spell… that is the only… he would never…” her disconnected mutterings echoed through the chamber as she paced like a cornered, rabid animal.

Imshael continued to watch silently as Andruil’s pacing showed her instability. His sister had been correct when she had foretold that the information of Assan’s pregnancy would drive her insane and by her agitated pacing, it would appear she was indeed correct. He knew that if she tried to find a way into the castle now, the Dread Wolf would indeed kill her without hesitation and with little effort. Andruil was in no state nor a match for his abilities and his spies had informed him that the castle was well fortified with only one-way in. The Dread Wolf was taking every precaution with his expecting mate. Andruil finally stopped pacing and stared at the wall for a long time, neither of them speaking. Silence reigned in the large room and finally, Andruil turned and looked at him. Her eyes were feverish with her madness, her face was streaked with tears.

“Get me into that castle. I cannot allow that slave to deliver some kind of abomination to our kind. If he were of his right mind, he would never have allowed it to happen.”

Imshael bowed before turning to leave. Upon opening the door, Andruil’s voice lashed out as harsh as a cracking whip of lightning.

“And… do… not… fail… me.”

Imshael stopped and bowed again towards her.

“You wish is my command, my Queen,” he replied. Walking through the door and closing it behind him, Imshael wore a smirk on his handsome face. “Foolish cow,” he muttered, moving down the corridor.

He made his way through the corridors of the castle that was hidden deep in the Arbor Wilds. The walls were overgrown with vines and leaves littered the floor. More than one room was without a roof as age had worn out parts of the keep. Leaving the main keep for the courtyard below, the darkened forest surrounded the castle. Sounds of owls just waking, greeted him as he moved down the stone steps. The sun was setting, and twilight was encroaching on the land. He shifted into his raven form as he sent out the silent call to his brother’s and sister to meet in the forest. He would need to explain to them what Andruil demanded of him now. He would need all of them and their combined magic to get Andruil into that castle and finally be rid of her.
I made my way down the steps as quietly as I could. At the first landing, I could hear the murmurs of conversation as I tried avoiding the dining hall. There were too many nobles—way too many nobles for me to be comfortable with. Even with Solas escorting me about most times, the nobles did not want to acknowledge him. It was as if they refused to see that the so-called Herald of Andraste was a mated elf. One Marquess had even intimated that my pregnancy was by the Maker. It had taken a few minutes to get my laughing under control after hearing that rubbish.

It was very exasperating though that every time I came down here to get something to eat, nobles approached from every angle, boxing me in. Most of them overly curious about why I chose to send elves after Duke Antoine instead of beheading him or imprisoning him. After hearing the same questions over and over again, I got tired of answering with, ‘it was the right thing to do for the elven people.’

I softly laughed as I remember the noble woman’s expression as I answered her question about the hunt. Josephine had given me a warning look when I sighed heavily with annoyance. I knew what Josephine wanted, I was just unable to give it to her because my patience with the nobles was gone. Smiling kindly at her, I had simply replied to the noblewoman, ‘because he was a fucking prick and deserved it.’ The woman looked to about faint, fanning her face hastily and Josephine choked on her wine as I walked away from them.

“When did everyone start to think I was a professional ass kisser,” I muttered.

Bean began moving around vigorously, and I sighed, pressing my hand to my malformed side as I continued down the steps. Some days I felt like a jungle gym and my ribs hurt from our child’s acrobatics. I stopped and leaned against the wall, taking another breath as bean leaned on my bladder and I silently prayed that I would make it to a restroom.

“Bean… you got to get off mommies’ bladder and quit kicking her kidney’s you’re not helping matters any here.”

The movement slowed, and bean stopped leaning on my bladder like I owed the kid lunch money and I sighed with relief.

“Thank you.”

I continued down the steps with a more hurried pace and found the small chamber the serving staff used and relieved myself before continuing on to the kitchen. The narrow corridors for the staff to come and go unseen were really coming in handy and I knew Josephine would not approve of me avoiding all her guests. I snorted as I peeked into the large dining hall, looking at all the overdressed, self-important people gathered in the room. *I never promised I would hang out with all those ass kissing monkeys, sorry Josephine.*

Pushing the door open that led into the kitchen, Francois greeted me with only a grunt. He was frowning at his stove as I approached. As I stopped next to him, he picked up a muffin from a basket and handed it to me. I took the muffin and smiled at him.

“Am I that transparent?”

He stopped frowning and smiled at me.

“Yes, ma petite, you are. This is all you come in here for.”

I laughed, tearing off another piece of my muffin and popping it into my mouth. Chewing carefully
and enjoying the burst of raspberry in my mouth, I patted him on the shoulder.

“That is absolutely not true. I also come in here for your witty conversation.”

Francois was laughing as I passed and pressed a fatherly kiss to my forehead, handing me another muffin before I could snatch it from the basket. I laughed and took the second muffin as I finished with the first one. Walking towards Raina, she was busily standing at a counter stirring. The table was piled high with cakes and pies and just the smells from this area alone would send anyone into a diabetic coma.

“Raina”

She turned towards me never stopping her stirring.

“Hi Fenlin, you look well.”

“And you look busy,” I replied.

“Of course, I am busy. It is Satinalia. There are so many things still to be done, so much to make and prepare. So many people to feed.”

In some ways all the bustle of activity, the smells in the room, it all reminded me of how normal families probably prepared for holidays. I only remembered caterers and servants hustling through my house as I grew up. I never grew up with the smell of baking bread or pies. I don’t think my mother even knew what a damn cooking pan was. Watching Raina now, it made me realize just how hard she had been working since arriving in Skyhold.

“Maybe after the holiday is over, you might want to take some time off and go visit your family in Val Royeaux. You need a break after all the hard work you have put in since coming here and I am sure they would love to see you.”

Raina’s eyes darted towards me and then away just as quickly. Her arm almost seemed to be stirring faster.

“I—I don’t think that is necessary. I am quite happy where I am.”

“Well, of course, it’s not necessary but I am sure they miss you terribly.”

Raina’s eyes glanced at me again and I noticed the expression of unhappiness that had taken over her lovely features.

“Is there something wrong Raina?”

“No, not at all. Everything is fine.”

Her quick answer sounded so fake and I stepped closer to lay my hand on her arm, stopping her stirring motion.

“Raina”

She set the bowl down and pressed her hands to the counter.

“It’s that—well it’s like—do you remember what we discussed last time?”

I nodded remembering it was about her liking Cullen.
“Well, I took your advice.”

“Okay, and I’m missing something here aren’t I.”

I watched Raina’s fingers move through the floury surface of the counter nervously.

“Don’t misunderstand… Cullen is wonderful. It is that I told my family about him and they will not welcome me when I return because of this choice.”

I stared at her for a moment trying to comprehend the confusing conversation. *Wait…* my eyes darted to hers as I started to understand what she meant.

“Your family is not happy with you because of you and Cullen, do I have this right?”

She only nodded her head and looked miserable. I took Raina by the shoulders and turned her towards me.

“Then introduce Cullen to your family and let them meet him.”

Her lavender eyes widened with the simple solution and she shook her head quickly.

“Oh, I don’t know if that is such a good idea Fenlin. They are very angry with my decision to see Cullen.”

“That is because the only examples they have are the humans in Val Royeaux. Your family sees that human’s that date elves are only after one thing and it is up to you to show your family that Cullen is not anything like them.”

We stared at each other in silence for a long moment.

“But it’s not like that… we… I…” Raina’s face turned bright red.

I laughed and shook my head.

“It’s okay Raina, I get it and believe me when I tell you, I do not need to know any more than that.” Raina smiled at me shyly as I continued. “But if you introduce Cullen to your family, I know they will quickly see that he isn’t just interested in you for your womanly assets.”

Raina nodded her head and appeared to be squaring her shoulders readying herself.

“You are right. My sisters are married to good elven men and have families of their own now. They have given my parents grandchildren and made them proud. For a long time, my parents introduced me to every single, elven man expecting me to get married like my sisters and have children. I just didn’t like any of them, they were not what I wanted and then I met Cullen. Everything about him, I found interesting and beautiful.”

She sighed, and I could see that there was something she wanted to say.

“Our people will never approve of our union or any children we might have.”

An unladylike snort escaped me, and I gestured with my hands.

“Who cares what everyone else thinks! Solas could have been a human, dwarf, Qunari and I wouldn’t have cared. Our love didn’t grow because he is an elf. Hell, I could have easily fallen in love with Varric for that matter.”
Raina stared at me and a small giggle escaped her.

“Don’t be fooled by him, he is very charming when he wants to be. Although, I think Cassandra might have knocked me the hell out if I had even glanced at him like that.”

We both laughed, and I took her hands in mine and squeezed, giving her my support.

“I believe to the marrow of my bones that once your parents meet Cullen, they won’t judge him by the shape of his ears but by the size of his heart. I met your parents and I would never believe them to be bigoted. I would believe them to be only cautious. They only want what is best for you. Prove to them that he is worthy of you.”

“You are right, I love Cullen and I know that if my family could just see how good he is, they would love him too.”

I clapped my hands together excitedly.

“Good, you will take him with you then.”

Raina looked at me a little anxiously.

“I would like to, but won’t he be needed here?”

“Stop worrying about all that. I know we can function without him for a few weeks. Currently, with me pregnant, I can’t leave the castle until the baby is born. That means that Cullen is not as busy as he would be if I and my team were out in the field.”

Raina bit her lip nervously and finally shook her head.

“He will never agree to leave with me. He takes his responsibilities to the Inquisition very seriously.”

I wave her objections away dismissively and wink at her.

“You leave that part to me.”

Raina shook her head at me, her lavender eyes narrowing.

“Oh, no… you have that look, Fenlin.”

I gaze at her innocently with a large smile.

“What look?”

Raina pointed at my face.

“That look—right there. That look that tells me, Cullen is going to be very angry in a few minutes.”

I looked at her in surprise and shook my head.

“No, no, no, why would he be angry? Just trust me, this will work just fine.”

“Oh, Fenlin… please. Don’t do it. Whatever you’re scheming, just let it go. I can ask Cullen to accompany me some other time.”

I laugh and pat her arm.

“You worry too much, just be ready to leave a week after the holiday to visit Val Royeaux and let
me worry about getting Cullen to accompany you."

I turned towards the door that would take me to the stables and Raina’s hand dropped on my shoulder, stopping me.

“Thank you.”

I hugged her and without a word left for the stables.
Sometimes... I Like My Job

Chapter Notes

Here's to you mom, I am posting this chapter early because I will be busy this weekend. I hope everyone else enjoys the update, I know I enjoyed writing it. Have a fabulous rest of your week and weekend.

“Which is the true nightmare, the horrific dream that you have in your sleep or the dissatisfied reality that awaits you when you awake?”
— Justin Alcala

Walking through the barn doors, the smell of dry hay and animal greeted me. Some might think it really weird, but I liked the smell of the barn. I liked the smell of hay, the sounds the horses would make. I could already hear the soft chuffing coming from Inansha’s stall as I continued towards the stalls that held Siugen, Etta, and Inansha. I took some apples from the barrel we kept in the corner as I passed. Rubbing their soft faces in greeting, Master Dennett entered the barn and I smiled at him in greeting before giving them the treats.

“Girl, every time I see you, you look as if you have gotten bigger.”

I laughed and ran my hand over my swollen belly.

“Trust me, I realize it. I haven’t seen my feet in a month.”

Dennett and I shared a chuckle as Elaina came from around the corner of a stall and stood with her hands on her hips. Her expression was full of embarrassment with hearing what Dennett had just said to me.

“Father! Why would you say such a thing to her? You don’t just point out how big a woman is during this time. You tell them they look lovelier than the last time you saw them, Maker knows a woman already feels like a bloated fish when they are that far along and they don't need an insensitive old man to point it out.” Her annoyed look was clearly written across her face before she smiled at me. “I swear sometimes my husband has rocks for brains.”

I giggled at her comment and watched as Dennett looked properly chastised yet completely unrepentant and walked towards his wife and press a kiss to her cheek. Her expression immediately changing to one of adoration.

“Must not be all rocks, I married you.” I watched as Elaina slapped his shoulder playfully and Dennett winked at her.

They are such a lovely couple. After making sure the Harts and Etta were properly spoiled, I smiled at the two and waved my good bye to them before making my way towards the steps that would take me to Cullen’s office. I knew my idea would work and I briskly knocked on Cullen’s door. If I knew anything about him it was that he was a knight in shining armor that all little girls dreamed about and that was what Raina needed him to be for her. The sound of his reply made its way through the thick
wooden door and I pulled it open. He looked up with surprise and stood quickly.

“Fenlin, what are you doing in here?”

I was a little taken aback by his greeting and stopped in the doorway.

“What do you mean, what am I doing in here? Am I not allowed to come here now?”

Cullen rubbed his neck and looked around his table sheepishly.

“No, no, of course not. It’s just that you usually come to my office when you are preparing to leave.”

I understood now why he was so uncomfortable. He must think I am going to tell him I am going somewhere. Please… as if Solas would let me. He would tie me to the bed first… on second thought that’s not such a bad idea. My mind began to wonder, and I mentally slapped myself. Mythal’s mercy! This kid is turning my brains to mush. Focus!

“Actually, I am here to discuss with you where you are going.”

Cullen immediately stopped rubbing his neck and stared at me.

“I am not sure I heard you correctly, could you please repeat that.”

I mentally clapped with excitement at his confused expression. His eyes were narrowed as we stared at each other like we were having a battle of wills, and I smiled at him before I sat down in the chair across from him and rubbed the side of my belly where bean was pushing.

“Cullen, please have a seat and let’s talk.”

Cullen glanced at his chair and then me.

“I don’t know if I would prefer to sit or stand while getting this information.”

I snorted and continued rubbing what I was sure was a foot pressed into my side.

“Well do what you want then, you won’t mind if I sit.”

I smiled at him and noticed he kept his gaze steadily on me as if waiting for me to attack or something.

“What did you mean when you said that I was leaving?”

I knew I was barely containing my excitement because his expression became wary.

“Come on, Cullen, have a little faith in me.”

His expression changed to one of exasperation and he sat looking at me. I smiled at him and shifted in the chair looking for a more comfortable position.

“I want you to escort Raina to Val Royeaux, so she can visit with her parents for a few weeks. She works very hard and has since she arrived. I want her to take some time off, especially after this holiday.”

I watched the slow blush form over his neck and move up and over his cheeks. His eyes held mine and I smiled at him. He is just so cute when he’s embarrassed.
“You know.”

I laughed and finally let my excitement with him and Raina’s relationship show.

“Of course, I know. I’m the one that introduced you two. I knew you wouldn’t figure it out, but she is the one I asked to make sure you would take your one day off a week that you fought me so damn hard on. I used your sweet tooth to my advantage. I knew you wouldn’t refuse any kind of delectable that Raina would bring you and it worked, perfectly. The side benefit is that you two got along a lot better than I expected.”

Cullen shook his head and softly laughed.

“I should have known. I knew you would have me watched, but I expected…”

“That’s where I outmaneuvered you, Commander, I knew what you expected and that is why I chose Raina to keep an eye on you. I believe that in your games of chess this would be called a checkmate.”

I couldn’t stop the impish grin that pulled on the corners of my mouth while Cullen leaned back in his chair and tented his fingers, looking at me curiously.

“And you want me to just drop everything and go to Val Royeaux with her to visit her parents?”

I too leaned back and held his gaze.

“I do.”

He gestured towards his desk that was littered with stacks of papers and I waved my hand at them dismissively.

“Won’t have moved one centimeter while you are gone. Trust me, the crap on my desk is still where I left it this morning.”

He glanced at me with annoyance and shook his head in refusal.

“Fenlin, I can’t just leave my responsibilities like that.”

I sighed and closed my eyes. Okay, big guy, you asked for it.

“Alright Cullen, you win. I can’t make you go. I won’t allow for Raina to travel alone so I guess I will just have to ask Bull to take her since you are too busy. I know him, and his chargers would love to get out of Skyhold for a bit. Krem even told me that Grim has a secret crush on Raina anyways… something about he really likes her pies. He might appreciate the chance to get to know her better.”

I noticed the narrowing of Cullen’s eyes and the stiffening of his features as I started to awkwardly get up and act as if I was ignoring him. I internally smiled knowing that his mind must be running at a hundred miles an hour and I made my way towards the door as he spoke up.

“Okay Fenlin, you win,” he said quickly. I stopped and turned to look at him and saw that his face was buried into his large, folded arms on his desk. “You win, I will take her myself.”

I smiled at his covered face.

“I know Raina would prefer your company that much more than Bull and his Chargers.”

Cullen lifted his head and finally looked at me.
“If someone had told me that being your friend was going to be this trying, I might have taken a longer moment to think about it.”

I laughed and walked towards him to place a quick, sisterly kiss on his cheek.

“Now where is the adventure in all that dullness.”

He gave me a wicked smile and waved me off.

“Maker's breath, you've done enough damage for one day, leave me. I have to make arrangements for my absence.”

I left his office with a huge smile on my face and made my way back towards the kitchen to tell Raina the exciting news.

Vivienne stood in a darkened room over the tavern. Her back ridged as her manicured nails tapped against her folded arms. Narrowed, slate grey eyes scanned the village anxiously for any signs of her envoys. *Those imbeciles are a week overdue.* She watched the people mill about carrying lamps in the darkened night heading to whatever hovel they lived in. Her small room over the tavern smelled like stale beer and sweat and she hated staying here but she would endure the offense if it meant that that insignificant elf got what was coming to her. She moved away from the window and sat in one of the wooden chairs the room offered.

“First the little urchin removes me from the Inquisition and then she replaces my position in the court with an elven mage… ridiculous.” She muttered sarcastically to herself. “She clearly has some information on The Empress that would humiliate her in front of the court.”

The more her mind spun the faster her nails tapped out a staccato beat on the small table beside her. She could feel the ice forming on her fingertips as her anger grew with her current situation. *That worthless knife-ear has turned everyone against me.* Vivienne's anger flew as she recalled how the Empress had cast her out of the Winter Palace like last years fashions. She slammed her fist on the table as she stood up angrily.

“How dare she try and reduce me to a lowly servant—like some commoner! I will not stand idly by and let her believe I am finished…”

She went back to the window to peer out and saw that the town was now empty.

“What could be keeping them so long?” Her impatient muttering left puffs of her breath on the glass. “I should have done it myself. I should never have trusted those two imbeciles to handle such an important matter.”

She turned briskly with the knock on her door. *Perhaps that is them.* She opened the door quickly
and found the chambermaid holding two buckets of steaming water for her nightly bath. Vivienne frowned at the mousy girl who kept her head bent.

“You are late… again.”

“Yes’em, I… I apologize… the fire was not…”

Her stuttering only annoyed her more.

“I do not care for your excuses.” She stared at the girl with a raised brow and an air of annoyance. “Well? Are you going to stand about all night and allow my water to grow cold or will you be about your duty?”

The maid kept her eyes down as she hurried into the room spilling a bit of water over the sides of her buckets and mentally flinched with the cutting tone of the woman.

“I see your incompetence knows no bounds.”

“Apologies ma’am. I will clean that up,” she replied hurriedly. Pouring the water into the tub, she used her apron to clean up the spilled water before she left. The tall woman loomed over her as she cleaned up the water, scaring her. “I have more water to fetch for your bath, my lady.”

Vivienne watched her get up from the floor.

“See that you don’t spill most of it along the way and hurry. I would like a bath that is not lukewarm.”

The maid curtsied quickly with the two buckets and left the room with all haste. Since the mage woman’s arrival a week before, Marian had endured the cruelty and harshness of the lady. She didn’t know who she was, but Miller had told her quickly it didn’t matter. The woman was paying good coin to stay here and that I wasn’t to cause any trouble, or he would throw me and my brother out. Pouring the steaming water into the buckets, she blew a tendril of hair out of her face and ignored how much her arms, legs, and back hurt as she picked up the buckets.

Returning with the last two buckets, Vivienne sighed in exasperation as the girl left a trail water through the room. She waited for the maid to dump the last bucket before walking up to her and slapping her harshly across the face.

“That is for your incompetence, now clean up that mess and get out.”

Marian held her stinging cheek and stifled her need to cry as she knelt and with shaky hands, cleaned up the small trail of water. Grabbing up the buckets she left the room and flinched when the door slammed behind her. Quietly crying, she made her way down the long hallway towards the stairs to the kitchen to put the buckets away. She couldn’t help feeling sorry for herself for just this small moment. *Why did they have to die? Taking care of Tommy is so hard. I wished they would have let the Templars just kill me.*

Wiping away the last of her tears with the back of her arm, she noticed a man stood in the middle of the stairwell looking up at her, blocking her path. His large hat shadowed most of his face, but she could see that his blue eyes were the color of a bright sunny sky and his wheat blonde hair hid most of his features. His clothing was well made, indicating that he was of means and he was softly smiling at her.

She realized that she had been staring at him and immediately ducked her head, casting her eyes towards the floor.
“My apologies my lord.”

Cole listened to the woman’s thoughts as they whirled in a jumbled ball of hurt.

“It is not your fault,” he finally said after a long silence.

She looked at him again and her own head tilted curiously as she studied him. There was something different about him… a kindness she had never seen before in any noble.

“Beg your pardon?”

Cole moved closer to her and stared into her eyes while he brought his hand up and touched her temple. His fingertips glowed a soft white as he said it again.

“It’s not your fault that your parents died during the rebellion. They wanted to keep you and your little brother safe from the Templars. You and your brother should return with me to Skyhold, they can help you, keep you safe.”

She stared at him with wide eyes for a moment not believing what she was hearing.

“You are with the Inquisition?”

“Yes”

“You would take us both there?” She couldn’t believe what was happening. Something about him made her feel safe… like she could trust him to not harm her.

“Yes”

She held his gaze for a moment longer before making her decision to believe him.

“I will gather my brother and our things. We will meet you outside in an hour.” Marian moved to walk around him and stopped, placing her small hand on his arm. “I didn’t ask your name.”

He stared at her quietly before answering her.

“Cole”

“Marian,” she replied smiling at him before walking around him.

Cole nodded and watched her move around him with hurried steps. As soon as she was no longer in sight, he turned his focus back to Vivienne’s door and his blue gaze hardened.

Vivienne toweled off and rubbed oil into her skin as she always did. Her dark skin glowing in the candlelight, she went to great lengths to keep her appearance youthful. Finished with her nightly ritual, she walked towards the small armoire against the far wall and opened the cabinet. Pulling out her silken robe, she slipped it over her shoulders and tied the sash. Smoothing the front of her robe down, she closed the cabinet door and found Cole standing behind it.

“What are you…”

She stood in shock as the demon stared coldly into her eyes and speared both of his rabbit handled daggers into her chest.
“You will not hurt them anymore,” he said holding her gaze.

Vivienne let out a choked cry as Cole twisted the daggers before ripping them from her chest. Her hands went to her chest as she fell, her gaze on the demon as she spat up blood onto the wooden floor. *This can't be happening... how did she know?... this wasn't ever part of the plan.* He stood over her, his daggers dripping with her blood and she couldn’t stop the blood that poured from her chest as a deep coldness settled in her.

“I knew you were a demon,” she spat.

Cole followed the path of blood trickling down her chin before looking at her with a detached coolness to his expression. He knelt down and held her angry gaze as he answered her with a menacing tone.

“For you, I am today.”

Vivienne’s body shivered uncomfortably as darkness rushed her and she slumped to the side, her mouth twisted with a snarl and her eyes wide open, staring at nothing. A grey haze had fallen over her gaze, signaling that she was finally dead. Cole picked up the edge of her robe and cleaned off his blades before putting them away and stood up. He glanced at her dead body feeling a sense of relief that she could no longer hurt anyone again and left the room, closing the door silently behind him.

Solas helped me from the bath and wrapped a large towel around me, pressing a small kiss to my nose. I watched him dry off and smiled when he wrapped the towel around his narrow waist. I walked past him into the bedroom and opened up our armoire to pull out a gown for the final night of Satinalia. The presents we had bought or made, had already been carried down for the gift exchange. I picked up my little vial of oil and Solas took it from me as was his new habit and began oiling my stomach, paying particular attention to the spots he knew itched.

He had a soft smile on his face as bean kicked his hand when he looked at me.

“Do you regret not knowing the sex of our child?”

I shook my head and smiled at him.

“Our child was a surprise, to begin with, so not knowing if it is a boy or a girl should be the next logical decision.”

He softly laughed with my answer and continued to rub oil over my stretched skin. I felt bean calm its acrobatics as Solas caressed our child with his magic.

“Is there one you would prefer over the other?”

His tone was curious, and I laughed.
“I don’t know… I don’t think so. I just want whatever it is to be healthy. You know… ten fingers and toes, all of its limbs.”

My reply made him laugh. Watching him wipe his hands on his towel, his question made me wonder if he would prefer one over the other.

“What about you?”

He turned to look at me as he pulled out a pair of breeches.

“What about me?”

I rolled my eyes at him and asked the same question.

“Is there one that you would prefer over the other?”

I slipped on my smalls and saw that he was taking his time to answer. I pulled my gown over my head and he stepped closer to me to help tie up the back. Moving my hair out of his way, he pressed a kiss to the nape of my neck sending delicious shivers over my skin.

“I do not prefer one over the other. Our child is a gift that I will treasure regardless of its orientation.”

I glanced back at him smiling. Running my fingers over his cheek, he bent and pressed a gentle kiss to my lips.

“I love you.”

He kissed me again quickly before swatting my ass.

“Come, we must get ready for this evening festivities before Lady Josephine knocks upon our door.”
Let the Festivities Commence

Chapter Notes

Happy Sunday! I hope you enjoy the update and thank you, everyone, again for sticking with my story. Your comments and support have really driven me to continue my little drabble.
Thank you!

Italics in quotations are conversations in elven.

“'The gods of the old world have stood aside, obeyed the ancient laws giving free will to men, and now when our realm and yours hang in the balance, we are still bound by our covenants. The laws are clear: we can act only through man. And in all the world, there are only two strong enough to defeat them. One born for it, the other through great sacrifice.'”
~ The Morrigan

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Skyhold had finally reached the final day of Satinalia. Solas held the door for me as I stepped through and glanced towards the ceiling of the main hall. Soft mage lights danced through the air and the smell of pine and lavender, different types of roasted meats and baked pies filled my senses. Josephine made sure that all the archways over each of the doors were decorated with large pine boughs. The same type of pine boughs decorated the walls with large, colorful ribbons laced through them.

Servants, maids, kitchen staff; all the people that made this castle run so smoothly filled the room. Tonight’s celebration was for Skyhold’s staff only. The nobles that were staying in Skyhold for the season had celebrated their Satinalia festival last night. Soldiers were guarding the entrance from the garden area where the rooms for nobility and guests were. This night was only for those that worked so hard all week to keep the nobles fed and happy. Tonight, my people would finally get a chance to relax.

We walked beneath the first of the pine-dressed archways and Solas stopped us under the first red and silver bow of mistletoe to kiss me. His hand in the small of my back pulled me closer to him and the gentle press of his lips against mine sent tiny shivers through me. Laying my hand against his chest, the soft hum of pleasure traveled through our shared bond. He nibbled on my lower lip and my eyes slowly opened to stare into his blue eyes holding mine for a silent moment before he winked at me and pulled me from under the archway before others got any ideas like last year. I giggled, glancing up at him while he continued to lead us towards our table.

“Not sharing this year?”

I still remember how he had done absolutely nothing about last year’s impromptu kissing booth. He glanced down at me smiling before pulling out my chair.
“No, I am not.”

I laughed as I took my seat and glanced around the room at everyone as he sat next to me. I like how everyone moved around, mingling with each other. Listening to the laughter, the smattering of conversations I heard filling the room, seeing everyone’s huge smiles as they allowed themselves one night to just relax made me feel good. My gaze fell to where Rayna sat next to Cullen and my romantic soul sighed happily at their shared looks of adoration.

Continuing my survey of the room, I saw my crazy crew set in different sets of groups, drinking and laughing. Cassandra sat beside Varric with Hawke and Fenris across from them. Fenris had his arm around the back of Hawkes chair and his fingers twirled a lock of her chestnut hair absently as he spoke with Cassandra. It was nice to see him relaxed with a small smirk on his lips instead of his normal impassive scowl.

My gaze moved on to behind them to the next table where Sera sat with Bull and Dorian. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, and her grand hand gestures told me that she was well on her way to getting soused. Bull was laughing about something Sera was saying while Dorian seemed to be shaking his head at the two of them. I watched Bull throw his arm around Dorian’s shoulders and pull him closer and the smile on Dorian’s face was beautiful. They may be an odd pairing, but their love was beautiful.

At the table directly behind them were the Chargers. I noticed Krem talking with a woman that seemed to have eyes for only him. Isn’t that Maryden, the lute player from the tavern? Oh, that is nice. She laughed at something he said and laid her hand on his arm. The gesture was sweet and Krem’s face turned red making me softly giggle with his predicament. If anyone would get Krem, she probably would.

I continued to scan the room one more time, looking for Cole and not finding him anywhere. That’s odd… he loves this part of the celebration where he can hear everyone’s thoughts and emotions. Before I could question Solas about it, Josephine chose that moment to bring the crown, the scepter and the golden sash forward for our chosen ruler for the night. He will show up sooner or later, I thought as I focused on the task at hand. Finally! For all the pranks she has played, I will have played the ultimate prank on the prankster.

“I have everything for the coronation of our crowned leader for the festival.”

We shared a sly smile as I stood up and walked to the dais to begin gathering everyone’s attention. I stopped in front of the large, absolutely gaudy looking throne that was created for this day. I studied the monstrosity and covered my mouth as I looked it over. “Wow, you really got into the spirit of the season. You might have outdone yourself this time Josephine,” I whispered. The chair was built more for an Avaar sized man because it was huge, and I could just picture how Sera would look sitting in it. I knew her legs would dangle over the edge like a small child sitting in it and I giggled. The enormous armrests were covered in the tackiest golden brocade along with the back and seat. Baubles of junk decorated the throne. Orlesian masks painted to resemble empty-eyed, clown masks. Glass beads strung on a thread with different colors of Rocks and wood decorated the chair as well. The whole thing was absolutely repulsive.

“It’s perfect,” I whispered to Josephine who nodded in agreement.

“It was my extreme pleasure,” she replied with a small giggle.

I turned away from the ugly chair and let out a loud whistle that gathered everyone’s attention. I waited for the chatter to finally die down as all eyes turned towards me and I gave everyone a cheerful smile before I began.
"As my Ambassador informed me that where she is from in Antiva, Satinalia is a largely celebrated festival throughout the country. Wild parties with huge feasts that last for seven days and on the seventh day of the festival, there is a gift exchange with those we care the most about. She also described to me that it was customary to elect a ruler for the final day's festivities, allowing the current ruler a chance to relax for the night and that sounded really nice."

I noticed Zevran grinning and shaking his head at me with my deceptive wording of the tradition. He bent his head and whispered something into Leliana's ear and her mouth rose with a large smile and glanced at me with a raised eyebrow as I continued.

"There is only one person that I could think of that could rule for this evening’s festivities. This person all but guarantees that we will indeed have a good time tonight, and that I can relax."

I took the crown from Josephine and walked towards Sera where she sat with Bull and Dorian. She had worn a large smile as I spoke but her blue eyes grew wider as I got closer. Stopping in front of her, I was giving her a cheeky smile that I couldn’t stop.

"Sera, for tonight’s festivities I have chosen you to be the ruler over our party."

Sera shook her head at me and waved her hands.

"You ‘aven a go, ya? I ain’t no ruler."

I shook my head and placed the crown on her head.

"Nope, not having a go with you. I choose you to be our queen for the night," I said clearly and bowed towards her.

"Oye… you’ve cracked! All this baby shite has gone to your head. Stop that!" She squealed when I bowed. "All of you, stop it!"

Others took my lead and bowed towards her and I saw the red of embarrassment spreading over her cheeks. I gestured towards the dais where her throne awaited, and Sera continued to protest loudly.

"No Fennie… no. You know I don’t much care for all that nobility mess. I’m a Red Jennie—remember?" she said desperately. I grabbed her hand and half dragged her towards the ugly throne.

I took the golden sash from Josephine and lifted it over Sera’s head to drape diagonally over her shoulders. Everyone was clapping and cheering as Sera bit on her lower lip nervously and stared at the huge, dreadful looking throne.

"If this is because I changed your sugar for salt last week, I promise I won’t prank you or Solas again. I swear it."

I shook my head with her pleading tone as I remembered my ruined coffee and placed the scepter into her hand and smiled at her.

"Take a seat on your throne, my lady, you have a job to do tonight. Now smile and hold court so I can dance with my mate."

Sera groaned loudly as I turned away from her to go back to my table. When I sat down, Solas bent his head to whisper in my ear.

"My recollection of the Antivan tradition it was the town fool that was elected for this position."
I smiled at him wickedly and winked.

“Do you think I should have chosen someone else instead?”

He chuckled and pressed a brief kiss to my forehead.

“No vhenan, no, I do not. But after tonight, we will need to be vigilant or we will find all my books glued together and you will find your ink swapped with blackened colored honey.”

I snorted and glanced back towards Sera and saw Josephine placing a small table next to her while someone brought food and drink for her. Her face was bright red with embarrassment when the kitchen maid bowed towards her before leaving. I giggled as Josephine began to tell Sera her responsibilities for the evening and the look on Sera’s face as Josephine bowed towards her before leaving, calling her ‘my lady’, had me laughing. Sera glared at me when she heard my laughter and I gave her a cheeky smile and toasted her with my water glass.

“Oh, there is no doubt about it, love, she will definitely seek some payback for this.”

The music began and Solas stood, bowing while he held his hand out to me and I blushed at him as I took it.

“You know I am not a good dancer.”

He pressed a kiss to the back of my hand and looked up at me from his bowed position over my hand.

“I disagree vhenan, you dance beautifully with me.”

“Yes, well that was before I became a whale,” I replied.

He laughed while helping me up and led us to the middle of the floor. Pulling me into his arms, he moved us around the floor with the music. I felt so awkward with my belly between us. Glancing up, his face wore a gentle smile as he moved us around the floor and I forgot that we were dancing like I did the last time. Staring into his eyes, it was as if time stood still. When the song came to an end, we were near another archway that held the mistletoe-like herb and he moved us beneath it, so he could press another kiss to my lips. Those around us that watched, started clapping and I knew my face grew red with the attention.

We made our way back to the table because it was time to exchange our gifts. Just as I had last year, I had drawn pictures for those closest to me. I enjoyed Bull’s expression when he opened up his gift to find that his picture had all the Charger’s and Dorian all done in a cartoon. He laughed as he showed his picture to the guys and everyone chuckled at how I had seated Dorian on one of Bull’s big shoulders, holding a ball of flame in one hand while Bull flexed his arms showing off his muscles.

Hawke opened hers next and it surprised me when she looked at me with tears in her eyes. It was a portrait of her and Fenris from our last trip. I had captured the tender way he looked at her sometimes when he thought no one was looking. I hadn’t thought that it might make her cry, but now I am really glad I drew that one for her.

I was curious to see Fenris’ reaction to his own picture. When he looked down at the picture he held and then glanced up at me with a small, pleased smile, it was worth it. I knew he would appreciate the picture because it was a drawing from when he had first come to Skyhold. He was looking for Hawke and I led him to her room and the picture was when the two had stood staring at each other in the open hallway.
I looked around the hall and still hadn’t seen Cole and I leaned towards Solas to ask him.

“Have you seen Cole tonight?”

Solas looked at me and shook his head as he answered me.

“He has not returned yet.”

My voice held surprise as I continued questioning him.

“Returned from where? What do you mean? When did he leave?”

Solas held my gaze and I had a feeling I might not like where this conversation was going.

“I shall explain everything when we are alone, vhenan.”

I nodded and felt a small ball of unease settle in my chest.

Our night was ending, and I had covered more than one yawn before Solas walked towards Josephine. I watched her direct one of the soldiers to gather Solas and mine’s gifts since there were more than we could carry ourselves. I yawned again and Solas took my hand and helped me stand. The napkin I had laid in my lap fell to the floor and I bent to pick it up and heard a solid thunk of something hitting my chair behind me. Solas’ barrier went over us swiftly and with surprise, I turned my head to look at my chair. There was an arrow embedded in the top of my chair where I had just been sitting. My mind seemed to struggle with what had just happened as the room broke into pandemonium. Sera jumped from the chair, running for the door just as Bull, Cullen, and Dorian were already outside.

“Stay down,” Solas growled.

I watched him leap over the table with one graceful movement and fade step towards the keeps doors that were standing open. With shaky hands, I quickly placed the barrier around bean as I still tried to process what had just happened. Zevran knelt beside me and spoke calmly into my ear.

“Come with me and Leliana, kitten.”

I nodded and took his hand up. Casting a barrier around us, I followed after Zevran as he walked in front of me holding his daggers while Leliana guarded my back holding her own knives. He opened the door to the Rotunda and continued to lead us up the staircase towards the rookery where there was only one way in or out. We walked in complete silence up the circular staircase. When we reached the rookery, he took me to Leliana’s chair and pulled it out for me to sit on. After I sat, he went to stand at the top of the stairs while I continued to process.

Someone just tried to assassinate me… I sat silently as the thought ran on a loop through my brain. Absently, I ran my hand over my stomach, checking the barrier around bean for comfort. Everything had happened so fast, my brain just can’t seem to process it.

The sounds of yelling broke through my mental mantra from the rotunda and I heard Solas calling for me. Our bond hummed with his worry and desperation even as I too felt similar emotions for him. I stood up and pushed passed Leliana and Zevran to make my way down the stairs to him.
“Solas” I called back as I moved past the small library for the next set of stairs. Before I reached them, he was already at the top and rushing towards me. His strong arms wrapped around me tightly and I buried my face into his chest and held him just as tightly.

“Were you able to detain the assassin?”

Leliana’s voice was clipped and dripping with ice as she questioned him.

“Yes, Bull is watching him in the dungeon with the Commander now.”

His angry tone rumbled beneath my cheek. I opened my eyes and saw Zevran and Leliana walk past us and head down the stairs. Solas’ hands moved from my back to my stomach and his eyes held a fear I had never seen before and it was hard for me to tell if it was his or mine that I saw. I placed my hands over his as he inspected the barrier around our child.

“Who was it?”

He shook his head before pressing his forehead against mine. His relief flooded me as he felt bean kick against his hand.

“He was knocked unconscious before I was able to question him.”

“Do you think it was Vivienne again?”

Solas pulled his head away from mine as he shook his head no.

“I promised you that I would take care of Vivienne and I have. That is where Cole has gone.”

My eyes widened with understanding as to why Cole was missing tonight, and I ducked my head.

“But…” I chewed my lip with nervousness as my memories flashed to Wisdom and how the mages made her kill, changing her into a pride demon. His hand cupped my chin and brought my gaze back to his.

“He chose to go vhenan because he wanted to. He was not ordered to go.”

I held his blue gaze and silently prayed to whatever gods would listen that they keep him safe and return him to me. I knew I worried about him sometimes more so than myself, but I know I could never forgive myself if any of my actions caused him to be corrupted and turned into a demon. Solas softly smiled and pressed a gentle kiss to my lips as if he was reading my mind.

“He will return vhenan.”

I finally nodded my head in agreement and took his hand, lacing my fingers with his.

“Come with me as I meet with my would-be assassin?”

“Vhenan, I would prefer that you go to our room and lie down. Let us handle it.”

My eyebrow rose, and I winked at him.

“I am sure you would… but that is not what I am going to do. So, are you coming?”

I heard his annoyed sigh and saw his quick nod of agreement before we made our way towards the dungeon.
We entered the dungeon and I looked towards the man who had just tried to kill me. He was dressed in all black leathers, his wrist bound behind him. The part of me that was Assan studied the prisoner where he knelt in the middle of the cell. Taking in his bent head that hung towards his chest, the way his shoulders moved in slow even movements with his breathing. Even the man’s hair was black, and it obscured his face from view the way it hung over.

I took a step towards the cell and Solas’ hand gripped my shoulder gently. Glancing at him, he shook his head and our bond hummed with his disapproval. I reached up and touched his cheek before moving away from him towards the prisoner. His soft sigh of annoyance with me only made me shake my head at him. Right now, I wanted to know who this man was and who sent him. My anger at the moment was controlled and I almost felt like it was Assan that had taken over.

I glanced between Bull and Cullen and it was Cullen who spoke. The muscle in his jaw ticking with his anger.

“He has not spoken since waking.”

I placed my hand on his arm in reassurance and moved closer to the cell. The prisoner continued to stare at the floor and I moved my fingers in a small pattern utilizing the fade that without touching the man, lifted him from the floor. His black eyes instantly glared at me and my head tilted slightly to the side, studying him. He tried to rush the bars and I held up my hand, flinging the man against the stone wall behind him.

“Now that was extremely foolish of you.”

He snorted and continue to just glare at me, not speaking a word. There was something about his eyes that reminded me of someone. While I tried to think of who that was, Solas stopped beside me and I felt the emotionless cold of the Forgotten Ones power flow through our bond. Suppressing a shiver, I mentally snapped my fingers as it came to me with the feeling of the void coming from Solas.

“You were sent by the Forbidden… who is your master?”

The prisoner’s lip moved to a snarl as he spat in my direction. Solas’ hand shot through the bars and with his magic, yanked the man to him from where he was against the wall. His long fingers were wrapped around the assassin’s throat and the assassin held his cool gaze with a large menacing smile on his lips.

“You and your bitch are harder to kill than anticipated.”

His eyes slipped to the scar around Solas’ neck and every part of me flashed with immediate anger. My aura pulsed dangerously around me, pushing everyone but Solas away from me as his own aura was matching mine. Solas’ head tilted, and a maliciously designed smile slipped over his handsome features while his eyes swirled like molten steel. My body felt frozen with cold as the void filled me. Ignoring the need to get away from the feeling, I continued to stand beside Solas.

“That was perhaps not the wisest choice of words. Who shall I thank for sending you to me before I kill you?”

He continued to give the eerie smile like some frozen marionette and I studied his attire and saw the small tattoo between his thumb and first finger.

“We shall send our regards to Imshael, my love. His mark is on his right hand.”
The assassin’s black eyes darted to me and I stared coldly back. Those in the room stood quietly behind us waiting and I said aloud so they understood.

“His master is not the one we met in the Hissing Wastes, but they are alike. We may go over the report again if you like for a better explanation of the situation, but we now know who tried to kill Solas in the woods.”

I glanced over my shoulder at Cullen and he nodded in understanding with Bull. Leliana and Zevran stood silently like sentinels and I turned back to the prisoner.

Cullen’s heavy steps approached Solas’ side.

“He tried to kill you once and failed and he just tried to kill Fenlin and the baby. I know what I would do to him if I were you, so do what you will with him, Solas.”

Solas only nodded slightly acknowledging Cullen’s words and glanced at me. Our bond conveyed his desire to kill the man and I nodded in agreement with his silent question because I wanted the man dead as much as he did. His gaze moved back to the assassin he held by the throat and cold magic filled the air, freezing only the man’s head and with a simple flick of his finger, the assassin’s head shattered, and the body dropped.

I grasped his hand, pushing my love for him through our bond trying to rid the void-like cold that was filling me.

“It is done. Please take me to our chambers, my love, I am quite tired.”

I felt his fingers tighten around mine and warmth started to flood me again as the Forgotten Ones magic again retreated.

“Ma nuvenin, vhenan.”

Chapter End Notes

Ma nuvenin, vhenan - as you wish my heart
Decisions

Chapter Notes

Happy Sunday!
Thank you, everyone, for your continued support and comments on this story. You guys are awesome!

"Raise your words, not your voice. It is rain that grows flowers, not thunder." ~Rumi

He stared at me carefully as I crossed my arms and shook my head at him from behind my desk. *Mythal’s mercy!*

“Absolutely not, Solas!”

“Vhenan, just please listen to me for once.”

“No, Solas. I will not just leave through the damn eluvian because you think Skyhold isn’t safe anymore. Our original agreement was that…”

Solas’ angry voice vibrated through our room with his anger, his aura flashed, scattering the papers on my desk to flutter to the floor and I stopped talking. He wore his frustration, worry, anger, and love for me as clearly as his pendant. Our bond vibrated with his fear and my heart melted at how much he really worried for me.

“Fen’edhis! I don’t care what I originally agreed to! That was before someone tried to kill you in the main hall!”

I watched him rub his hands over his head before throwing them in the air as if to say, ‘fuck it’ and began pacing. I rubbed my face trying to gather my patience and calm down before I moved out from behind my desk. Stepping in front of him, I placed my hands against his chest, making him stop.

“Solas,” I said softly. He laid his hands on my shoulders and bowed his head towards mine. “I know you think to spirit me away to some hideout in the Crossroads will keep me and our baby safe, but then what? Will you allow us to return then or will you come up with some other reason to keep me there? Where does it stop?”

His eyes were closed and the heavy sigh that escaped him puffed over my face. I reached up and caressed his jaw, silently asking him to look at me. His troubled blue eyes finally opened slowly to meet mine, and I cupped his face tenderly.

“I cannot endure losing either of you.”

The pain I heard in his voice, vibrated through our bond and I pressed a small kiss to his full lips, whispering against his mouth a small reminder.

“I have promised you forever Solas and I don’t plan on going back on that promise. I just need you
to have faith in that... in us. Together, we are a power to be wary of, but when they breed within us seeds of doubt, even when we know what we are capable of, then they have already won. Can’t you see that?"

I knew he was listening to me because the fear I had initially felt flooding me was starting to decrease as we held each other’s gaze. *Has he forgotten who he is?*

“You are Fen’Harel,” I said with conviction lacing my tone. “One of the most cunning and deadly of the Evanuris and the Forgotten. You are the only one that can walk in both the light and the dark. The Forbidden is using our relationship to restrain you and Andruil underestimates your hatred for her for what she did.” His eyes lit with a small fire and I smiled. “I was originally Banal’ras, one of the most feared Sentinel’s in the Evanuris Court, something Andruil has clearly forgotten. I assure you, my love, I have all those memories and capabilities, but I am more now than I was before. I am free, and I am Ras’Salladin.”

Solas held the fierce gaze that I was using to try to rally him into remembering who he is.

“Together, we are a substantial adversary.” I glanced down at my stomach and then looked back up at him. “And I have someone to fight for and protect. I will never submit again, Solas and neither will you.”

The stories that I remembered through Assan’s memories were of a much more arrogant and proud man than he was now. His fear of losing me for a second time has paralyzed him into losing himself and it was time that we removed that fear and guilt he carried for the loss of Assan. What she chose to do then was what needed to be done, whether or not he agreed with her, but now he needed to accept what was done and heal.

I took his hands within my own and led him to the loveseat. Sitting in his lap, I pressed my side into his chest and nestled my face into his neck. His body instantly relaxed with the position that brought us both comfort and I shortly felt his hands play with my hair and I sighed. Winding my fingers around the leather of his wolf’s jawbone pendant, I listened to his heartbeat while we sat in silence. One of his hands laid over my stomach and I smiled against his neck with the soft feeling of his magic caressing over our child. Bean seemed to enjoy his touching and began kicking beneath his hand. His eyes slightly crinkled around the edges with his small smile with the baby’s actions. There was a vibration through our bond I had never felt before and I closed my eyes, studying the emotion.

“No more leaving the chambers without the barrier in place and someone with you.”

I barely heard his softly spoken request and pressed a small kiss to the skin behind his ear.

“I agree, I also want everyone entering Skyhold through the front gate better vetted and there must be some kind of spell that we can cast over the door for those trying to enter unseen.”

“Agreed. I shall speak with Dorian and Dagna.”

He pressed a kiss against my forehead and I looked up at him.

“We must speak with Mythal together, vhenan. I would be surprised if she was not aware of her daughters’ machinations.”

I slightly nodded in agreement.

“And she may also want to assist in sending the Forbidden back to the void.”

I felt his slight shrug and I leaned up to look at him.
“She may or may not. My sister does not always listen to anyone other than herself and will always only do what she thinks is best. We shall see.”

I felt a small shift in him with his words that sent a small shiver of cold over our bond and I studied his expression carefully. My eyes searching his it finally came to me what this feeling was. *He is going to speak with the Forgotten.* My arms slightly tightened around his shoulders.

“You’re going to let the others know what they have planned.”

His eyes held mine for a long quiet moment before he answered me.

“I am.”

Those two simple words sent a dagger of fear racing through me and his hands came up to cup my face as he tried to soften my fear.

“It is who I am vhenan, I will be quite alright. If I make them aware of what the Forbidden have done, they will intervene.”

I listened to him carefully even though the idea of him conversing with them did nothing to lessen the fear I felt and yet he was right. I knew that Solas walked a fine line between both worlds given that his abilities were both of the light and the dark, but the thought of him talking with them… it sent shivers of fear up my back. *What if they see him as a traitor? What if they chose to kill him instead of listening? Oh my God, what if…*

“I will be quite welcomed vhenan, please stop this useless worry.”

I clenched my eyes shut for a moment and shook my head as I let out a heavy breath.

“You make that sound as if it should just be easy.”

His arms wrapped around me, pulling me into him and I pressed my nose against his neck taking in a deep breath of his scent. The smell of parchment, elfroot and glacial ice met my senses, soothing me.

“You said you cannot endure losing me? Well, that goes both ways, wolf.”

His soft chuckle surrounded me, bring with the sound a small comfort. His lips pressed against my forehead and he spoke.

“Your demands are duly noted, vhenan.”

I left the stairway leading from our chambers to the main hall with Solas for the morning meeting and watched Rayna crossing the keep with quick steps towards us. She stopped in front of me and glanced at Solas before looking back to me worriedly.

“I know you are on your way to your meeting this morning, but I would like just a small moment of your time.”

I nodded my agreement and watched her take a deep, anxious breath before continuing.

“I want to postpone my trip to Val ’Royeaux.”
She quickly held up her hand as I opened my mouth to disagree and I stared at her determined expression, saddened by the reason she would wait to visit her parents.

“I know Cullen was willing to go earlier, but with what happened on Satinalia, I know he would prefer to stay until things are calmer and even if we were to go, he wouldn’t be able to concentrate.”

I stared into her pretty lavender eyes and finally sighed in defeat. She was right, Cullen would not want to leave now with everything that happened. I nodded in agreement and Rayna laid her hand on my forearm, smiling brightly.

“Thank you for understanding, Fenlin.”

I watched her turn around and head across the hall for the door leading to the dining hall and sighed again. It angered me that everything that I had struggled to accomplish getting those two out of Skyhold had been cast off in a blink with one single arrow. I let out another heavy sigh and continued towards the war room.

Gripping my fingers before the large door Solas planted a brief kiss to my cheek before he opened the door for me and we entered the room. Cullen stood next to Leliana and Zevran talking together about the night before as we entered. Josephine gave us an uncomfortable smile while Solas shut the door.

“Good morning Inquisitor. I hope you slept well last night.”

I stood next to Solas and nodded my head ‘yes’.

“We did, thank you. Shall we begin?”

Just as Cullen cleared his throat, Cole arrived in the room startling everyone.

“Andraste’s tits,” Zevran said as he grabbed his dagger.

His blue eyes met mine before he looked at Solas.

“It is done.”

Solas nodded his understanding and I moved to him and grabbed his hands, staring up into his watery gaze.

“And you are...?” I was afraid to finish my sentence.

He squeezed my hands and slightly smiled.

“Yes”

I nodded, and Cole’s head slightly tilted looking off into the distance for a moment before looking at me again.

“There is someone I want you to meet later.”

I am aware that my expression was one of complete surprise since Cole did not have ‘people’ he would introduce and I nodded slowly.

“Okay Cole, I will find you after my meeting.”

He nodded and then vanished from the room making Cullen and Zevran groan. I turned towards the
groaning men with a raised eyebrow and Cullen cleared his throat again and rubbed his neck while Zevran let go of the hilt of his dagger.

“I would like to discuss with you about postponing my absence from Skyhold,” Cullen began tentatively.

I nodded my head in understanding and scratched against the side of my stomach.

“There is no need for us to discuss this Cullen, I can completely understand why you would want to wait. We can discuss the possibility of travel again at a later date.”

I could see that my easy response instantly relaxed him. It didn’t take long for Leliana to take control of the meeting by talking about Corypheus’ whereabouts. If rumors were true and her reports could be trusted, Corypheus was indeed heading through the Emerald Graves looking for Elven ruins. Discussions about materials for blankets and bedding were on the roster for the meeting and Josephine outlined the needs of the refugees that came with us from the Hissing Wastes. It was not long after this part that the meeting was complete. As we turned to leave, Cullen and Zevran stopped us.

“Solas, if we may have a moment?”

He nodded as I turned to look at them. Solas pressed a brief kiss to my cheek, gesturing for me to wait for him in Josephine’s office. I held back an annoyed sigh at being left out of the obvious bro-fest and followed Josephine.

Solas watched her leave with lady Josephine and as soon as the door closed, he turned back to the two men.

“How is she really?” Cullen asked while rubbing the back of his neck.

“She is mostly tired but very angry with the intruder, and yet, very determined to continue moving forward towards the elimination of Corypheus.”

Cullen shook his head while Zevran looked on curiously.

“Shall I continue to shadow her with this… Cole?”

Solas nodded his head, ‘yes’.

“If you would Zevran. She will not grant me the pleasure of her company all day long and it is good to have others aware of her surroundings more so than I. I prefer to remove those that annoy her rather than allow her to deal with them on her own.”

Zevran gave him a cheeky grin and bowed his head slightly towards him before taking his leave. Solas kept his gaze on Cullen as the door closed.

“Fenlin made a suggestion on how to better guard the gate that I would like to discuss with you, Dagna, and Dorian.”
Cullen’s eyebrow rose curiously.

“I gather this suggestion is magical in nature?”

Solas nodded his head. “It is.”

Cullen’s hand rested on the hilt of his sword while he nodded his agreement.

“I will be in my office when you are ready to discuss this.”

Solas nodded and left the room to gather Fenlin for breakfast.
Thank you, everyone, for your comments, kudos, and general support. I hope you enjoy the update.

Zevran and I walked towards the tavern where I knew Cole would be. Having him walking with me was kind of peaceful since he really didn’t bother me much and I knew that Solas felt comforted by his presence being with me. I smiled my thanks to him as he opened the door and the smells of wood smoke and stale beer hit my senses and instantly I rubbed my nose.

“Well, at least it doesn’t smell like sweaty ass in here anymore,” I grumbled walking inside, making him chuckle.

“It is not so bad kitten. There is this tavern in Denerim that has this odor that would burn your nose as you entered.”

I stopped and looked up at him with a raised eyebrow.

“Why in the hell would you go into a place that smelt that bad?”

Zevran laughed and gave me a patient smile like I was some naïve little girl.

“There was this woman”

I held my hand up before he could finish, laughing at him.

“Zevran… if that place smelled that bad and you still entered, your level of desperation to get laid takes on a whole new meaning to what you’re willing to endure to get it.”

His laughter was deep and robust sounding as he bent closer to my ear.

“In my defense kitten… she was very beautiful.”

I shook my head at him and entered the tavern. “So is the sunset over a manure heap, but that doesn’t mean I want to stand there and watch it.

He chuckled, just shrugging his shoulders while following behind me. Cabot nodded at us as we passed, cleaning a mug with a dishrag. I waved at Bull as I passed by him and his Chargers sitting at a corner table playing cards. I held onto the banister leading to the second floor of the tavern enjoying Meriden’s lilting voice as she sang. She sounds so pretty, I thought as I reached the landing.

“I will wait for you downstairs with Bull.”

I smiled at him and nodded before rounding the corner of the stairwell. I stopped in my tracks when I saw a young woman with wheat blonde hair and pretty green eyes talking spiritedly beside Cole and a little boy that looked similar to the young woman listening raptly from his other side. I stood back for a moment taking in the way she spoke with him and how the little boy’s expression conveyed how much he obviously idolized Cole. I don’t think he brought home kittens this time.
Cole’s eyes suddenly met mine and there was a small smirk on his face as he stared at me. *I guess he heard me.* Motioning me towards them, I slightly shook my head as I smiled at him and walked towards the small group. Studying the young woman, I felt a small vibration of untrained magic around her and her little brother and then looked at Cole for an explanation.

“They were at the tavern in Redcliffe. It was not safe.”

I watched quietly as he quickly looked at the young woman and shook his head.

“No, she’s not like her. She can help, she will want to.”

I watched Cole turn and look at the boy, nodding his head.

“Yes, she is pretty.”

I started chuckling as I scratched the side of my stomach and shook my head at the odd snippets of conversation they shared. The whole scene was very typical of Cole.

“Ok, so I can safely assume they are who you wanted me to meet.”

Cole looked at me and nodded his head.

“Yes”

Sighing, I sat on the bench across from them and started with introductions as Cole was oblivious to simple pleasantries like that.

“I believe introductions are in order. There are those that will call me Herald, Inquisitor, Your Worship,” I waved my hand dismissively at the titles. “I prefer Fenlin.”

The young woman looked at me nervously for only a moment before her eyes shied away from mine.

“I am Marian and that is my brother Tommy,” she answered timidly, gesturing towards the young boy.

My heart broke with the sound of her worried voice and I gazed at her bowed head for a moment before looking at her little brother who studied me curiously. Smiling at him gently, I looked back at Cole and then Marian's lowered head.

“He found you in Redcliffe’s tavern, but why didn’t you leave Redcliffe with the other mages?”

I heard the young girl’s sudden intake of breath as she raised her head in surprise.

“I see, you didn’t think I would know. You are both mages, I can sense it and yet you are trying to hide it, why?”

The young girls’ eyes slightly widen with my comment and then narrow with conviction.

“Because my parents died to keep us from being captured by Templars, so we wouldn’t end up in a tower. That is why we hide our magic and stayed in Redcliffe after the others left.”

I understood her drive to do anything necessary to keep from that fate, especially if it was ingrained into her upbringing. Funny, how life will take a turn and bring you to the ones that will want to help you the most.
“You thought the Inquisition would put you and your brother in a tower like the Templars?”

The young girl shrugged and dropped her gaze downward again as she spoke to the surface of the table.

“I didn’t know what the Inquisition was going to do with all those mages. I heard rumors about an alliance, but I didn’t believe it true. I just knew if I kept my head down, and worked hard, no one would know what we were.”

I nodded my head, understanding her distrust and looked back towards Cole who was sitting silently listening.

“You brought them here to keep them safe.”

“Yes”

I nodded my head again and folded my arms on the table, looking at the young woman again who obviously made all the decisions for her little family.

“How old are you, Marian?”

Her eyes came up from the table to look at me as she replied.

“I am eighteen and my brother nine.”

The slight tremor in her voice told me that she thought I would reject her and her brother. The idea that she would think it, let alone fear me, just broke my heart. Holding my hand out, palm up, I made a small dancing dog out of a bit of fade magic. The soft muted green of the created wisp danced circles in the palm of my hand. The young woman smiled while her little brother clapped excitedly.

“Mari! I want to learn how to do that,” the little boy said pointing at my hand.

“Hold your hand out,” I replied, and the little boy eagerly held his hand out to me.

With a small push of my magic, the wisp jumped from my hand to his and the boy stared entranced as the small dog ran in circles around his small palm. The small trick was enough to break the ice and allow the two an opportunity to relax around me. When the wisp disappeared, the little boy frowned for a moment before looking eagerly at me to do it again, making me laugh.

“You can learn how to do that too, but it takes a lot of hard work.”

He nodded his head in agreement and I looked at his sister now who was quietly studying me.

“The mages that are allied with the Inquisition are free to come and go as they please. There is a tower, but this is a Castle and it was the largest place to house all of them together except for the barracks. They chose the tower because they wanted a place to study in peace and I don’t think they are used to mingling with non-magical people yet. I will not tell you that there aren’t any Templars on the grounds of Skyhold because that would be a lie. My Commander is a retired Templar and many of his comrades joined our cause. Our military is made of a mixture of rogues, warriors, Templars, and mages. Human, Qunari, Dwarven, and Elf all fight side by side, together. Will any of this bother you?”

I waited for her answer and caught her little brother quickly shaking his head as he stared pleadingly with his sister. The young woman finally shook her head ‘no’ before giving me an answer.
“I do not see where I would dishonor my parent’s wishes if we were to stay here.”

I smiled and held my hand out to her.

“Good, I was hoping you would say that. Now, let me give you and your brother a tour of Skyhold so that you can get yourself acquainted with your new home before I introduce you to Fiona and the rest of the mages. They will help get you and your brother settled into your own quarters and make sure that you know when mealtimes are and what studies you two should be working on. Anything that you need, you’ve only to tell Cole and I will make it happen.”

“Thank you,” she replied.

Cole stood with them and I caught the young woman’s sidelong gaze at Cole with more than just a sisterly glint and mentally giggled. Well, that could be interesting.

I watched from my seat on the bed as he slipped his traveling leathers on. There is a heaviness in my heart knowing what he was going to do and I didn’t want him to go.

“Do you really need to go today?”

His blue eyes gazed at me from over his shoulder. Tenderness and warmth flowed through our bond as he finished slipping his boots on.

“I know you are worried, vhenan, but there is no need for you to be. We cannot wait for Imshael and his brothers to make their next move.”

I snorted and rubbed the side of my stomach where bean was kicking.

“Yeah, nothing to worry about. You’re just going to visit the Forgotten Ones, that’s all… nothing to worry about at all.”

I know he could hear the sarcasm in my voice and yet he just laughed at me and I wanted to strangle him. My gaze followed his slow walk towards me where he stopped in front of me and knelt down. Taking my hands, his handsome smile melted my flash of anger with him and I sighed heavily.

“How can you be so calm about it?”

He kissed my forehead before answering me.

“Because vhenan, they are not unhappy at being locked in where they are.”

I shook my head completely confused and he stared at me calmly.

“It is the void vhenan; it is where I was first born. It is not an unpleasant place as some would have you believe because it is truly no different than here.”

My eyebrow rose with his description. Assan’s memories replay the one time she went to the void and it dawned on me that it was very cold, like the Frostbacks. I looked at him interested in what he would tell me about the void and he continued.

“When you look at me, what do you see?”
The corners of my lips twitched as I tried to be serious but couldn’t and ended up smiling anyway.

“Is that a trick question?”

His rich laughter filled the air and I touched his face, skimming my fingers over his cheek.

“I see the man that I love.”

His eyes softened, taking the hand that touched his cheek and kissed the palm.

“My kind looks no different than those of the Evanuris. Our differences lie in the balance that we bring. You cannot have the light without the dark. Mythal knew this and that is why she brought me into the Evanuris court. She wanted a liaison between both parties so balance could be maintained.”

I nodded my understanding of the basic truth that everything had a semblance of checks and balances. What still surprised me was that they didn’t mind being locked in there. The Forbidden obviously did or they wouldn’t have wanted to escape.

“So what you’re saying is that the Forgotten Ones are perfectly happy to stay in the Void but obviously the Forbidden do not agree.”

He shook his head and sighed heavily.

“No, it would appear they do not.”

He stood up and I follow not wanting to let his hand go just yet. Walking with him to our weapon’s rack, he reached for his staff and I stopped him, pulling the one that was given to me by Inquisitor Ameridan. The staff made fade magic much more powerful and I wanted him to have every advantage.

“Please take this one.”

He glanced at me for a silent moment before finally giving me a small nod and taking the staff. Releasing the hold I had on his other hand, he slipped the staff into the harness on his back before cupping my face and kissing me soundly.

“I will return by nightfall.”

I nodded and kissing him again, I softly warned him.

“If you are not, I will come looking for you, wolf.”

His lips smiled against mine and our eyes locked.

“Understood”

His words whispered against my lips before he kissed me again. It was over all too quickly I thought when I stood at the top of our stairs with my fingers pressed against my lips, watching him disappear around the corner of the stairwell. I sighed heavily when I heard the door close and went to my desk.

"I might as well do some work while I wait."  

I sat down and found myself staring out the window instead. I hate this...
Thank you, everyone, for leaving comments or Kudos. It is very humbling to know that someone is enjoying my story. I also wanted to give everyone a heads up that this is a total Solas chapter as he takes action. I hope everyone enjoys the switch up.

- All conversations within quotations and in italics are to be understood as spoken in elven.

Solas traveled through the Crossroads with long, confident strides. His determination clear with each step he made forward. He would obtain the other's help and he would protect his mate and their child. In his left hand, he held the former Inquisitor’s staff, using it as a walking stick as he picked his way over stony rubble. He recalled the expression on Fenlin’s face as she held it out to him. Her amber eyes filled with worry even as she tried to hide it from him. He gazed at the sphere mounted at the head of the staff. He’d felt the immense expansion of its power when entering the Crossroads and a small smile lifted the corners of his lips. She had known it would be more powerful here, that was her purpose in asking me to take it. If the staff reacted like this in the in-between, he was curious as to how it would react once he entered the abyss where the fade was not removed.

He stopped for a brief moment to look over the torn area of what used to be a bustling town for travelers and felt the twinges of regret. The devastation that lay before him was due to the sundering of the veil, which he created. Everything him and his kind had built was intimately intertwined with the fade and magic. He still saw parts of large buildings floating amongst the clouds and sighed heavily. There was so much he missed about his previous home and yet, there was much he did not.

Knowing that if he had not cast the veil, that all of his people would have become slaves and the war between the Evanuris and the Forgotten would never have ended did not always lessen the pain he felt. But his mate would disagree with his thoughts if he were to say them aloud to her. He knew she firmly believed Mythal shared in the devastation and decimation of their people and perhaps she was right.

Moving through the maze of forking paths, he thought of Fenlin and smiled. She stole his breath when she looked at him and his heart would race with one of her mischievous smiles. The feelings that grew within him with the thought of their unborn child brought an emotion so strong he could not find words to describe it. She had given him that… the opportunity for life to grow. His vhenan was not only wise but very cunning and he snorted at himself. She would have to be, to be my mate. He shook his head as he thought about her logical arguments with him and softly laughed at himself. For all his knowledge, she always found a way to reason with him.

With a small smirk on his lips from his wayward thoughts about his stubborn mate, he began walking again. He knew exactly the path to the mirror that hid his brother’s and sister in the abyss. He could only speculate the motivations for the Forbidden to be plotting as they were, but he would need the other’s assistance in reigning them in and ceasing their meddling. One clear motivation was that Imshael not only wanted free, but he wanted to be ascended and rule. What the others wanted out of this maneuvering was unknown. If they are left unchecked, a war was inevitable.

Solas recalled what the elves of the current period thought of the Forbidden and was not surprised at
their inaccuracy. Imshael was a spirit that chose a corporeal form, not unlike Cole. The differences lie in the fact that Cole was a spirit of compassion and Imshael was a spirit of desire. He sighed as he thought about Anaris and to a few others, she was known as malevolence. What the people remembered of her was even less than of the Forbidden. He knew she could be very vicious when called upon and yet again, in order to deliver justice a certain amount of malevolence was required, no matter how good the intentions of the warrior. Balance must be preserved. At one time, Imshael had been her right hand. Malevolence and desire went hand in hand and it was difficult for him to surmise what possibly transpired between them to cause such a change. Only Anaris could answer those questions.

He rounded a broken pillar and recognized the dark mahogany framed mirror and stopped to evaluate it. Pushing his aura out, he ascertained that the barrier was indeed weakened enough to allow the Forbidden an opportunity to escape. With his hand raised, his magic flared and soon flowed through the mirror allowing an opening large enough for him to enter and stepped through. His magic grew exponentially within the abyss as it was not cut off from the fade. The staff hummed in his hand and the sphere glowed brightly, almost blindingly so before it slowly receded. *It reacts as if it is real and taking a cleansing breath. Most curious,* he thought.

Closing his eyes for a moment, he wanted to enjoy the moment of feeling himself again before walking towards the palace. The tall grove of trees lined the path like silent sentries, making him feel as if they had stood to wait for him to return. He glanced around the area absorbing the green fields of wildflowers, the sparkling river and tall mountains in the distance with tips covered in snow behind the large stone castle. He gazed at the mountains and if there was time, he would travel to the small village he was raised in. *Perhaps one day I will return there, but with my own child and mate.* Shaking his head at how easy it was for him to become distracted when it came to his feelings of family, he focused forward towards the castle.

Walking up the large stone staircase to the front door, he heard the door open ahead of him and crested the landing where he was greeted by Geldauran. Bowing his head towards him, he took the arm that Geldauran held out to him.

> "By the void, it has been far too long since I have felt your presence brother. What has brought you to us?"

Solas wasted no more time and spoke candidly.

> "Imshael"

Uttering the name of the Sentinel that should be with Anaris made Geldauran’s forehead quickly wrinkle in concern. Letting his arm go, Geldauran gestured for him to follow after him. Solas entered the keep and with an absent wave of his hand, the door closed behind him with the use of his magic. He followed after Geldauran through the keep, down a long corridor that led to the sitting room where he had spent many hours reading and he regarded the other’s sitting on various chairs with books in hand.

His eyes fell to Anaris where she sat on a chaise lounge with a leather-bound book in her hands. Her fiery red hair and snapping red eyes stared at him. She wore a smirk on her ruby-stained lips as she closed her book with a snap.

> "I had not trusted what I felt when you entered. It has been over a millennium since you have visited. I believe the last time was when you told us of the plan you made with Mythal."

Solas nodded as Daem’thal stood to take his arm in greeting. The dark grey of his hair shrouded his shoulders and parts of his face while the black of his eyes flashed mischievously through the
darkened strands.

“You seem… changed. Perhaps it is the lack of hair that is causing me to think this.”

Solas shrugged, unwilling to disclose anything to them unless it was necessary.

“Perhaps, but I assure you, Daem’thal, that having forgone vanity for practicality has been quite enlightening. Alas, I digress. Pleasantries aside, that is not what has brought me here today.”

Anaris stood and went to the side table to pour everyone a glass of wine. She turned and held out a glass to Solas. Her eyebrow rose as he made her wait for a moment before taking the offered glass.

He knew that there was much they didn’t know and began explaining what had transpired during the time they had been away. He began by telling them about Corypheus and how he had obtained his orb and tore a hole in the veil. How he had joined the Inquisition to hopefully obtain his orb back and help remove the ancient Tevinter Magister. Once he had shared what was important for them to know, Anaris studied him with her fiery, red eyes.

“What has brought you to us, Fen’Harel? I do not believe you came to us to discuss current events.”

Solas held her curious gaze as he answered her.

“Imshael is what brought me before you.”

He saw the flames flash in her eyes before she could mask them and turned away, taking a drink of her own wine.

“What has that betrayer done now?”

While the others listened quietly, Solas took a drink of his wine before answering her.

“He and the others have left the abyss with strategies of controlling the quicklings and ruling.”

Anaris turned to him not bothering to mask her surprise as Geldauran shook his head with the knowledge and Daem’thal snarled his displeasure. Solas was pleased with their reactions and knew it would not take much to obtain their allegiance in rounding up the Forbidden.

“That is not all,” he stated. Geldauran’s hand ran through his snow-white hair with frustration. “Of course, it isn’t,” he growled angrily. Solas only nodded his head and continued.

“They have somehow found a way into the Golden Palace and released Andruil. For what purpose, I do not know, but for now, their schemes are aligned with her own.”

Daem’thal let out a heavy breath as he set his glass of wine down.

"Perhaps with the intent to use her to hunt you." Daem’thal turned to look at him with a raised eyebrow. "If I recall, she was quite relentless in her pursuit."

That and to kill my mate, Solas thought silently as Geldauran spoke up.

“Then it is only a matter of time before the others are released.” Solas watched Geldauran pace. “It is a renewal of war that they strive for.”

Solas nodded his head, “I am afraid so.”
Anaris sat on the chaise lounge, crossing her long legs and tilting her glass towards the light making a kaleidoscope of colors to reflect on the marble floor. Her expression pensive.

“Then it is time that we make you aware that there is a fourth.” Solas held her gaze and his stomach clenched with what she would say next. “She has not taken form as of yet. She was meant to be yours once you returned. She is as cunning and malicious as you are known to be, and we thought her to be a perfect match for your abilities.”

Solas shook his head and felt the frustration grow with this new knowledge.

“Fen’edhis! Why would you allow such a thing to happen? All of you knew that I never wanted my own Sentinel.”

Anaris looked at him angrily.

“It was not as if we created her for you, brother,” she replied sarcastically. “She had just come to exist, as did the other’s, we did not create them. There simply was no choice in the matter.”

Solas shook his head and rubbed his neck. This is getting nothing accomplished except for a headache. He turned to look at everyone as he set his glass down.

“What’s done is done. Now we must all face the consequences of having them in our service. I came here to ask for your assistance in gathering them before they do any more damage.”

Geldauran stepped forward first.

“You will have my assistance. If they are to continue to run free, they will disturb the precarious balance that has been created. We cannot have another war begin as we have only just begun to recover from the last one that lasted for centuries.”

Daem’thal nodded his agreement and Solas started to relax as one by one they agreed.

“I shall return in three days to open the barrier around the mirror so that you may leave.”

Anaris’ eyebrow rose at him curiously.

“What must you leave?”

He held her gaze, his face an impossible masque to read.

“I have obligations that must be attended to before I may help with the hunt or I will be seen as suspicious.”

Geldauran nodded his head with understanding.

“He must continue his disguise with this, Inquisition. If he were to just disappear, the quicklings would begin to suspect that he was a spy.”

Anaris snorted and waived off Geldauran’s explanation, presenting Solas with a cool smile.

“I believe our beloved brother is not telling us everything.”

Solas stared at her coldly, refusing to tell her about his mate.

“What you believe is inconsequential, Anaris. What I choose to tell you about my personal life is of my own decision. You should be more concerned about why Imshael chose to betray you in such a
fashion and how you failed to recognize his absence.”

He saw in her expression that his words had cut her to the quick as her hands clenched into bloodless fists at her sides.

“Do not try to chastise me, Fen’Harel, or it will be the last thing you do.”

Solas’ cold laughter echoed in the room menacingly while shaking his head at her audacity. His voice grew with his power as he allowed his magic to flick angrily against her. The sudden shudder through her aura excited him and his eyes flashed warningly as he was reminded of how much he liked the taste of fear.

“Has it been so long that you have forgotten the last time you threatened me, Anaris?”

Geldauran and Daem’thal stepped away from them not having forgotten what had transpired the last time Anaris had challenged him. Both could recall that he had ripped the magic away from her with very little effort. She had raged against him, but she had been spellbound with no magic for months. He had been unaffected by her tears until Anaris had finally broken down and begged him to return her magic to her. Only then had he finally relented. What he had done to her had manifested a small streak of white hair in her fiery tresses that she covered with glamour.

Anaris swallowed nervously as she held his stare before lowering her blood red eyes to the marble floor.

“I have not… forgotten, Fen’Harel.”

He heard the timid reply and stepped a bit closer to her and smiled very wolf-like when she took a small step back. The wolf in him smelled her fear of him and howled with glee like a glutton at a feast.

“Good, then you will not need a reminder of what the consequences will be if you continue down this foolish path.”

He saw her nod her head in silent agreement and pulled his dark magic back within himself before looking at Geldauran and Daem’thal.

“We shall meet at the mirror in three days.”

He saw them both nod in agreement and left the sitting room.

Anaris’ eyes came up to watch him leave and rubbed a slightly trembling hand over her neck where his magic had coldly touched her. She was positive now that something about him was changed because in the past he would never have warned her of her mistakes or shown mercy.

“Why must you always provoke him, Anaris? You are lucky he did not do to you what he did last time, but let you off with a warning.”

Anaris’ eyes flashed at Daem’thal angrily.

“What you should be questioning is why didn’t he? Has he ever shown anyone mercy before?”

The silence was deafening when they heard the door to the main keep close with a solid thud.
Thank you, everyone, for your continued support of my story. Your comments and kudos are just awesome to get.
Thank you!

**Please let me know if where I bounce from Fenlin to Solas is too confusing for anyone. I want to make sure this transition between the two is smooth and unconfusing for the reader because in future chapters I will want to do this again.**

The sun had set, and I made my way down the stairs leading towards the kitchens. Stopping in front of the warded door, I glanced over my shoulder in one direction and then the other before running my hand over it, unlocking the ward. Reaching for the handle, I froze with the distinct sound of a clearing throat.

“My, my, kitten… you are a curious one to follow.”

I let my head thump against the door and a heavy sigh escaped me before I ran my hand up the door in what looked like an innocent maneuver, but little did Zevran know that I was replacing the ward I had just removed.

Holding his steady, curious gaze, I smiled and rested my hands on my constantly growing stomach hoping to take away his curiosity of where I was going.

“I don’t see what is so curious in my actions. This room is nothing but a personal library.”

Mythal’s mercy, if I could sound any more of a liar, the words would be tattooed on my damn forehead in neon and flashing at him. Continuing to hold his gaze, he gave me a wicked smile just as he leaned against the wall with a relaxed air about him. Shrugging his shoulders at me with a blend of curiosity and indifference, he glanced at his fingernails.

“I don’t believe I have ever seen you come to this room before, that is what has made me curious.”

I gave an aggravated sigh that made him laugh.

“If I don’t want you to see me doing something Zevran, I can indeed make sure that you don’t.”

His eyebrow rose with my confident statement and then gave me a look that I could only explain as indulgent to my idyllic notion that I could possibly ever best him and gritted my teeth. What is it with good-looking elves thinking that they are incapable of being bested by a woman outside a bedroom?

“I am sure you could,” he said with a pacifying tone, only pissing me off even more.

Wanting to prove to him that I was quite capable of what I stated, I smiled at him before pulling the fade to me with a wave of my hand, as if telling him goodbye and disappeared from where I stood directly in front of him. He stood immediately from the wall looking around while muttering Antivan curse words. I smiled and covered my mouth to stop myself from laughing aloud at his unease while
moving in behind him. Pulling out the small penknife that I kept hidden up my sleeve and pressed it to his side as I revealed myself.

“Dead,” I whispered from behind him.

His loud laughter filled the air as he glanced down at me from over his shoulder. His magnetic smile lighting his features while his gaze held respect and surprise.

“You continue to surprise me,” he said shaking his head while I put my blade away. He bowed deeply with a mischievous glint in his eyes. “I shall never underestimate you again, kitten.”

I laughed and swatted his arm playfully.

“See that you don’t because all these pregnancy hormones might actually get a man stabbed.”

His laughter echoed through the hall and he glanced at the door that I was going to enter before his whole macho showboating started.

“I am guessing that the door is magically locked specifically because this is a room no one may bother you in other than your own mate?”

I know my face held a surprised expression and he took my hand, patting it patiently while smiling at me roguishly.

“I know you must think that most handsome men, such as myself, are not all that smart and in most cases, you would indeed be correct, my dear. However, I have traveled with mages and know the feeling of magic when it is being used.”

I snorted at him as he playfully winked at me. This man could kill any other woman’s hormones with a simple glance and smile. I could do nothing but really like him and realize that I had no other choice but to admit he was right and shrugged my shoulders in acceptance.

“You would be correct, Zevran. The room is warded and yes, Solas is the only other that knows the pattern.”

His triumphant smile only made me laugh.

“Then I shall leave you to your privacy, kitten. Even I understand the need for such things.”

I leaned up on my tiptoes and pressed a quick kiss to his cheek, grateful for his understanding.

“Thank you Zevran.”

He winked at me and turned back towards the stairs leading to the main hall. I breathed a silent breath of relief as he left and went back to the door quickly. I knew the sun had already set when I was walking down the steps and now it would be dark. Solas promised he would be back tonight. Slipping into the room, I warded the door behind me quickly and walked around the desk that had been moved to expose the hidden staircase. Making my way down the steps, I entered the room that held the eluvian and found a place to wait for him.

Sitting on the floor, I leaned back against the wall that faced the mirror and waited. Don’t make me come looking for you wolf. I yawned, rubbing the side of my belly tiredly. “I’ll just wait right here,” I said aloud to myself, yawning again and closing my eyes. I’ll just rest my eyes for a moment. I won’t need much... ... ...
Solas ran his hand over the mirror leading into Skyhold and stepped through instantly feeling his mate’s aura. His eyes searched the room as he entered and saw her dozing against a wall obviously waiting for him. Running his hand over the mirror, closing it, he walked towards her and laid his staff and pack down beside her as he bent.

Touching her cheek to gently wake her, he watched her sleepy amber eyes open as her lips slowly smiled at him. He shook his head at her and quickly felt her arms around his neck and her lips on his. All thoughts of admonishment for her even sitting on the floor left him at the soft touch of her lips against his. Her relief clear with not only the way she held him but the hum of the emotion vibrating along their bond. When she pulled back, she held his gaze with a questioning look. Touching her cheek, he smiled at her tenderly, knowing what she was questioning.

“I will need to return in three days to take up the hunt with them on the Forbidden, but they have agreed to assist.”

He saw her troubled gaze before she cast her eyes downward and placed a finger beneath her chin to lift it, wanting her to look at him. Her amber gaze held fear and surprisingly he wasn’t feeling it in their shared bond. Watching her for a long, silent moment, he realized she had wrapped herself in her ‘darkness’, as she called it, and sighed in annoyance, dropping his hand.

“You will still continue to lock me out of your feelings even though I can clearly read them in your eyes?”

He couldn’t disguise his hurt and saw her amber gaze grow warm as she cupped his face tenderly.

“I would rather not have you worry about what I am feeling,” she replied.

Solas held her soft gaze and every piece of him wanted nothing more than to protect her. Leaning into her, he kissed her gently. Pulling back, he looked around them and sighed with the return of his initial observation that his mate sat on the cold, stone floor. Standing, he held his hands down to her to help her stand.

“Come, you cannot continue to sit on this cold floor vhenan, let us retire to our chamber.”

She smiled up at him making his stomach tighten.

“I have waited all day to hear you say that,” she replied.

He smiled before grabbing his pack and the staff from the floor after helping her. Taking her hand, she led them up the steps.
With the dim light of dawn just peaking over the tips of the mountains, I woke and gazed at his sleeping face. *Why does he have to be so handsome even when he sleeps?* Running my fingers lightly over his jaw, his eyes slowly opened to look at me.

“I don’t like you hunting them without me.”

His smoky, sleep-filled gaze stared at me for a silent moment before he ran his fingers through my hair.

“I will be fine, vhenan. It must be done.”

I held his soft gaze for a moment before bean kicked into him from between us and I smiled at him.

“I think our child also doesn’t agree with you.”

The look on his face was of joy as he pressed his hand to my stomach and caressed over where bean had kicked.

“Our child is like his mother, stubborn.”

I laughed at him and placed my hand over his where it lay splayed over my abdomen.

“I’m not the only one who is stubborn, Fen’Harel.”

His smile of pleasure at the comment made me think he preferred to think that what I had said was as a compliment and laughed.

“You don’t even disagree.”

His laughter filled our chamber before he pulled me towards him to place a kiss on my lips.

“No, I am as obstinate as you say, vhenan.”

Smiling against his lips, I pulled him closer to me. *I will never get enough of him.* Wrapping my hand around his neck, I nuzzled against him.

“Take a bath with me?”

My simple question brought both of his arms around me instantly and I sighed with the heat of him against me.

“I would like that,” he replied thickly before letting me go and getting out of our bed. Holding his hand out to me, I followed him into our bathing chamber.

I glanced at him tenderly with a small smile on my face as we left our stairwell for the main hall of the keep. His fingers lightly touched the small of my back as we made our way towards the war room for the morning meeting. There was small tingle of awareness that rushed through my senses telling me that we were being watched and I felt Solas’ fingers on my back slightly stiffen. He bent to kiss my cheek and then cast a barrier over us with the hand that had been settled on my back. Instantly, the cool feeling of his magic enveloped us, and I glanced at him.
“So, it wasn’t just me that felt that.”

Solas shook his head, not answering me, but scanning the room carefully as we continued towards the war room. Opening the door, he ushered me through before closing the door behind us.

“No, someone was using glamor to obscure themselves from our view. What you felt, was their magical disguise.”

My sigh was one of annoyance and I caught the small smirk on lips as we continued down the hall, past Josephine’s office.

“You attend your meeting, vhenan, and allow me to discover who this spy is that has found its way into Skyhold.”

I stopped to look up at him and reached up to caress his cheek. His tender smile made my insides melt.

“Please be careful, Solas. I don’t like that people are getting into the castle so easily with everything you and Dorian have done to fortify the grounds.”

He nodded his head in agreement and kissed my forehead before turning to go back to the main hall. I watched him go before opening the door to the war room.

Solas walked into the main keep and felt the tingle against his senses and moved casually towards the rotunda, feeling the tingle of magic intensify against his aura. Whoever was disguising themselves would show himself soon. Opening the door, he walked inside and moved towards his desk. Standing off to the side where he would still have a view of the door, he saw it open and a nobleman entered. Solas continued to act as if he was not paying attention to the man and went about picking up a book from the floor. The tingling intensified as the man came closer and Solas prepared to cast a spell that would freeze the man and froze as the other man spoke.

“Relax, falon, I come in peace.”

Solas’ eyes studied the noble and settled on the stark, lavender gaze that held him.

“Felassan?” he whispered with surprise lacing his voice.

The sardonic grin that grew on the noble’s face shimmered and it was with a blink and he stared at his long-time friend that stood in similar garb as his own. A simple woolen tunic, brown in color over a matching pair of brown leggings. The obvious differences between them were that Felassan’s chestnut colored hair was braided down his back and wore Mythal’s vallis’lin starkly against the pale skin of his face. His arms were folded behind his back and his eyebrow was raised while he studied him quietly.

“It appears that you have been very busy since you awoke, falon. I have a good idea as to why you
have not written for some time.”

Solas held his gaze and shook his head at him, quietly telling him not to speak further. Thankfully, Felassan took the subtle hint and glanced around the room carefully. He should have known that Felassan would seek him out when he ceased to send him any reports as to his current situation.

“It is good to see you, falon,” Solas said as he walked around the table and held his arm out in greeting. Felassan grabbing his arm pulled him in close for a tight hug.

“Is there somewhere that we may talk that is without ears? There is much I would like to discuss with you,” he said softly, close to Solas’ ear as they hugged.

Felassan let him go and Solas nodded at him, gesturing for him to follow him.

“Come, your journey must have been arduous.”

Felassan laughed, following behind him.

“That it was,” he replied.

I felt my frustration growing with the lack of real information from my council. I listened quietly while Josephine discussed some of the needs for around the castle and for the nobles. It all sounded like buzzing in my head, I can’t take this anymore, I realized and held up my hand. Josephine fell silent and I rubbed my face wishing I could just go back to bed.

“Please submit your requests in writing, Josephine and I will go over them and get back to you. Right now, my curiosity lies as to if we know where Corypheus is.”

I noticed the small smirk on Zevran’s face and the impassive expression on Leliana’s face.

“I told you this would not work,” he said softly to Leliana.

I raised my eyebrow with the cryptic comment and watched Leliana dartingly look at Zevran in annoyance before looking back at me and finally answer. As I watched her, it almost appeared that she didn’t want to.

“My agents have found the Venatori searching through the Emerald Graves and even as far-reaching as the Anderfels for Elven artifacts. I would rest easier if I knew exactly what he was looking for, but for now, he is still unseen.”

I held her gaze for a moment and then glanced to Cullen who stared down at the map on the table. What the hell is going on here? Why are they so hesitant to give me an actual update about what’s going on?

“And what about you, Commander?”
Cullen’s gaze bounced up and looked at me. He rubbed his neck and it was a telltale sign of his nervousness.

“Everything is in order, Fenlin,” he answered without actually answering.

Crossing my arms over my stomach, annoyed with his non-answer clearly written in my entire posture. I narrowed my eyes at him, making him squirm. What the hell is going on?

“What is going on with you guys? Normally, you two are all about giving me the most current reports on what is happening, but today you two are acting like you don’t want to tell me anything.”

I watched Cullen and Leliana share a look before they spoke at the same time.

“That”

“It’s”

Holding my hand up at them, they silenced immediately.

“I don’t know what is going on here, but I don’t like it, so one of you had better start talking…” looking at each of them angrily. “Now.”

Cullen sighed and rubbed his neck obviously deciding to speak first.

“We thought that you should maybe try relaxing a bit since it is getting closer to…”

Cullen’s voice trailed off with the instant flash of anger on my face that I didn’t hide and cleared his throat nervously.

“Closer to what, Commander?”

Pregnancy hormones raging with the idea that everyone was still trying to either tell me what I could or couldn’t do and now apparently what I should or shouldn’t know. My eyes dashed to Leliana as she finally spoke up.

“We thought that worrying you at this stage of your pregnancy would not be good for you or the baby.”

I clenched my hands into bloodless fists as I grew angrier and Josephine finally broke into the conversation, dragging my attention from Leliana.

“We agreed with Solas that it would be for the best to not overly concern you with what Corypheus is currently up to or what is happening in areas around Ferelden until after the baby is born.”

My gaze looked at each of them as I kept silent. Taking a deep breath to try and bring my anger under control, I closed my eyes for a second and then looked at them. Keep it together… they mean well.

“Thank you, everyone, for your concern. I do appreciate the idea behind it…” I was proud of myself for not losing my temper with them. I knew what they were trying to do for me, it was just smothering. “But to be honest with everyone here, I don’t need to be coddled like some invalid.”

Zevran chuckled and then winked at me while Leliana, Josephine, and Cullen looked at each other sheepishly.

“Solas’ concerns are his own and I can handle him myself. What I don’t need is for all of you to start keeping things from me just because I am pregnant. I realize there is nothing that I can do about it
personally, but I can interject where I would like our military to go or not. Is that understood?”

I heard their mumbled agreements and left the war room. *Oh, husband… you and I are going to have a long conversation about this.*

Chapter End Notes

vhenan - my heart
falon - friend
Every step I made across the main hall towards the rotunda was full of anger and frustration. *I am going to throttle him!* I knew my expression was one full of anger because nobles stepped out of my way quickly as I crossed the keep and ripped open the door that led into the rotunda. I raked the room with my gaze angrily, more than ready to jump him and saw that he wasn’t in here.

“Well that sure sucked the air out of my sails,” I muttered aloud with a huff.

“Your Worship?”

With my hands on my hips, I turned towards the door that led to the battlements where the hesitant voice had spoken from and held back the sigh of annoyance with the unwanted title.

“What can I do for you?”

My answer sounded curt and I mentally groaned with how short my temper was getting as of late. It wasn’t his fault that Solas continued to smother the hell out of me even after we’d just talked about him not doing that. The young soldier slightly flinched with my tone but opened the door further allowing Raj to trot through the doorway into the room. My earlier anger with Solas instantly evaporated at the sight of him and a smile grew, removing my frown.

I glanced at the soldier again as I ruffled my fingers through Raj’s soft fur finding the sense of balance I had been lacking as of late as I breathed in the scent of the forest from his fur.

“Thank you.”

He nodded quickly and left for the battlements, and I turned my focus back to greeting Raj since he had been gone for quite a while. The sheer size of him was overwhelming. I realized just how big Raj really had gotten as I barely had to bend to rub my forehead against his. The fact that Raj was now a fully-grown wolf finally sunk in and my heart hurt a bit with this understanding. *He will want to gather his own pack and create a family of his own… he won’t want to stay here much longer.*

“My little boy isn’t so little anymore.”

His head rubbed against mine in greeting and I felt instantly calmer than what I had been when I first walked in here. There was a small twinge in my lower back and I reached around to slightly rub at it while my thoughts went back to where Solas could have gone since he obviously wasn’t here. Sitting down in his chair, my anger with his suffocating meddling still irked me but my anger had melted away as I calmly stroked Raj’s head who chose to lay down next to me. I leaned back and rubbed my stomach absently with my other hand, thinking about where he might be and suddenly my eyes popped open and my fingers stilled.
“Sometimes I am such a dumbass,” I mumble aloud causing Raj to tilt his head at me questioningly. Closing my eyes, I focused on the bond I shared with him hoping this would work. He told me that I could use it to find him and that was exactly what I was going to try and do. Focusing my magic on the invisible, woven threads that bound us together, I could mentally see the kaleidoscope colors of the magical tethers leading me out of the rotunda and back out into the main hall of the keep.

“Gotcha, ya old goat!” I said aloud with a slap on the armrest for emphasis.

Smiling with my success, I stood up and walked out of the rotunda with Raj closely behind me while I continued following the magical leads. Standing outside of the rotunda, I closed my eyes and focused on the connection again. The colorful threads stretch across the room towards our chamber door. Opening my eyes again, I walked across the hall with a continued sense of triumph and reached for the door handle. Our door vibrated with magical and energy, staying my hand as I reached out. I felt the intricate wards and frowned at them.

*This is how we ward the door when we go to bed, why would he ward the door like this in the middle of the day?* My mind played through a plethora of scenarios, flipping and twisting like an acrobat through my mind and none of them gave me any confidence, but it was the last one that had me ripping the ward away in anger with the barest flick of my fingers. *There better not be a woman up here husband or I will kill you both!* I heard Raj’s low, menacing growl with my tumultuous emotions flicking around us and he bounded up the stairs ahead of me.

I felt his surprise with my anger flow through his aura as mine rushed through the room like a raging storm while I ascended the steps as fast as my pregnant body would take me. I knew our shared bond vibrated violently. The closer I got to the end of this pregnancy, the more my emotions rushed from one end of the spectrum to another in a blink. Even knowing this, I still couldn’t control them and right now, my emotions and imagination ran like wild horses with the idea that he might be with someone else.

Finally reaching the landing, my eyes landed on his surprised blue gaze from where he sat next to the fireplace before scouring the room looking for my imagined woman he was with. Raj stood in front of the chair opposite of Solas, his blue-green eyes narrowed at the unknown visitor while showing his teeth in warning for them to not move. Raj’s reaction drew my gaze from Solas’ surprised one, and in my angry fog I realized it was not a woman who sat in the chair, but an elven man with chestnut colored hair and Mythal’s tree designed vallis’lin over his length and width of his forehead, the roots slowly descending down his aristocratic nose. He was dressed comfortably in a long woolen tunic and matching leggings like Solas. It was his snapping lavender eyes watched me carefully while sitting in the highbacked chair across from him that really gathered my attention.

I stared at him long enough that one his eyebrows rose with humor and I finally looked away from the visitor to where Solas still sat in his chair. His gaze held a glimmer of humor as well. I felt seven shades an ass for even imagining that there would be some other woman up here and rubbed my face with embarrassment. *For the love of the Gods, I need to get this kid out of me, so I can go back to being level-headed again.* I watched Solas stand with a knowing smile on his lips and walk towards me. I felt the warmth of his understanding and his love for me flooded our bond and it only made me feel even more of an ass for thinking him anything like other men I’d known. He bent his head closer to mine, closing my eyes, the warm touch of his lips pressed softly against mine in our traditional greeting. When I opened my eyes, his blue gaze held mine tenderly.

“I see that Raj has decided to return to us. I am pleased that your meeting was not a long one this morning.”

I shook my head at him, trying to clear the fog around my brain that he could easily cause and
remembered what had happened during the meeting that had set me off in the first place and I felt the spark of annoyance ignite again. Looking up at him, I wanted him to see my annoyance with his meddling.

“My short meeting might have something to do with my meddlesome mate telling everyone that they should censor what they tell me because of my delicate state.”

The sound of laughter from the man in the chair drew our attention and I noticed the expression of annoyance on Solas’ face as he looked at him. I saw that Raj was still on guard even though he was no longer smiling at him and I could not hold back my curiosity any longer and gestured towards him.

“What is your associate, Solas?”

I heard him clear his throat, feeling the small thread of unease from him and I glanced up at him curiously. He appeared to not want to introduce us and I turned to look back at the man that sat lounging in the chair. Not waiting for Solas to make up his mind, I took the initiative and introduced myself.

“It appears my mate is suddenly speechless. My name is Fenlin.”

The man’s lavender eyes crackled with mischief as he slowly stood and I saw that he was as tall as Solas. Taking my hand, he bent over it and the angry vibrations from Solas only made me more curious as to who this man was. He barely grazed my knuckles with his lips before rising.

“It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, lady Fenlin. I am Felassan.”

Something about the name seemed vaguely familiar, besides the fact that my previous self was called Assan that is. Wracking my brain, it finally came to me who he was, and my eyes grew as I suddenly understood. He is one of the contacts Fen’Harel uses as a go-between him and Briala. I slowly pulled my hand from his and looked up at Solas. His gaze confirmed that I was correct, and I sighed realizing why he was here.

“I have news that is going to take him away from here. My mind started to swirl with all the different possibilities and I turned away from them. Taking a deep breath, I pulled the comfort of my darkness to control my sudden rush of anxiety and quieted my mind before it could leap any further with conclusions. One episode of delusions of grandeur is quite enough for one day. I needed to hear what he had to say before I let my fear of losing him take over.

I slightly jolted with the feel of Solas’ hand on my shoulder and I kept my eyes closed as I continued to focus on breathing evenly. Stop being such a coward... this isn’t who you are at all! Has pregnancy not only made you an emotional wreck but also a daft cow?! My internal admonishments had me squaring my shoulders and opening my eyes to finally look at him.

“Welcome to Skyhold, Felassan. Please forgive my intrusion of your conversation earlier. I will speak with Josephine, my Ambassador, and have a room readied for you for as long as you would like to stay.”

I could hear the overly formal way my voice sounded and cleared my throat before tearing my gaze from Solas’ questioning gaze to look at Felassan. Nodding my head at him, I moved away from Solas towards the stairs.

“Vhenan”

I shook my head and gave him a wobbly smile.
“It is quite alright Solas. I am sure there is a lot you two need to catch up on and I don’t want to get in the way. I will leave you to it.”

I didn’t wait for his response, nor would I let him see my anxiety with Felassan’s appearance here and headed back down the steps with a soft whistle, calling Raj to me. I heard his quick steps behind me and continued down the stairs.

Solas heard the door close and felt the flash of her magic as she warded the door and turned towards Felassan’s curious gaze.

“There is much you have left out of your explanation about your mate, falon. You didn’t tell me she was also an Evanuris,” he said, then snorted and shrugged his shoulders. “But then again, you didn’t care to inform me that you were mated.”

Solas shook his head and folded his arms behind himself. There was something about the way Fenlin had acted that worried him, and he wished that he could have followed after her to explain instead of entertaining Felassan.

“There are many things that I deem not of your concern, falon, as you have also made known that you appreciate this view as well.”

Solas saw his eyebrow come up curiously and looked at him pointedly.

“Briala,” is all Solas would say and watched Felassan’s lips grow into a large smile. His laughter filled his chamber and he felt a flicker of annoyance with his friend.

“Oh, yes, my little protégé. I was surprised when you demanded that I stop helping her.”

Solas glanced at him briefly before moving back to his chair and sitting down again.

“I did not demand it of you, I strongly suggested it and as for that, I would not have asked it of you if she had not allowed Empress Celine to purge the alienage’s of Halamshiral.”

He watched his friend’s eyes narrow with this information and leaned back, folding his hands in his lap, pleased that he had been correct in believing that he knew nothing about it. Knowing now that Briala’s machinations were her own gave him a sense of relief.

“I see she failed to mention this to you—her teacher.”

Felassan looked at him angrily.

“Do you think I would allow her to go unpunished for such an offense to the people? That I would not have told you if she had told me? Are you now questioning my loyalty, Dread Wolf?”

Solas waved his hand dismissively at him and sighed.

“Do not become so dramatic, Felassan. If I believed you knew, I would have killed her and then you, myself.”

Felassan’s gaze held his steadily and with a few minutes of tense silence, he finally watched his
friend lean back in his chair and relax.

“Thank you, falon. Before your mate interrupted us, you were about to tell me what has been transpiring between the Forbidden and Andruil.”

Solas nodded and began explaining the situation even as his mind still wandered to his mate who had effectively shut him out of her feelings as she had their chamber door.

I opened the door leading out to the garden and found an empty bench to sit on. Raj laid down next to me as I let my mind begin to wander again. What if Andruil has approached him? Is that the reason he is here? The twinge in my back snagged my attention and I rubbed at it. The sound of a child’s voice addressing me pulled me even further from my thoughts and I turned towards the voice.

“Savhalla, Fenlin.”

I fixed a smile on my face as Kieran approached. He is such a peculiar boy.

“Aneth’ era, Kieran. Are you enjoying the garden today too?”

I patted the spot next to me and he sat down.

“I was doing my studies when I saw you leave the keep.”

I nodded and slightly ruffled his hair.

“It is important that you do those, or your mother will not be pleased that you are ignoring them.”

His heavy sigh made me smile as his bright, golden gaze just like his fathers, rose to look at me.

“Don’t tell mother, but they are sometimes very boring.”

I chuckled and nodded my head in agreement.

“I understand, sometimes you just need a break.”

His dark head nodded in agreement and then pressed his hand to my large stomach. His head tilted like Cole’s when he was listening to something that only he could hear and then nodded his head again. I watched his actions curiously as I knew that he held within himself the soul of Urthemiel, one of the old Gods. His situation was such a curiosity, but I just couldn’t find it in me to ask Morrigan about it. In the end, it was none of my business what happened, only that it did and Kieran was here. Just as I was about to question him about what he was doing, he smiled at me and removed his hand. His expression so serious for such a young boy as he spoke to me and I realized that it must be very difficult for him to be of two minds. With that thought, I realized that he and I were not so different, especially when it came to having two sets of memories.

“It will be nice to have someone like me around.”

I looked at him in confusion.
“What do you mean, like you, Kieran?”

He shrugged and stared at the ground.

“Old and powerful. Mother says I must be very careful with my knowledge so that I do not hurt anyone, but no one wants to play with me.”

I saw his neutral expression and felt sorry for Kieran. He may house an old soul, but he was still a child. I ran my hand over my stomach as I digested his explanation. I had never thought about what type of child Solas and I had created before, but it would not be a surprise if they were magical. The sound of Morrigan’s voice startled me from my thoughts and I turned to look at her over my shoulder.

“Kieran, you shouldn’t be bothering the Inquisitor, nor should you be neglect your studies.”

His heavy sigh could be heard, and my lips twitched as I watched Morrigan fold her arms, waiting for him to get up from the bench we shared.

“Come with me, young man, back to your studies.”

He stood with a groan and walked around me back towards the gazebo where I could plainly see where he had his books laid out on the table. Morrigan nodded at me in greeting before following after Kieran back to the gazebo. I watched them walk away and wondered if I too would be raising our child by myself. The instant I thought it, I shoved the idea away.

No more delusional thoughts, Solas would never allow it.

Standing up, I made my way back across the garden to find Josephine and have a room prepared for Felassan.

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Reading the correspondence on my desk, I felt the caress of his aura before hearing the door open. Raj’s head came up as I closed my eyes and took a deep breath in preparation of the discussion I knew was to come when I felt the flash of his magic warding the door. I had been such a coward yesterday, that I’d made sure I returned to our chambers before him, all so I could be asleep when he came to bed.

I watched him as he reached the landing and look at me. His slow walk across the room increased the nerves in my system. He bent and pressed a kiss to my lips in greeting, his thumb rubbing gently over my cheekbone. His gaze studied mine questioningly and a soft sigh escaped me.

“Your concerns that I will not return are unfounded, vhenan. I will never go far from your side.”

His softly spoken confession brought me an immeasurable amount of comfort. He took my hands and helped me up, leading me towards our couch. Sitting down, he pulled me onto his lap and I slightly snorted with the maneuver since I knew I weighed a ton.

“I might be a bit too heavy for this now, Solas.”

“Nonsense,” he replied quickly while holding me tighter, making sure I didn’t move. “Now, will you allow me to tell you why Felassan is here?”

I snuggled my face into his neck, taking a calming breath of his scent while I waited for him to continue.

“There are reports of changes with the elven movement throughout alienage’s across Orlais and Ferelden. Elves are leaving for unknown locations and Felassan believes they are being hidden
somewhere in the Crossroads but has not been able to obtain the location as of yet.”

I heard his heavy sigh before he continued. “I must apologize, vhenan, it is my own fault for not keeping him abreast of my plans, that is what brought him to Skyhold. After our discussion, we both believe that what is happening with the elves has something to do with Andruil and the Forbidden. How I am unsure, but he agreed to accompany me on the hunt for the Forbidden.”

Listening to him, I felt a semblance of comfort knowing that at least he would not be going alone to confront the Forbidden.

“Won’t the Forgotten be angry with Felassan’s presence?”

His hands rubbed my back soothingly as if he knew where my tension was hidden, and I melted into him.

“No, they will welcome the assistance. It will take time for them to become accustomed to how heavy the world will feel without the veil. The fact that the Forbidden have been free longer than them will mean that they are possibly stronger than them. I have grown accustomed to the feeling of this world as has Felassan, it is to their advantage to have him along.”

The fact that I would have to stay behind was really frustrating and I knew he sensed my feelings when his lips pressed against my forehead.

“I know you would prefer to come along, vhenan, but I am glad that you are not.”

I leaned up to look at him with a frown. His lips slightly quirked at the corners with my expression of frustration.

“It is not that I do not want you at my side, it is because I have not told my brothers and sister that I am mated.”

I held his gaze for a long moment. *Why would he hide me?*

“Are you afraid they would try to hurt me?”

I watched him shrug his shoulders and then caress my jaw tenderly. Leaning into his touch, I closed my eyes.

“What is it, Solas?”

Opening my eyes to look at him, I saw in his gaze that he was hesitant to tell me. I waited and whatever had been his problem in telling me, he resolved quickly.

“It is because I am not the only one who may walk with the Forgotten.”

I sighed in frustration with his cryptic statement.

“Could you possibly explain something any more complicated or unclear as you just did? It is clearly written all over your face that you would rather not tell me, but out with it Solas.”

He held my annoyed gaze and let out a heavy sigh.

“It is that your soul is split… like mine. You have abilities of both the light and the dark. I do not know how it came to be, or if that was Mythal’s intention to make sure that you could also act as a liaison between the Evanuris and the Forgotten when she brought your spirit back. However, it does not change the fact that you capable of wielding the fade and using the void’s darker magics.”
I looked at him in surprise with his explanation and then started laughing and shaking my head.

“I have no idea what you are talking about, Solas. I am pretty sure I would recognize using the
darker magic of the void.”

His head tilted curiously at me and I explained what I meant.

“When you use the Dread Wolf’s magic… I am filled with fear, a bone-chilling cold that fills me to
the point of wanting to flee. I would recognize using that type of magic.”

Solas’ eyes held mine and he still wore a small smirk on his lips as he spoke.

“That is because when you call on it, it is not cold and unemotional. It is full of fire and very much
emotional, vhenan.”

I knew my expression was one of surprise as he continued.

“How do you recall the way you reacted to the assassin that had tried to kill me and then you and the
baby?”

I mulled over the memory thinking about how angry I had been when I had learned that he was the
one that had tried to kill Solas in the forest. My instinct had been to kill him myself. My anger was
only matched by Solas’ at the time when I felt it and I realized that at that moment I hadn’t felt the
coldness of the Dread Wolf’s magic. Is that what he means? His hand came up and caressed my
cheek tenderly.

“It is only another reason for why we fit so well together, vhenan. But it is also the reason I do not
want the Forgotten to know of your existence yet. There will be those that will feel threatened with
your presence at my side and I would kill even my own kin if any harm were to come to you.”

‘He would remake worlds and even challenge me for you.’ Mythal’s words came back to me and I
saw the steely determination in his eyes that made the blue of his eyes swirl with molten silver.
Cupping his face, I pressed my lips to his and the sudden tightness that I had felt in him, slipped
away.

“Then we will do what you feel is best in this situation, ma’ lath. I couldn’t forgive myself if I ever
put you in a situation where you had to fight your own family because of me.”

I wrapped my arms around his neck and pressed a kiss to his lips. The feeling of his strong arms
wrapping around me was comforting. In moments like this, I felt like there was nothing we couldn’t
accomplish as long as we did it together.

Chapter End Notes

Falon - my friend
Vhenan - My heart
Ma’ lath - My love
Thank you, everyone, for your patience on this chapter. Last week there were multiple issues that thwarted this chapter from posting. First, it was my modem that died—got a new one, easy fix that. Then, my laptop ate over half my chapter, not an easy fix that. As I am sure you can imagine, I lost my schnitzel over that little episode. So, in lieu of this entire shit-show, I am posting two chapters today for your enjoyment.

Laying on my side, I gazed out our window at the soft hint of the pre-morning light barely peering from behind the mountains. Not wanting Solas to realize that I was awake, I refrained from sighing despondently as I’m reminded that today he would leave to track down the Forbidden with Felassan.

What excuses I’d made with the council to not raise any suspicions for his absence had sounded lame, especially when all I would say is, ‘there are matters that need to be addressed, so he will be gone for a while’. I wasn’t completely lying, I just wasn’t telling them everything. It was quite clear that no one was buying my vague reason, especially Leliana and Zevran, but they weren’t pressing me for anything more than what I was willing to share.

I soaked in the warmth of his body behind me, enjoying the vital heat that radiated from him that loosened the muscles in my back, but if I was, to be honest, it was the way his hand lay protectively over bean that made me melt into a blob of goo. This was the position that I found us waking up in normally and it was always the sweetest feeling. His hand would move unconsciously in soothing circles when bean would kick or move restlessly, and it was adorable. That, and to my complete frustration, bean would calm with the soft caress of his magic. Traitor! I’m the one that feeds you, grows round for you, becomes a hormonal mess for you, and you already favor your daddy.

My hand beneath my pillow clenched into the fabric as reality came harshly back into the light of the swiftly breaking morning. No matter what I tried to tell myself, I could find no way that I could see this separation as a positive, especially when I wouldn’t be waking up like this for who knew how long. We had no idea how long he would be gone for. It could be days, weeks, and the more I thought about him leaving, the more my heart hurt.

The feeling of his lips brushing against the side of my neck made me close my eyes to savor the sensations.

“You are awake early.”

The sound of his sleepy voice created goosebumps along my skin.

“Mhmm,” I replied.

“I can feel your unhappiness, vhenan.”

I kept my eyes closed and focused on the feel of his chest pressed snugly against my back. The way he spooned me with his legs and knees bent to fit comfortably behind me, completely cocooning me within his warmth. I felt the breath of his heavy sigh against the nape of my neck and a small tear
leaked out of the corner of my eye to run into my pillow.

“Vhenan”

I could hear the unhappiness in his own voice and the heavy sigh I had tried to keep to myself, finally escaped.

“I’m allowed to be unhappy about your leaving, Solas,” I answered. I heard the huskiness of barely controlled emotion in my voice and tried to clear my throat without much luck. “I know why you are going, I understand that we don’t have a whole lot of choices right now, but nowhere in this decision do I have to be happy about it.”

I heard his soft snort with my reply and snuggled back into him as his arms closed around me. Gazing through the window back towards the mountains again, the sky was streaking with pinks and oranges heralding the approaching sun and I wished I could turn back time or stop it altogether so he wouldn’t have to leave.

“I concede your point,” he whispered against my head before pressing a kiss to the top of it. “I do not like leaving you either.”

Now it was my turn to snort.

“Are you sure about that? The closer it gets to bean making its way into this world, the meaner I get. All’s it would take is someone sneezing wrong and—kaboom! I’ll blow like a volcano.”

I gestured with my hands and imposing a bit of magic, it set off sparks from my fingertips in the predawn light over us. His soft chuckle with my silly actions brought a much-needed smile to my face and his arms tightened around me as he teased me.

“Your emotional state does lead me to question if it would be a wise choice for us to have more than one.”

I elbowed him in the stomach and his laughter filled our chamber. Rolling towards him, I loved how his eyes sparkled at me playfully. The way his hand came up to gently push my hair out of my face before touching my cheek while his other hand cradled the small of my back. *This is exactly what we needed, just this quiet moment between us*. I bent and pressed a kiss to his lips, whispering against his mouth.

“I love you.”

His lips curved against mine and tingles rushed through me with the small action. His lips traveled down my neck and the rush of sensations flooded me when he softly bit the tendon in my shoulder. The simple action made me bite my lip as a low moan escaped.

“Ar isalathe ma,” he whispered, spreading kissing down towards my chest.

“Ar ame mar.”

The sun had only truly risen about an hour ago as I followed after Solas down the stairs where he’d said Felassan waited for him. there was something about Felassan that I did not like, but for now, I am just going to chalk it up to pregnancy hormones since I really didn’t know him. I will bide my
time by waiting to see if Felassan would give me reasons for these feelings I had towards him. Solas pushed open the door and Felassan’s cool, lavender eyes held mine for a moment before he looked at Solas, completely ignoring me.

“Shall we,” he said gesturing towards the front door.

I knew that it must appear that he was leaving the castle when in fact, the two would come back in through the entrance in the valley that we used for the troops, so they could make their way back into the keep using the eluvian for where they needed to go. Ignoring Felassan’s expressionless face, I looked up as Solas turned towards me and pressed a gentle kiss to my forehead. Closing my eyes, concentrating on the feeling before opening my eyes again to look up at him.

“Try not to make us wait too long,” I whispered.

His answering small smile at my lame joke squeezed my heart when our bond flowed with a pang of sadness at our parting.

“I shall bear that in mind, vhenan.”

He gently squeezed my hand before letting it go and I watched him and Felassan walk out of the keep. Running my hand over the side of my stomach, I watched them until I couldn’t see them anymore. *Well, it’s just you and me now bean.*

The dining hall was full of nobles as I made my way to a table in a darker corner to eat something. Solas had already been gone for two weeks and each day he was gone, the less of an appetite I seemed to have. Another heavy sigh escaped me when I thought about Solas. Preparing to force another bite of my dinner in me, I stopped halfway to my mouth when I heard Dorian calling my name. I gave him a morose smile as he sat down across from me before finishing my bite of stew.

“Have you heard anything from him yet?”

I stared into my bowl of food and shook my head ‘no’ before pushing another bite in. I heard him sigh as he reached out to take my hand.

“I am sure he is quite alright, my dear.”

I nodded silently in agreement with him as I laid my spoon down.

“I know he is alright in here,” I replied pressing my hand over my heart. “But knowing that does not stop me from missing him any less.”

Dorian’s expression was full of compassion. I tried for a better smile not wanting to worry him so much about me and rubbed at the sharp twinge in my back. *I really miss his back rubs.* Dorian patted my hand as he stood and gave me a cheerful smile of his own to lift my spirits before he left. I watched him leave and turned back towards my lunch with disinterest.

*Eat, take a nap, deal with some correspondence, bathe then sleep… simple. Just rinse and repeat until he returns.* I kept the silent mantra running through my mind as I shoveled another bite of stew into my mouth.
Standing in front of my armoire preparing for bed, the smell of parchment and elfroot filled my senses. A strong thrum of longing filled me as wished I could touch him. Pulling one of his shirts from inside, I held it to my face and pressed my nose into the cloth, breathing deeply.

“I wish you were here,” I whispered into the cloth before taking another deep breath. Laying the shirt back inside, I flattened out the wrinkles my pulling it out had caused and took out my nightgown, slipping it over my head. Removing the braid from my hair, I ran my fingers through it before climbing into bed. As I did every night since he had left, I piled pillows around me and grabbed the one he normally slept on and snuggled it close.

Solas stared into the small campfire with frustration. For weeks they had searched for the Forbidden and found no traces of them. He felt the cautious looks of the others often watching him as he grew more and more frustrated with their lack of results. The longer he was away from Fenlin, the more irritable he became an only Felassan comprehended why he was acting the way he was. Constantly surrounded by his kin, there was no way he could safely visit with his mate in the fade to check up on her for fear they would discover her.

“What if they are using Andruil to protect them?”

Solas looked at Felassan and nodded his head in agreement.

“I have thought this might be the case when we could not establish any connection to them.”

His eyes moved to where Geldauran and Daem’thal stood across the fire from him directly behind Anaris. Their expressions also similar to his own—frustrated, but for different reasons than his own.

“It is as if they have disappeared entirely. I cannot sense their presence,” Daem’thal said to everyone with annoyance.

Anaris snapped a small twig she held in her hands and threw it into the fire with disgust.

“How could anyone possible sense anything in this disgustingly, heavy world. Everything is… disengaged, tranquil,” Anaris answered with a sneer. “It is as if there is no magic in this world.”

Solas listened to them and could not disagree with Anaris’ comment. The veil had taken much from this world and the feelings that they experienced since leaving the Abyss were not unexpected.

“It does take some getting used to,” Felassan replied with a smirk towards Anaris. “But I’m confident that a strong mage such as yourself, can overcome the sensation quickly.”

Anaris’ red gaze swiveled towards the elf wearing the slave marking of Mythal, her expression full of loathing.

“When I want your opinion, slave, I will ask for it. Until that moment, you should scarcely be seen
and most certainly not heard.”

Lavender eyes sparkled with excitement and Felassan cracked his knuckles in expectation of the verbal game. He was enjoying this outing more than he had originally anticipated.

“Careful, my lady,” he said with a mocking smile that bellied his nasty tone. “This slave, as you like to refer to me, is not under your control. Perhaps you would appreciate an education on our physical differences in this world.”

Solas watched the flush of anger rush over Anaris’ cheeks and darken. Holding out his hand tiredly, he needed them to stop before his headache grew any further. The two had instantly disliked each other from the moment they had looked upon the other and their verbal squalls were starting to get on his nerves.

“Enough—both of you. Your petty quarrels bring us no closer to finding them and to be honest, they give me a damn headache.”

“Agreed,” Geldauran seconded.

Solas gave him a grateful half-smile and rubbed his hands on his thighs.

“How shall we proceed if we cannot find traces of them anywhere?”

Solas glanced to Daem’thal and rubbed his neck with agitation. His plan had seemed so easy when he had contrived it. Because the Forgotten could sense their sentinels it was to be a simple matter of just following the trail. He had not foreseen that the Forbidden would take measures against such location.

“We have no choice but to wait for them to make the next move that will expose them to us.”

Everyone silently agreed with him as each nodded their head.

“Then we should return to the Abyss until it is time. The longer we are away, the more the probability increases that we will upset the balance of this world.”

Solas looked at Geldauran and nodded his head.

“Agreed”

With the decision made, they doused the fire and left the small campsite with their bedrolls and packs. Solas kept his steps unhurried as he moved with the others. Taking a calming breath, he gazed up at the stars for a moment before continuing down the path toward a hidden Eluvian. Soon vhenan, I will be home soon.
My eyes suddenly flashed open with a loud pounding on my door. Groaning, I slowly rolled and waved my hand in the general direction of the stairwell when I heard Cullen’s voice yelling through the thick, wooden door.

“You must get up Fenlin,” he yelled as he raced up my stairs. The sounds of metal sliding against metal as he ran up my stairs and his urgent sounding voice, instantly cleared the sleep from my mind. Sitting up, I pushed my hair out of my face and saw his profile outlined by only the light from the fireplace as he reached the landing and walked towards me hurriedly.

“Fenlin, Skyhold has come under attack. We need to get you out of here. Leliana and Zevran are awaiting you in the keep.”

I shook my head and slipped out of the bed in complete confusion with what he had just said.

“Slow down, Cullen. What do you mean we are under attack? Who is attacking?” I watched him rub a gloved hand through his hair in agitation.

“Undead, demons… Maker only knows what else. Our military has joined the mages on the battlements to ensure the barrier around the castle holds.”

I went towards my armoire and pulled out a light, woolen dress. Pulling it over my nightgown for added modesty, I shoved my feet into a pair of boots without any socks and strode with determined steps passed Cullen for my weapons rack. As soon as my hand wrapped around my staff, I felt Cullen’s hand clasp my arm, trying to stop me.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

I raised my eyebrow at him in annoyance and gave him a snarky smile.

“I’ve never thought you an idiot before Cullen.” Gesturing at myself, I snorted and answered him even more sarcastically. “What does it look like I’m doing?”

I felt Cullen’s fingers slightly tighten around my arm and his face grew red with anger.

“You are not going outside, Inquisitor. You will go downstairs, meet Leliana and Zevran, and you will follow their instructions—to the letter.”

Of all the… I yanked my arm from his grip and stared up into his own amber colored eyes that squinted down at me in anger as I tried to control my urge to throw him against the wall.

“You, overbearing… chauvinistic, nugs ass!” I replied, noting his small flinch with the sound of my voice vibrating around us angrily. “You do not command me, Commander. We can’t only focus on the bloody barrier, but we have to also focus on the bridge leading into Skyhold and the entrance for our military in the valley. The mages will need my help and you know it.”

Without letting him answer, I headed down the steps as quickly as my pregnant self could move and heard his hasty clunky steps following rapidly behind me. Reaching the landing, I pushed open the door and saw that Leliana and Zevran stood waiting for me and held up my hand at them.

“You two can continue waiting there or help me protect Skyhold.”

“Inq…” Leliana began hurriedly.
“No!” I snarled at her and walked past her ignoring the shared looks between Zevran, Cullen, and Leliana. I saw Dorian and Bull come through the door that led to the rotunda from the corner of my eye and noticed his angry scowl when he noticed I was heading for the doors with my staff. Trying to keep my anger under control with everyone’s incessant hovering but right now wasn’t the time for all their smothering.

“My dear… what in Maker’s name do you think you are doing.”

I growled at him, unable to take any more domineering men in my life. Why does everyone think I am in such need of fucking protection? Do they not realize that I am about to lose my shit if they don’t back the fuck off? It must have been something Bull saw in my expression that had him grabbing Dorian’s shoulder, stopping him.

“Don’t Kadan… she is about to blow.”

Dorian looked at him incredulously.

“Well, this is a brilliant idea, Amatus. Let’s allow the very pregnant Inquisitor lead the armies into battle!”

The only thing I heard out of his mouth was ‘allow’ and my aura flashed with indignation.

“Allow me?”

I watched as both Dorian and Bull took a step back from me. I knew that the surface of my eyes was swirling dangerously with Evanuris power in a visual warning, not unlike my voice would vibrate, but now I understood what Solas was trying to explain to me about my other abilities. I could feel the fire rushing through my veins on emotional, rolling waves, igniting and feeding my anger. Turning away from them, unsure of how I could use this power, I walked out of the keep’s front doors. Using my staff as a walking stick, I stood on the small landing that overlooked the courtyard as I appraised the situation.

There were mages on the battlements and a few on the ground, mixed with the rest of the military personnel. From a distance, I watched while Fiona moved through the mages on the battlements, her voice a bastion of knowledge and confidence as she called out directions. Right now, the fact that she was a former Grey Warden was a blessing since she moved and spoke with a calmness that assured the other mages.

I ignored Cullen’s angry gaze that he shot me as he walked by and started shouting orders to the men and women in the courtyard. I noticed that there were more than a few Templar’s in the mix of soldiers that answered to his orders quickly. I glanced behind me and saw that Leliana, Zevran, Dorian, and Bull were standing behind me also surveying the area. Hearing the sound of my name being called, I glanced back down towards the courtyard and saw Hawke and Fenris striding towards me from the direction of the tavern. I continued down the stairs and met them at the bottom.

Hawke pulled her staff from her back and slightly leaned on it while she held my gaze.

“What’s the plan?”

I glanced around at where the forces were focused and noticed that Cullen had at least listened to me when I’d told him that we should also focus on clearing the bridge. Noticing the ebb and flow of the opposing forces, anyone could see that our soldiers needed more magical backup. When I saw that it was Cullen and Cassandra out there leading the charge, I gestured towards the bridge and glanced around at everyone.
“We go and clear that trash off our lawn.”

Bull cracked his knuckles and kissed my cheek quickly, pointing at my stomach.

“No’s the time to do that magic-thingy you do to keep bean safe,” he said while wiggling his fingers at me.

I ran my hands over my swollen stomach, weaving the magical enchantment. Once it was in place, I checked and made sure that there were no gaps and nodded at everyone.

“Alright, I know you guys are tired of sitting around here while I gestate and frankly, so am I. So, let’s get out there and help Cassandra and the Commander and blow off some much-needed steam.”

It didn’t take much to prod Bull as he quickly took off for the bridge, pulling his ax free of its harness on his back. Fenris smiled wickedly before pressing a brief kiss to Hawke’s cheek and take off after Bull, leaving the rest of us to shake our heads at the two’s enthusiasm.

“Well, let’s not keep the enemies waiting.”

Casting a barrier around us, we moved towards the bridge to lend the warriors some magical aid.

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Ar isalathe ma - I need (desire) you
Ar ame mar - I am yours
The Arrival of the Bean!

Chapter Notes

I hope this was worth the wait, enjoy!

"Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart."
- Winnie the Pooh

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Solas consoled himself with the knowledge that he would be back within hours as he and Felassan made their way through a rising storm up the mountain pass. He had wanted to use the Eluvian inside the bottom of Skyhold to get back quicker but listened to Felassan when he logically pointed out that they were not so far, and it would indeed be far more convincing if they returned through the front gate.

For a week they had traveled from the unknown ruin outside of the Crossroads which held an Eluvian. Setting up camp every night except for tonight. Tonight, he would not stop when he was so close. Every step he took, brought him closer and his only goal was to get to Skyhold and hold her, hear her voice, feel her warmth.

The passing weeks had been agonizing without her and gratefully, Felassan had chosen not to mention her as they traveled together. When he took one more step into the gale-force winds, he felt a wave of magic hit him in the chest along with the cold gust, pushing him back. Squinting his eyes into the snowy night, he could see nothing, but he could feel and taste the magic on the air that swirled around them.

“There is a large amount of magic being used up ahead,” Felassan said as he too looked out into the frozen night.

Solas knew whose magic they were feeling, and his blood ran cold.

“Fen’edhis,” he growled sprinting into the dark.

Chasing after him, Felassan followed in confusion.

“What do you mean, ‘fen’edhis’?”

Solas ignored him as he pushed through the cold night. Warm air puffed out of his mouth as he ran and as they drew closer to the castle, was where he found wraiths, undead, and demons moving towards the castle and the feel of her magic grew stronger on the air. He could make no sense to what was going on, but he could guess.

Fighting his way to the bridge leading into Skyhold was when he saw her, and his breath left him at the sight. She was flanked by Dorian and Hawke who continued to rain fire and lightning down on the undead that was pushing towards the warriors in front of them. With an unsteady breath, he studied her as she stepped slowly forward.

She held her marked hand in the air above her as she effortlessly controlled the holy barrier, she’d cast to keep everything away from her. While she drew the fade around her with her other hand, she
rained down over her enemies flaming rocks of fade fire. He saw that arrows and magic fragmented against her barrier.

His heart double beat in his chest with how beautiful she was with her black hair flying around her face in indignant flicks with the magic she called upon. Her skin glowing with an ethereal fire that followed along with her aura and from his vantage point, he could see that her normally amber gaze, swirled with molten silver and held the gaze of death for her enemies and he was in awe.

The sound Felassan’s broken intake of air broke the mesmerizing moment and he whipped his head towards him.

“You failed to tell me that she and Mythal are… one.”

“May we discuss this later? If you have not noticed, we have the advantage of attacking our enemy from behind.”

Not waiting for Felassan’s answer, he pushed through the enemy lines with a singular focus.

The sensation of his aura was unmistakable, and I searched for him through the crowds of soldiers and enemies. As I continued to search, my gaze finally found him with Cullen, Cassandra, Bull, and Fenris, moving towards her. The love he fed me through our bond brought tears of joy to my eyes that he was finally back.

I pulled my gaze from his strong form and glanced around the area, including the valley below. *There are just too fucking many of them and I am so tired of fighting.* I gently spoke the spell that pushed out the holy barrier, not unlike the one Solas and I had cast in the Hissing Wastes. My knees shook and my arm lit up like a broken vase with the magical power I channeled. I felt Dorian and Hawke’s hands instantly on my arms not only holding me up but channeling their own magic into me as the barrier grew. It was not long before I began feeling more mages channeling their magic through me and the power was so staggering that I was grateful that Dorian and Hawke held onto me. With the mages combined power, the barrier now encompassed the whole of Skyhold, steadily moving outward.

Eyes closed, I kept my singular focus on projecting the barrier further, but the gentle touch of his hand over mine had my eyes flying back open to gaze up at him. His energy channeled through the anchor and I bit my lip as it threw the barrier out, destroying anything in its wake. Shaking and drained from the magical energy I had expelled, I started to crumble. His arms easily slid beneath my legs, picking me up and without a word, carried me towards the keep.

“You’re home.”

His lips met mine for only a moment not stopping his progress towards the keep. Burying my nose into the collar at his neck, I took a deep breath of his scent. Taking another breath, it hitched with the hard twinge I felt in my back. I felt him lengthen his strides across the courtyard, almost bounding up the stairs to the keep. *Well, he’s in a hurry?* My lips grew into a large smile with the thought.
Not long after the first one, there was another sharp twinge and our chamber door flew open with his use of magic. The feel of his magic as he warded the door was instantaneous as he bounded up the stairs to our chamber. I was starting to wonder if all the magic that I channeled had hurt bean when I felt another sharp twinge that speared over my stomach and I hissed with the discomfort of this one. *That’s not like the others.* I ran my hand over my stomach, removing the barrier around bean while Solas walked towards the bed. I knew our child was safe, I could feel it in the marrow of my bones even as I felt another strong twinge, this one accompanied by a hard kick from bean.

“Ahhh… ouch, ouch, ouch.”

Solas laid me on the bed and went to our bathroom, returning with a huge stack of linens. He pulled off my gown and then nightgown. Pulling out a shirt that Bull had given me as my belly had grown larger and slipped it over my head. *What is he doing?* I watched him silently as he started laying down the absorbent towels, one on top of another and then pick me up and lay me on them. Unable to keep silent any longer, I spoke while he busily started propping pillows up behind me.

“Solas, what are you…” this time there was a strong pain that stole my breath that centered into my lower back, radiating outward and I moaned low, gripping the bedsheets. When the pain subsided, I was now glad for the thick layer of towels beneath me because I was pretty sure I had just wet the bed. *Did my water just break?* I looked up at him in horror with the embarrassing sensation.

“Am I in labor?” No sooner had I asked the fearfully spoken question, I was instantly gripped in a pain, unlike anything I had ever felt before. I felt a cool cloth on my forehead and opened my eyes to look into his tender ones.

“I believe our child is tired of waiting, vhenan.”

Suddenly, I gripped his wrist, looking at him anxiously.

“But it’s too soon.”

His fingers smoothed over the lines of worry around my mouth and shook his head.

“Only by a few weeks. It will be okay.”

His words were reassuring and then the next contraction gripped me strongly and I screamed while I felt like my body was splitting in two. His hand held mine tightly until the contraction passed and I opened my eyes to look at him.

“I will go and gather Dorian as we discussed and return shortly.”

I gripped his fingers not wanting to let him go now that he had returned. He must have sensed my unwillingness to allow him to leave me and pressed a kiss to my head.

“I will only be a moment, vhenan.”

I finally nodded my head and let his hand go. I followed his hurried movements out of our chamber. When I could no longer see him, I ran my hands over my stomach. I couldn’t believe it was finally time. For some reason, I had honestly started to believe that I was going to be pregnant forever. As another contraction rushed over me, I gripped the sheets and groaned loudly.

“Son of a…”

“Now my dear, that is not the first words you want your child to learn”
I turned towards Dorian’s calm voice and grimaced more than smiled as wave after wave ran over me.

“I’m going to just take a quick look and see how far we are before we can finally discover who won the bet.”

I was too busy trying to ride the strong pain that threatened to rip me apart, that I could care less and after a brief moment, I felt his gentle pat on my knee as he spoke to Solas and me, though I was still focused on controlling my breathing.

“It would appear this child is definitely in a hurry, so I would estimate maybe a few more hours before they make their debut.”

My eyes flashed open in alarm to look at Solas’ calm face and I picked up my head from the pillows to stare at my friend over the large mound of belly between my bent knees.

“A few hours? You make that sound like it’s nothing but a pleasant walk in the bloody garden.”

Dorian only held my gaze and I let my head drop back to the pillow as I groaned with another contraction. The feel of Solas’ hand in mine anchored me and my gaze held his. *Walk in the garden…*

With Solas’ whispered words of encouragement in my ear and after six hours of cursing, groaning, screaming, I was beyond exhausted, but it had all been worth it. The fact that every part of my body felt like I had just been dragged through a knothole didn’t matter. Every agonizing moment had led up to this and now I finally held bean in my arms. Solas sat behind me, propping me up as he gently touched our son’s cheek in quiet wonder while he fed. I couldn’t stop staring at him as he suckled greedily from my breast.

I touched his long fingers that lay near his face reminding me of his fathers, then softly moved to the dark cap of downy soft hair surrounding his little crown that was going to be my contribution. I traced the soft shell of his tiny elven ear that lay against his head that was beyond adorable with its little point at the top. Short, dark lashes lay against his tiny cheeks as they moved vigorously. It was too soon to say what color his eyes would be, but I have a feeling that they will be like his fathers. Ten fingers, ten toes and had been very indignant of the cold room until Dorian had swaddled him and given him to me so he could eat.

“He is perfect,” I whispered as tears slipped down my cheeks.

The hand that he had on my other shoulder, squeezed gently and I felt his lips slightly tremble against the side of my cheek as he kissed me.

“He is,” he answered in an emotionally thick voice.

I finally tore my gaze from our child and glanced at him over my shoulder. Our bond hummed with our shared love and joy over this small being that we’d created.

“What should we name our son?”

His eyes lifted from bean, his expression still full of wonder while his soft smile widened.
“I had not thought of names for a son. I was quite sure we would have a daughter, who would be much like you.”

I chuckled.

“I see. So, you have no thoughts?”

I held his gaze for a silent moment before he stretched his hand out and cupped my chin. Closing my eyes, his thumb gently grazed my cheek before he pressed a soft kiss to my lips.

“Emithlen,” he finally answered.

Opening my eyes to look at him, I smiled as I turned beans new name around in my head, liking the sound of it.

“I like the sound of Emithlen, but you know me, I’m still going to call him bean.”

Solas’ smile broadened, and he kissed me again before looking back down at our son who still nursed hungrily.

“He does have his father’s appetite that’s for sure.”

His soft laughter rumbled against my back before his lips pressed against my temple.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” he said against my skin.

“I love you too.”

Chapter End Notes

Vhenan - my heart
Fen’edhis - universal curse word (literal translation is: wolf dick)

*For those of you who wondered if bean's name meant something it does. Emithlen means to behold.*
I hope everyone will enjoy the new chapter and thank you, everyone, for your continued support with my crazy drabble.

Once Solas and Dorian had deemed Emithlen a healthy boy, he showed us all just how healthy he was and with very little surprise to any of us in the room, our son’s aura hummed with power. Dorian’s shocked expression was definitely not one I would ever forget as Emithlen’s little body had an ethereal glow to it. Solas and I could only look at each other as we finally understood truly what we had created together—the next generation of immortal Elvhen.

Once bean was swaddled and handed over to me, Dorian spoke quietly with Solas for a moment and they shared a small nod of understanding before Dorian went to open the chamber door. I could tell that Dorian was worried about bean’s magic, but I wasn’t, and I knew neither was Solas. I think we would have been surprised had our child not shown from the moment they took their first breath that they had some kind of magical abilities. Focusing on my feeding son, I delicately touched the crown of his head and smiled gently at him as I watched. Yawning with exhaustion, I ran my finger over his little brow slightly wrinkled and the sight made me think of Solas when he was concentrating. You are going to be nothing but trouble, just like your father, I can already tell. His little fingers slightly gripped at the skin above his little face as if he could hear me and he disagreed, making me smile.

Everyone that entered the room moved with the precision of a military strike. Each of them telling me not to move from my place against the stack of pillows Solas had strategically propped me against and let them handle everything. Little did they know that I was pretty sure that if I tried to stand up right now, everything, including bean’s previous home, was going to fall out and land on the floor. Nothing about my body felt normal and besides, I didn’t want to move anyway because I couldn’t stop staring at my son as he slept against me. After he had fed and been burped, he fell asleep against me and though I was physically exhausted, I couldn’t sleep, not yet.

After Emithlen was born and Solas and I had been given a moment alone with our son, there was a bustle of activity in our chambers. Bull brought in the wooden cradle that the Chargers had made for bean. It was made from dark wood and shaped like a half-moon on a pedestal that rocked. Everyone else reminded me of a moving company as they brought in other items for the baby. Grim and Stitches brought in two small armoires for the baby clothing and for the cloth diapers. The cradle Bull and the boys made was prepared with linens and bedding all soft shades of dark green and red that I knew Krem would have sewn for him and Bull brought it close to my side of the bed. Standing next to the bed, Bull cast a large shadow over us as he looked down at bean sleeping. Glancing up at him, I caught the same look of wonder in his eye that Solas had when he looked at his son.

Before I could say anything to him, he pressed a kiss to my forehead. “Introductions later Boss, you just rest.” He stood up and motioned for the guys to follow him. “Let’s go, boys, we got some celebrating to do and they got some sleeping to do.”
“Bull,” I called out to him before he could leave. “Will you at least tell me who won the bet before you go?”

Bull snorted and his entire face scrunched with annoyance.

“Zevran, that sneaky little ba...” he quickly cut himself off.

I softly laughed at his sudden look of irritation before he waved at me and left with the rest of the boys. Solas followed them down the stairs and once they were gone, he warded the door. I yawned tiredly when he returned to our room and walked towards our bed. He stopped at the cradle and I watched him trace runes into the woodwork to keep beans magic from harming himself while he slept until he could understand what it was all about. Yawning again, I rested my head back and watched him lazily as he walked around the cradle. Bending, he pressed a kiss to my lips before moving to take bean from me.

“Let me put our son to bed, vhenan.”

I watched him hold our son close to his chest and press a kiss to his forehead before laying him down in the cradle. Once Emithlen was tucked in safely, he turned back towards me. My eyes were half closed just watching him. He bent and gently held me against him with one arm while his other removed the large stack of pillows so that I would no longer be propped up. Before he could lay me down, I kissed his neck, smiling at him tiredly.

His hand caressed my face and I leaned into the touch.

“I believe your day has been a busy one, sleep vhenan.”

It didn’t take much pushing to get me to do that and I fell swiftly asleep.

“You fool!”

The coldly spoken words were followed by a loud, thunderous assault of magic. Imshael slammed into the large poplar tree ten feet behind him and slid to the ground. Xebenkeck rushed to loom over him angrily, his hands clenched into bloodless fists.

“Are you trying to get us all killed?”

Imshael snorted and wiped the blood from his mouth with the back of his wrist as he stared up at Xebenkeck with insolent black eyes.

“Your complete lack of vision is appalling, brother.”
Imshael’s flippant words only angered Xebenkeck and he yanked Imshael up by the throat to hang suspended in the air.

“I should do the Dread Wolf’s work for him…” he snarled angrily while squeezing Imshael’s throat.

“Enough you two, your infighting will solve nothing,” Gaxkang said, placing a restraining hand on Xebenkeck’s shoulder. “We must now decide on our course of action.”

Xebenkeck dropped Imshael with disgust.

“We would not need a course of action if this void-ridden pestilence wasn’t so insolent. Now we must not only deal with the wolf and his mate, but we must also deal with the Forgotten because of his actions.”

Imshael’s normally aloof and teasing expression changed to one of livid rage.

“Something had to be done or that pampered fool, Andruil, was going to ruin it all by getting herself killed before it was time. I had to show her that to attack Skyhold now, there was no possibility that she could win. What you deem foolish, kept every one of us from getting acquired by the Forgotten, or perchance you didn’t notice that part.”

Xebenkeck shook his head at Imshael.

“Had you not begun with your tricks and desire to be the center of attention, the Forgotten would never have even been involved,” he snapped. “You think I should thank you for your actions? You have provoked the wolf to take an even more extreme avenue of action.” Black eyes flashed with anger at him. “He was willing to allow us to return to the Abyss—no harm no foul. What do you think his recourse will be now after attacking his mate? The one you failed to notice, was very heavy with his child?” He sneered and his hand cut through the air. “He will make sure that each and every one of us will die the true death to never be reborn again. You have sealed our fate brother. We should have had a say in your method before you doomed us all.”

Silence prevailed in the grove of trees as they contemplated their fate. The cold, intangible presence of the fourth entered the space. Her sigh echoed through the trees.

“Stop being so dramatic Xebenkeck. There is still hope that we shall prevail, but there cannot be any more mistakes.”

Xebenkeck shook his head before crossing his arms unable to see any way out of their current situation.

“Then what would you suggest we do sister to get us out of this mess we have been dragged into?”

The sound of her sigh echoed before her calculating and cool voice filled the space like a winter fog.

“We must not lose sight of Andruil’s hatred for the wolf’s mate. If we wait and watch, the opportune time will present itself so we may bring the two enemies together.”

“And Fen’Harel?”

“I have some thoughts about what we should do with the wolf…”
“You’ve got to move a bit quicker, Solas.”

I was watching bean while Solas changed his wet nappy and waited for the signs that our beautiful progeny was about to let the waterworks loose now that cool air touched him. I learned quickly not to dillydally when changing bean’s diaper or you got a peed on. I mentally snorted at the stuff I had learned since having a child.

“I do not believe this needs to be a race, vhenan. It is but a simple changing of his …”

His sentence cut short quickly when he hid his face behind the cloth diaper he was holding while our precious son let the water fly and soaked the front of his shirt. I held my sides while peals of laughter echoed in our chamber at Solas’ absolutely surprised expression on what had just happened when Emithlen was finished. Moving towards our armoire, I pulled out a clean tunic for him as I still continued to laugh and laid it out on the bed for him. When I turned around, Solas had finished changing Emithlen with a slight smirk on his face.

“This is why you encouraged me to move quicker.”

I giggled while he put bean in the cradle and then pulled his soiled shirt off. When he went to the bathroom to wash up, I went to bean’s side and touched his cheek. His brilliant grey-blue eyes so much like his fathers, stared up at me somewhat cross as he tried to focus on me. I smiled at him and kissed his cheek.

“That’s my boy… dead center in the chest -- ten points,” I whispered.

I glanced at Solas when he walked out of the bathroom and picked up the shirt I had laid out on the bed.

“Perhaps you should have given me that bit of information on our son’s tendency before I began changing him.”

I snorted and pressed another kiss to bean’s soft cheek before standing up.

“Hey, I thought we could share an educational moment together. Besides, I don’t see where the fun is if I had told you.”

His laughter was quick, and he walked towards me, eyes sparkling with mischief. There was no doubt that he would make me pay for this little trick.

It was nice that everyone had given Solas and I a couple of weeks to get used to this whole parenting thing, but now it was time for us to also learn how to juggle our other responsibilities. Solas had chosen to keep to our chambers for his research and reading so he could be with bean while I attended my meetings and made my rounds. Once my meeting was finished, I would return to our
chambers and attend Emithlen’s needs before tackling my mountain of correspondence. I didn’t want to admit it, but I envied Solas this opportunity. I would much rather stay in my chambers with bean and let him handle all the bullshit.

Right now, our son was the best-kept secret in Skyhold because no one had actually seen him yet except for Dorian, Bull, and his chargers. Today after my meeting, I would bring the council up to meet him first. I pressed another kiss to bean’s cheek before walking towards Solas. His arms wrapped around me and pulled me closer to him.

“It will take time for me to become accustomed to not having our son in between us.”

I laughed and glanced down at my stomach that still slightly pooched out. Compared to right after bean was born, I had still looked pregnant, but my body was slowly returning back to a semblance of normal. I had small little stretchmarks over my hipbones, but otherwise, everything was almost back to the way it was before, well, almost everything. My breasts were still not my own. With them full of milk, I hardly recognized my own chest that used to be A-cups that were now probably more like C-cups. My former feelings of envy at women who had larger busts was swiftly forgotten as I realized they got in the damn way, but at least I could wear my pre-pregnancy clothes again, even if they were a bit tight in the chest, and it felt good to slip into something other than a damn maternity dress.

“Hmm,” I replied slipping a bit closer and walking my fingers up his chest to encircle his neck. “I know you’ll adapt quickly.”

His laughter was deep and comforting before he bent and kissed me lovingly. A few moments of soft kisses, I stepped back and winked at him.

“I will be back as soon as the meeting is over with the others.”

He nodded, sending me love through our bond and sharing an understanding smile with me before walking to the bookshelf. I glanced at bean and with a deep breath, forced myself to leave our chambers for the war room.

Crossing the main hall was slow as I was stopped by nobles full of congratulations, but finally reaching the door, I closed it behind me with a sigh of relief. Walking down the hall towards the large wooden door that led to the war room and pushing it open, there stood everyone waiting for me. After closing the door, I smiled at everyone as I walked towards the large table with the map in the middle. It felt like forever since I had been in here when in fact, it had only been a few weeks. I looked at everyone and focused first on Leliana.

“Well, hit me, what do you have for me?”

Leliana sharply nodded and pushed papers towards me that held reports that her agents had gathered.

“We are still looking into who ordered the siege on Skyhold. At this time, there is little evidence and none of it is pointing towards Corypheus or his Venatori agents. What we do know is that Venatori are making their way to the eastern part of the Emerald Graves known as the Arbor wilds. Rumor is that there is an elven temple there.”

I nodded, listening to her while studying the reports.

“How much time do we have before we can expect his entire force there?”

She shrugged.
“It is uncertain, I will keep you updated on their progress.”

“Perhaps Samson will appear there as we have been unable to ascertain his whereabouts as well,” Cullen commented.

I nodded my head agreeing with him.

“It would be nice to catch that slippery bastard once and for all. I am sure the Templars we have here in Skyhold would just love to see him again.”

Cullen chuckled.

“Well, I do know that Sir Barrister would appreciate that opportunity.”

We shared an understanding look.

“I bet he would.”

Josephine cleared her throat, grabbing my attention.

“Empress Celine and King Allister have sent gifts for the new young master as have many noble houses of Orlais and Ferelden. Also, Thane Sun-hair from Strong-Bear Hold sent the young master a pony that Master Dennet informs me is a strong animal along with a letter for you.”

I shook my head at the silliness of it all but kept my mouth shut and glanced at the obscenely large stack of papers in front of Josephine. Gesturing towards the stack, I cleared my own throat.

“Are those all the congratulations and whatever other kinds of bullshit?”

Josephine gave me a disapproving look before answering me.

“They are indeed correspondence wishing you well.”

My fingers tapped on the surface of the table as I studied the stack.

“And how many other stacks require my attention?”

I held Josephine’s hazel gaze with a raised eyebrow. I had missed the way Josephine’s expressions would flit across her face before she could control them.

“I have arranged the other reports and correspondence in order of importance. I will have them brought to your chambers this afternoon.”

Just the thought of how much she would have delivered later made me want to pull out my hair.

“That will be fine Josephine. However, I would like you to find me an assistant to help me with the never-ending stacks of paperwork. I can’t keep up with all of it and take on Corypheus.”

Josephine nodded her head in agreement as she wrote on her always present clipboard.

“Of course, Inquisitor. I shall begin my search today.”

After an hour of listening to reports from Leliana and Cullen, the meeting finally closed, and I escorted everyone to my chambers. Entering my room, I saw that Solas stood by the fire with bean
cradled in his arms. He wore a tender smile as his eyes met mine. Walking towards him, I kissed bean on the forehead before he bent and kissed me in greeting.

Leliana and Josephine moved towards Solas and glanced down at bean, softly cooing over him while my son’s bright grey-blue eyes gazed up at them. I noticed Cullen had not moved towards Solas and I glanced at him curiously. He was staring at Emithlen with curiosity but also anxiously. I walked towards him and linked my arm through his somewhat startling him.

“It’s just a baby, Cullen.”

He snorted and rubbed his neck nervously.

“I can see that.”

I shook my head at him and glanced at Solas who wore a slight smirk at Cullen’s obvious discomfort. I felt Cullen’s arm stiffen as Solas walked towards him with bean.

“Perhaps vhenan, it will help if he actually holds Emithlen.”

Cullen started shaking his head vigorously.

“I don’t want to hurt him or…”

Solas slipped bean into Cullen’s arms, ignoring his protests.

“Nonsense Commander, you will not hurt him.”

Cullen’s expression went from fearful to awestruck. Leliana, Josephine, and I shared a knowing smile as we watched Cullen study bean silently. He finally looked up at me with a little smile.

“He has your hair.”

I snorted and replied teasingly as Solas’ arm slipped around me, pulling me closer to him.

“Good thing too or he’d be bald the rest of his life.”

Solas kissed the top of my head as he shared in the laughter. We all watched Cullen get comfortable holding bean and after a while, I felt a tingling in my breasts that forewarned me it was time to feed Emithlen. Not more than a second passed and I had felt the sensation, bean started fussing. Cullen looked at me slightly scared as if he had done something wrong and I chuckled, shaking my head at him.

“He’s hungry Cullen, don’t look so frightened.”

His expression was full of relief as I took bean from him and walked towards the couch to get settled. Josephine, Leliana, and Cullen started for the stairs.

“We shall leave you both to go about your day and perhaps we may return to see Emithlen later?” Josephine questioned as she crossed the room towards the stairs.

“Sounds good to me, Josephine. Don’t forget about that assistant,” I replied.

“I won’t, Inquisitor,” she replied before following the others down the stairs.

Emithlen was instantly quiet as soon as he latched on and I ran a finger over his soft cheek as he ate.
“Assistant?”

I glanced up at Solas as he moved to sit next to me and put his arm around me, pulling me closer to him. Pressing my back against his chest, I rested against him enjoying the position we had adopted when feeding bean so he could watch.

“Yes, I asked Josephine to find me an assistant to help field all the paperwork. I can’t keep up with it all, especially now with bean here.”

He reached out and ran his hand over bean’s head, his chin rested on my shoulder as he watched.

“I have been telling you since we arrived in Skyhold to get help and it took the arrival of our son to finally convince you to get an assistant?”

I snorted, ignoring his smarty pants tone.

“Yeah, well, maybe he was just more persuasive than you.”

I caught his eye roll and laughed as he pressed a quick kiss to my cheek.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan.”

I winked at him and smiled before kissing him back.

“I love you too, Solas.”
“Are you sure about this design, Fenlin? It… it just doesn’t seem very sturdy or safe. Perhaps you should try carrying something in it before you put in Master Emithlen.”

I heard Helene’s hesitant voice while I slipped the baby sling over my shoulder, wrapping the ends around my waist twice before tying it off on the side.

“No need Helene this is perfectly safe, you’ll see,” I replied while picking up bean and slipping him into the hammock styled sling. “There you go little man, you wanted to hang out with your mamae today didn’t you?”

He had just started smiling this week and every time he did my heart just melted. I tapped the little dimple in his chin that was just like his fathers and grinned back at him.

“That’s what I thought.”

I turned around to show Helene that what I had asked her to make was actually quite sturdy and safe for a baby to sit or lie in.

“See Helene, I told you there was nothing to worry about. I’m telling you, you could make a fortune if you made more of these and sold them in Val Royeaux to the women there.”

I watched her tap her finger against her chin thoughtfully.

“You could send them to your sister to try and sell in her shop,” I tried with a persuasive look.

Helene nodded in agreement and walked towards me to look inside at bean all snug as a bug in a rug in his new little carrier.

“If I do, then you will share in the profits with me since it was your design.”

I held my hand out to her, “deal”. Shaking on it, we left my chambers.

Parting outside of my door, the walk across the keep made me feel like I was some runway model with the way everyone was studying me. I quickened my steps for the front doors and left the keep before any of them could stop me from making my way to the barn. It had been a long time since I had seen Master Dennet and the animals, not to mention just being outside.

Greeted by the smells of hay and animal when I walked through its large wooden archway brought a smile to my face. I grabbed a couple of apples from the barrel in the corner near the doorway and walked towards Etta, Inansha, and Siugen. Inansha’s impatient bugle made me laugh as I walked towards him first.
“I’m coming handsome… just control yourself.”

I could hear the sounds of his feet stomping as he snorted and shook his head at me as I approached. Holding my hand out to him, he sniffed and then rubbed his muzzle into my palm. I scratched his forehead and rubbed his jaw, his eyes closed and leaned into my hand heavily.

“You are being a silly animal,” I muttered feeding him the apple.

“I see you finally found your way back.”

I slightly turned towards Master Dennet’s voice as he rounded the corner smiling.

“You knew I would,” I commented casually returning his smile.

“Aye, I did at that. I was wondering when those in the keep would stop with all their fussing over you.”

I snorted and shook my head.

“Oh, they haven’t stopped with all their fussing, I’m just not listening to any of them and doing what I want.”

His laughter filled the air as I gave him a cheeky smile. Dennet walked towards me and glanced at what appeared to be a cloth bag strapped to my chest curiously.

“Girl, what in the Maker’s name is that you have wrapped around you?”

I stepped closer to him so he could see inside.

“Well I’ll be damned,” he said softly as he stared down into bean’s grey-blue eyes. “He is a handsome fellow.”

I chuckled.

“Well, Solas and I like to think so, but since we are his parents, we tend to be a bit biased on the matter.”

“And rightly so, I think,” he said before patting my shoulder. “You two did good.”

“Thanks,” I replied, my voice a bit emotional.

I smiled up at him and leaned up, pressing a quick kiss to his weathered cheek, making him blush and get all flustered with me.

“Now go on with you, I got work to do.”

I smiled at his retreating back and left the barn after giving the remaining apples to Etta and Siugen. Walking up the stairs leading to Cullen’s office, I glanced out over the courtyard catching sight of Cassandra sparing with a dummy. I don’t think the woman ever just takes a day to relax, I thought before knocking on Cullen’s door. The sound of his voice was muffled by the thick, wooden door and I pulled it open.

Cullen sat at his desk surrounded by paperwork and I shook my head.

“I see that you too are fighting the demons of paperwork,” I joked with him as I moved towards the chair in front of his desk.
Cullen snorted and leaned back in his chair, rubbing his face.

“‘It is a fight that I never seem to win,’” he replied.

His look was curious as he stared at where bean lay behind the cloth wall.

“What in Maker’s name are you wearing?”

I chuckled and slipped bean out of the hammock.

“I am wearing my son,” I replied cheekily.

Cullen watched me adjust Emithlen as I explained my new contraption.

“I don’t like being tied to my room because Emithlen needs to be fed so often. So, with Helene’s help, we created a baby sling of sorts so I could bring him with me.”

He nodded in understanding, his eyes looking at bean before looking into mine.

“Is it wise to bring him out of the keep so soon?”

I laughed at his question that sounded an awful lot like Solas’ comment when I told him what I was going to do, and I brought bean over to him. Cullen took bean this time without a frightened expression but wore one of happiness.

“He’ll be fine, and I think the fresh air is just as good for him as it is me.”

I turned towards the opening door where one of Cullen’s assistants came in from the battlements.

“Commander, I have the latest reports from Lady Nightingale.”

Cullen gestured for him to lay them on his desk with his chin not taking his attention away from bean.

“Thank you, Lieutenant.”

I waited for the man to leave before gesturing towards the report, my curiosity killing me.

“May I?”

Cullen nodded and I picked it up, opening it quickly. If we could just find Corypheus it would be a solid step forward, instead of this stagnant place we were at now. I scanned the page looking for anything that would help, and my gaze fell on the location the Venatori were all converging on, the Arbor Wilds. What could be there that they are so interested in?

“What did you find?”

I sighed and laid the report on his desk, shaking my head.

“Nothing that we didn’t already know, but there is just something that keeps running around in my head.”

Cullen’s gaze withdrew from bean who held his large finger tightly and looked at me.

“What?”

“Why the Arbor Wilds? What is there that is drawing them like flies to crap?”
Cullen snorted and glanced back down at Emithlen, smiling at him.

“Who knows. Leliana’s agents have been unable to get close enough to find out.”

I chewed on the inside of my lip as I thought more about it and then snapped my fingers.

“We’ve been going about this whole mess the wrong way, Cullen.”

He looked up at me with an eyebrow raised while waiting for me to finish.

“We needed to send someone along with her agents that they wouldn’t see coming as Solas did to Vivienne.”

Cullen slightly grimaced and his expression did nothing to hide how he didn’t like my idea.

“You’re speaking about asking Cole to go with them.”

I sighed and threw up my hands at him in annoyance.

“And why not? Cole can hear their thoughts and gather the information we desperately need so we can pull Sampson and Corypheus out of hiding. If we are going to win this whole bloody war, we have to stop playing by some unseen playbook, Cullen.”

His loud sigh filled the room before he nodded his head in agreement.

“Perhaps you are right. We should discuss this with the others in the morning meeting and see what they think about it.”

Agreeing with him, I took bean from his arms and slipped him back into the hammock. His little mouth opening with a tired yawn.

“I will put together some ideas that have been kicking around in my head and see what everyone thinks about them tomorrow. See you later Cullen,” I said before heading out the door and walking down the stairs.

After making my rounds and spending a bit of time in Cassandra’s room to feed bean, I made my way back to the keep. As soon as I entered the main hall, one of Josephine’s many assistants hurried towards me.

“Inquisitor,” she said hurriedly as she stopped in front of me and curtsied.

I slightly adjusted bean as she continued.

“Lady Ambassador would appreciate it if you would meet with her in her office.”

I gave her a smile and nodded trying not to groan when she curtsied again and hurried off. I was making my way across the hall when I was then stopped by Marquis DeLeu. The older Marquis and his wife had journeyed to Skyhold at the request of Empress Celine to keep her informed of the Inquisitions movements. As far as Marquis go, he and his wife were not horrible, although, I wish they didn’t wear the hideous masks.
“Your Worship, it is good to see you up and looking so well so soon after your childbearing.”

“Thank you, Marquis, it feels good to take in the fresh air and scenery and how is your wife today?”

“She has taken ill these past few days with a cough and a fever. I do not know what ails her as it came over her quite suddenly.”

I expressed concern by pressing my hand on his arm uncaring that for Orlesian’s the gesture would seem inappropriate.

“Would you like me to have a healer sent to your quarters?”

The Marquis patted my hand and let out a small relieved breath.

“Since we are so far from our own healers, it would make me feel easier if you would be so kind, Your Worship.”

I nodded my head and walked past him towards the door leading to Josephine’s office. Entering her office, I saw the young woman Cole had brought back with him from Redcliff sitting in one of Josephine’s highbacked chairs. I sat in the chair Josephine gestured towards that is next to Marian and answered her questioning gaze.

“Emithlen is in here, also can you have a healer visit Marquis DeLeu’s wife. She has been unwell for a few days.”

Josephine studied the sling for a moment before nodding her head at me while she scribbled down my request on a piece of paper andgestured towards Marian.

“I believe I have found the assistant that you requested.”

I look at Marian and see her quick nod as Josephine continues.

“She is versed in reading and writing and according to her teachers she is quite competent with her studies and has progressed very well since starting.”

I listened as Josephine pretty much gave me Marian’s resume and I smiled at Marian.

“Do you think you will be able to do both?”

Marian nodded her head yes.

“I believe I can, and I am also hoping you will help contribute to my studies.”

I shrugged one shoulder as I thought over her proposal.

“Sure, I can help with your studies if that is really what you want,” I answered. “So, can you start tomorrow?”

Marian nodded with an excited smile on her face and I rubbed my hands together.

“Good, I look forward to having your help. I will go over everything with you in the morning after my meeting.”

Josephine looked relieved to have that sorted out as I stood.

“Thanks, Josephine, I will see you at the meeting in the morning.”
I left her office and walked down the corridor and out into the main hall, hoping to catch Solas in the rotunda. When I entered, Raj was laying next to Solas’ desk while he and Felassan talked. Something about him still just didn’t sit well with me and his instant silence when he saw me didn’t help matters any.

“Good day my lady,” he said, bowing instantly.

“Good day, Felassan. I hope you slept well,” I replied politely even if his false pleasantries set my teeth on edge.

Solas smiled as he stood and walked towards me eyeing the carrier.

“This is what you described to me earlier?”

I nodded as he pushed a bit of the cloth aside and saw Emithlen sleeping. The gentle smile that adorned his beautiful lips every time he looked at our son made me happy. He eyed the baby sling carefully before finally bending and pressing a kiss to my lips in greeting.

“Perhaps Helene will indulge me and make one for me as well.”

I looked into his grey-blue eyes smiling.

“I’m sure she would if you really want one.”

His quick assured nod was enough to make my heart sing and our bond vibrated with my pleasure. Only the clearing of another’s voice tore my attention away from him to my complete annoyance. My gaze slipped to the one who made it and stared directly into the disapprovingly cool, lavender gaze of Felassan.

“I apologize, was I interrupting you two?” I said with a hint of sarcasm and a raised eyebrow as I held Felassan’s stare.

“You were,” he replied caustically.

Solas glared at him over his shoulder as he retorted.

“You most definitely were not.”

I snorted and looked between the two.

“Well, that is as clear as mud. I either was or wasn’t interrupting.”

Solas turned back to look at me as Felassan stared at me haughtily.

“We were just talking vhenan, you did not interrupt anything of any importance.”

It seemed it was Felassan’s turn to snort and look at Solas with annoyance just as his rapid elven slipped out sarcastically.

“Your idea of importance has drastically changed, my friend.”

Our bond shimmied with Solas’ displeasure at Felassan’s tone and his hands dropped from my shoulders to fold behind his back as he held Felassan’s gaze.

“Perhaps it has changed as far as you are concerned. Shall we continue this discussion elsewhere so you may apologize to my mate for being so rude?”
Felassan’s expression was loud and clear on that thought and it told me that hell would likely freeze over first before he apologized to me.

“You ignore too much and it will only…”

All’s I wanted to do was see my husband, sneak a kiss and be on my way, not start some silly argument. Not wanting to hear anymore, I looked at Felassan coolly.

“Enough of this.”

Felassan’s astonished gaze with my strong tone surprised me but when he instantly took a knee, I didn’t know what to say or do and stood mortified.

“What are you doing… get up,” I said quickly with embarrassment.

Felassan’s angry gaze held mine as he stood and snarled at me.

“You are not worthy.”

I stared at him in surprise not knowing what he was even talking about before Solas stepped in front of me, blocking him from my vision.

“You will stop right there Felassan before you say anything further to my mate that you cannot take back.”

“Sh...”

“I said Enough!”

I shivered as his voice vibrated and filled the room with a cold menace that warned Felassan he was quite serious. Solas’ tone caused Raj to move from his place next to the desk and come to my side, and it also must have woken bean as he quickly started fussing. Easily slipping him from the little hammock, Solas turned and held my gaze for a moment before looking down at beans watery gaze. Taking him from my arms, he swiftly started murmuring soothing words to him, instantly calming him.

I watched Felassan as Solas soothed our son and saw a wave of anger in the lavender depths I had not expected. He soon stared at me with an expression of disgust that took me by surprise.

“How did you come to be in possession of her soul fragment? What spell did you use?”

I shook my head completely confused with what he was telling me. His obvious dislike of me was clearly written all over his face and I had no idea what the hell was going on.

“Her who? I don’t understand what you mean?”

“Mythal,” he snarled.

I slightly rocked back on my heels and stared at him in shock.

“I don’t understand.”

“You lie!”

My own temper flared, burning off my confusion and shock and I took a step towards him with my fists clenched tightly at my sides.
“Do not say one more word or I will rip that tongue from your mouth and slap you with it!”

It was as if the fade was pushing him to the ground and with complete despair, I watched Felassan fall to both knees at my commanding tone in silence once again.

Staring at Felassan’s bowed head, my heart raced. “Solas?” I whispered with anxiety to where he stood behind me comforting Emithlen.

“Release him, vhenan so we may discuss this in our chambers.”

I looked at him unsure of what he meant, and he kissed my forehead, flooding me with reassurance.

“Tell him that he may stand up and allowed to speak again.”

I shook my head in confusion.

“But why would he… I… what did I do?”

I know Solas could feel my anxiety and apparently so could bean because he began crying loudly again. Swallowing anxiously at what had just happened, I took bean from Solas and kissed his forehead swiftly calming him.

“Hush now little man, mamae just had a moment. It’s all over now,” I whispered onto the skin of his forehead before pressing another kiss there. I took a deep breath and turned around to face the kneeling Felassan uncomfortably.

“Please stand Felassan and let’s discuss this calmly so that all parties understand what is going on.”

Felassan quickly stood and stared daggers at me even as he silently nodded his head in agreement. I turned away from him with Raj at my side and Solas moved in behind me to follow while Felassan followed after him. My mind was spinning a thousand miles an hour about what had just happened. What did you do to me, Mythal? Solas opened our chamber door and I headed up the stairs unsure if I was ready to know what was going on.
Our chamber was oppressively silent as I went about changing bean and putting him in his cradle. Kissing his forehead, his beautiful little mouth yawned tiredly. *I can relate, little man.* I glanced at Solas where he stood next to the fire watching me and I let out a soft sigh before dragging my gaze to Felassan who kept his back towards us and stared out the window over the valley.

Solas held his hand out to me and I went to him. He kissed the top of my head and rubbed my back as I leaned against him, taking the strength he offered.

“I believe I can explain how you came to be in possession of one of Mythal’s spirit shards, vhenan.”

With Solas’ statement, Felassan turned and finally looked at us. His eyes still holding anger towards Solas and disdain towards me.

“Then explain how this—travesty of an elf was granted elevation and a part of the all mother’s purest essence?”

I flinched with the whip-like sound of Felassan’s voice as he addressed Solas. Now I knew why I had felt an immediate aversion to Felassan—he is an asshole! I glanced up at Solas as his arm slipped away from me so he could stand in front of me, blocking Felassan from even looking at me or I him, which was fine by me, except Solas’ aura was flicking angrily around us, and this boded poorly.

“You forget your place Felassan and to whom you address. I will not tolerate any further disparaging remarks about my mate, or I shall be pressed to administer swift retribution, is that understood?”

Yup, boded very poorly. The strong sound of his voice as it vibrated through our chambers slightly shook the pictures on the walls and blew papers from my desk. I peaked around Solas’ arm to look at Felassan and noticed his pale expression where Mythal’s vallis’lin stood out starkly against his skin even as he smirked at him, waving a hand dismissively. I shook my head and closed my eyes thinking of ways to explain how an elf got thrown from my balcony when the air blew around me and I opened my eyes quickly. I knew what I would find and was not disappointed. Solas had Felassan by the throat, his demeanor cold and furious and Felassan’s expression of surprise was pleasing.

“You disappoint me, Felassan. You have disrespected my mate and yet you want answers for what has transpired.” I watched as Solas lifted Felassan from the floor angrily. “I would propose you speak with Mythal and see if your arrogance will convince her to explain the situation to your liking.” Then with a flip of his arm, threw Felassan against the stone wall.

*This has got to stop, or I am never going to understand what the hell is going on!* Stepping forward, I held my hand out towards Solas.
“Enough, Solas. I want to know how this happened just as much as this asshole does, so please explain and ignore him.”

I stared into his cool grey gaze calmly until I felt the warmth of our bond flowing between us and his expression softened as he began to speak.

“It happened the moment you sacrificed yourself to Andruil. Mythal bound your spirit, keeping it away from Dirthamen and thus not allowing it to move on to the plane of eternal rest. Instead, she bound you to her, where a piece of her was given to you before she released your spirit into a different plane of existence to be reborn again until a time when she could bring you back.”

I stared at him trying to understand what he was telling me, my mind a complete jumble that I barely spared Felassan a glance as he rose from the floor.

“You want me to believe that she is the reincarnation of Assan?”

His tone mocking and full of disbelief.

“The choice is yours, believe what you will. However, I can assure you, Fenlin is a reincarnation and now holds Assan’s memories.”

I was still trying to wrap my mind around everything as Felassan replied indignantly.

“That is absurd, the all mother would never…”

The sound of Solas’ anger chilled the room and pulled me from my errant thoughts.

“Would never bestow such a gift to a sentinel… her shadow?”

A gift? A piece of Mythal is in me and they think it a gift? I’m not sure I am seeing it that way yet. I cleared my throat, drawing their attention.

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“Are you sure this didn’t happen when I requested her aid in speaking with the dragons?” I asked, ignoring Felassan’s expression of surprise.

“It was not, vhenan. The only way she could place a part of herself with you would be when you were not of this world any longer.”

Felassan’s eyes were wide as he glanced between Solas and me.

“You have conversed with the All-Mother?”

I nodded my head and sat down in the chair, staring into the fire. I was trying to study my feelings about it all and I wasn’t sure how I felt about any of it yet. I knew I could never be angry for what she did because it gave me the chance to be with Solas again… but why would she place a part of her spirit in me? Shaking my head, it was just so hard to wrap my mind around it all since there was no way to understand Mythal’s machinations.

“If your hypothesis is correct, does this mean that she also has a piece of me?” My voice sounded hesitant and slightly unsteady with the idea.

Solas walked towards me, gently smiling before kneeling in front of me and taking my cold hands.

“I believe at one time she did have a part of you always with her until she believed it was time and used that piece to bring you back. Once that was accomplished, the piece that she had was given back to you.”
I slowly nodded as it started to become clearer to me.

“This definitely explains how she could find me in the fade so effortlessly,” I mumbled. “So, me having a piece of her is part of a plan then. One only Mythal knows,” I said with a wry smile.

“It would appear so, vhenan,” he replied, squeezing my hands.

I bent and pressed my forehead against his, closing my eyes and just soaking in the calm feelings he gave me before leaning away.

“I will never kneel to you, I do not owe you my allegiance.”

I glanced at Felassan and something about his posture and arrogant attitude made me want to bring him down a peg or two, so I smirked at him and reminded him of what happened in the rotunda.

“You might not do it willingly, but you will if I command it, Felassan.”

I could see by the instant flash of anger in his lavender gaze and the red flush that ran up his neck that he didn’t like that reminder at all.

“If everything I have heard today is to be believed true, then you are no better than I—you were nothing but a slave. Our difference is that I wear mine on my face willingly and yours was forced onto your hand.”

His venomous tone instantly ignited my anger and I stood.

“That is where you are wrong, Felassan. I’m no slave to my mark,” I retorted quietly, the anger in my tone frosting the air. “I am free—something you will never be and unlike you, I am not some arrogant, egotistical, jackass, born during the times of Arlathan, thinking that makes me superior to all elves. No, I am a simple elf, who can appreciate everyone for who they are because I, unlike you, don’t need to pretend that I am better than anyone because of my heritage.”

He snorted and I pointed towards the stairwell for him to leave.

“Get out of our chambers now, I am tired of your bullshit. You have your answers, now leave us.”

His expression of anger was pleasing because I knew he was leaving only because I commanded him to do so. Having a part of Mythal could come in handy if I was going to have to deal with Felassan’s shitty attitude. As he passed me, he glared down at me.

“I loathe you,” he mumbled softly.

I laughed and bowed towards him mockingly as he walked down the stairs.

“The feeling is mutual, wanker.”

I covered my mouth to keep the laugh from escaping when his shoulders stiffened at the insult before walking through the door. I replaced the ward over the door and turned back to Solas who leaned against the bedpost watching me.

“As I have said before, vhenan. My sister has done you a disservice by choosing you as a vessel.”

I held his gaze for a silent moment realizing that Felassan wouldn't be the only one to react this way towards me and I walked to where bean slept. Studying his little face quietly, I let out a small sigh. I would never regret or be angry with what Mythal did. I was here, I was finally whole having found Solas and now we were a family and I wouldn't change all of this for anything. I stared at our son
and thought about our future. Caressing his little cheek, I spoke softly. “How will our enemies try to use him to get to us? How will we keep him safe from Andrul and the other Evanuris, or even the Forgotten and Forbidden? What about the ancients still walking the world like Felassan? Will they too see our son as a bargaining tool?” I jolted with the sudden feeling of Solas’ arms around me.

“I too worry about these things, vhenan, but we cannot lose focus. Right now, we must find where Corypheus is hiding. Then we will discuss what we shall do about, Andrul.”

I looked up from Emithlen's sleeping face and glanced at Solas over my shoulder, my blood instantly boiling with rage when I thought about what I would do with Andrul.

“There will be no discussion because it is simple. I will kill her.”

Solas and I held each other’s gaze for a silent moment before he pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“Agreed, vhenan.”

I turned back to look at bean while Solas continued to hold me. *That I promise little man. That crazy bitch will never get the chance to use you to get to me.* I touched his cheek tenderly, reinforcing my promise to him.

I left the meeting feeling frustrated with the lack of information on Corypheus. The only good that had come of it was Leliana agreed with my idea of asking Cole to accompany a group of her agents. Maybe with his assistance, we might actually start getting some results.

Walking into Josephine’s office, I found Marian sitting in one of the highbacked chairs waiting for me. I smiled at her warmly and clapped my hands and rubbed them excitedly because I had a really good feeling about her being my new assistant.

“Are you ready to get to work, Marian?”

The girl stood quickly and nodded her head excitedly.

“Good, I have a mountain of crap on my desk that needs to be sifted through and prioritized. Come on, I will introduce you to my workload and then we will discuss your duties.”

Marian followed me down the corridor and out into the main hall. She stood quietly beside me while a noble asked after bean’s health. Making sure the conversation lasted all of one minute, she kept up with my quick pace to my chamber door. As soon as the door was closed, I threw a small ward on the door and let out a sigh of relief as I walked up the stairs.

“You don’t like crowds very much,” Marian commented as she followed me up.

I laughed, reaching the landing and glanced down at her.

“No, not at all. I prefer to just blend into the shadows and not be seen.”

“That must be difficult when you are the Herald of Andraste then.”

I had just removed bean from the carrier and glanced at Marian.

“I am Fenlin, not the Herald of Andraste, not Your Worship, and to be honest, I never wanted to be
Inquisitor but there was no one else that could close the rifts.”

Turning from her I laid bean down in his cradle and quickly untied and removed the carrier from my shoulders. Beans arms were starting to move anxiously, and his little face scrunched up with annoyance at not being fed yet and I gently spoke to him as I picked him back up and moved towards the chair.

“Now, now, hush little man. You know I’m going to feed you, so what is all the fuss about.”

His angry cries filled the room and I laughed at his reddened face as I quickly unbuttoned my shirt. Emithlen’s indignant cries immediately stopped as he finally got what he wanted, and I looked at Marian and gestured for the little blanket over the back of the couch.

“Will you hand me that, Marian. I promise I will show you what your job will entail as soon as I am done feeding bean.”

She brought the blanket to me and sat down watching bean as he ate curiously.

“Does it hurt?”

I glanced at her for a second.

“You mean feeding him?” I see her nod as she watched me. “I guess it kind of did at first but then it didn’t or at least I don’t notice it anymore. What I notice now is that it hurts when I don’t. That’s why the carrier is so handy. Not only do I have the freedom to leave the room, but I can also bring Emithlen with me and feed him when it is time.”

After taking care of bean, he fell asleep and I went about explaining to Marian her duties. By the time Solas arrived for lunch, we had made a healthy dent in the stack of paperwork. Glancing up from the invoice I was reading, I felt the soft caress of his aura as he ascended the stairs and smiled at him. My smile fell a little when I saw Felassan walking behind him.

I stood and smiled at Marian as she glanced between Solas and Felassan a bit nervously.

“It appears that it is lunch time, Marian. Why don’t you run along and get something to eat? We can continue in an hour okay?”

Marian nodded before getting up and moving around the two tall elves’ uncomfortably for the stairs. Solas walked towards me and kissed me in greeting. Returning his kiss, I caressed his cheek when he pulled away.

“How was your morning?”

He smiled and kissed me again as he took my hand and led me around the desk.

“It was quite productive, as I see that yours was as well. It appears your assistant is competent.”

I nodded and slipped the carrier over my shoulder and Solas went about tying the ends around my waist. I completely ignored Felassan’s presence and I caught a glimpse of the small tightening around his mouth with being so easily dismissed. I internally smiled at the small tell. *Suck it, ass monkey.*

“Is she uncomfortable with elves?”

*Oops, pay attention ding dong.*

“Not so much as she is with mages. She and her brother are the ones I told you about that Cole
returned with from Redcliffe. She is a mage herself, but with everything she was taught from her parents and then what happened between the mages and templars, she is just suspicious.”

Felassan snorted and I saw him roll his eyes with disdain.

“Shems are utterly worthless.”

I let out a sigh of annoyance and held Solas’ gaze as he held Emithlen.

“Seriously Solas, I’m trying. I’m really trying… but if he is going to continuously be an arrogant ass, I am going to throw him off my balcony.”

The small smile that lifted the corners of his mouth instantly made me feel less annoyed by Felassan’s presence. Solas slipped bean into the carrier and I adjusted his weight as Solas turned to look at Felassan briefly before wrapping his arm around my shoulders.

“Come vhenan, let us retire to the dining hall for our afternoon lunch.”

I smiled up at him and barely glanced at Felassan as we walked by him. His animosity for me was annoying and I still didn’t understand why he would dislike me so much since I had never actually done anything to him. Mentally shrugging my shoulders at his dislike for me, I just didn’t care what he thought and smiled up at Solas as he held the door open for me when we reached the bottom of the stairs. *Fuck him!*

Walking across the main keep, we headed down into the dining hall and I saw Cole sitting with Marian and her brother. Anyone with eyes in their heads couldn't help but notice the way she was looking at him as he sat next to her brother talking. *Oh boy… that could either prove a good thing or a very bad thing.* I sat down in the chair Solas held out for me. For once, Felassan sat at another table away from us, giving us a bit of privacy and I turned my attention back to where Marian and Cole sat.

“Thank you,” I said automatically taking the plate as I continued to think about Cole and Marian.

Solas must have noticed my absent expression as he took hold of my hand to draw my attention. I looked at him as he leaned closer to whisper into my ear.

“You are many miles away, what troubles you, vhenan?”

I gestured towards Marian and Cole and noticed that he too saw what I did. We sat quietly, taking bites of our lunch as we were both were now thinking about it.

“It was inevitable that she would feel that way towards him.”

Solas looked at me with a raised eyebrow of curiosity, silently urging me to continue.

“He took her away from everything that worried or frightened her,” I said before setting my fork down. “From what I understand, the owner of the tavern constantly threatened to throw her and her brother out and he allowed customers to slap her around if they wanted too. Her and her brother being mages and unsure what had happened to the ones that had been there before, she was frightened and forced to just survive the situation. So, when Cole showed up and offered her an opportunity to live in a place where the threat of getting thrown out is minimal and people wouldn’t hit her if she made a mistake, it probably sounded like a fairytale. Then she got here and found that everything he had told her was true. That she and her brother would receive an education, have a paying job with accommodations and she could finally relax.” I took a bite of the ram roast and chewed for a moment before I looked at Solas again. “Yeah, that would definitely make the man
who helped me look very handsome in my eyes.”

Solas glanced at me for a moment and then glanced back at the couple sitting across the room oblivious to our concerns for them.

“Does she not understand that Cole is a spirit of Compassion? What he did for her and her brother is what his nature demands. What she wants from him could never be without the likelihood of corrupting Cole.”

I stared at him for a moment and rubbed Emithlen’s back when he moved within the carrier.

“I agree, but shouldn’t that be Cole’s decision?”

Solas held my gaze for a moment before I could see him relent his position and nod.

“You are quite right, vhenan, it is his decision.”

I smiled at him gently and grasped his hand that lay on the table.

“Now you understand why I worry… I can’t interfere to keep him safe, he must do this himself.”

Solas’ fingers tighten around mine for a moment in understanding and lean forward to press a quick kiss to my cheek.

“Then we shall be concerned together.”

He gestured towards my plate and winked at me.

“Now please, eat more of your lunch, vhenan.”

I rolled my eyes at him and picked up my fork. I still had the small pooch for a belly and larger breasts just for feeding bean, but other than that, most of me was back to the skinny me and I knew Solas worried that I would start dropping weight again with my worries or anxieties that made me drop weight rapidly, but I was eating constantly. I snacked all day long and drank a dark beer from Orzammar that reminded me of Guinness twice a day to keep up my milk production. I was pretty pleased with myself overall at maintaining the weight I had and speared a carrot with my fork.

“Don’t start my love, you know I am eating all day long to keep this little man happy.”

Solas cupped my chin and gazed into my eyes with a twinkle of mischief in his.

“Yes, I have noticed that you have changed many previous habits for him over your mates’ pleadings.”

I gave him a cheeky smile and winked at him playfully.

“As I told you before—he was much more convincing.”

He let go of my chin and I popped the carrot in my mouth still smiling at him. He shook his head at me and lathered honey over a slice of bread.

“Ass,” he muttered before taking a bite.

Giggling, I took another bite of roast while watching him look at me playfully as he chewed.

“You should know, you made me this way.”
He almost choked on his bread with laughter and hit his chest a few times before taking a drink of water.

“No vhenan, you came well equipped with obstinacy without any assistance from me.”

He laughed as I made a gesture of ‘who me?’ and I joined in and laughed with him. For now, I would enjoy the moment of our shared teasing and laughter because I never knew what I would have to deal with from one moment to the next.
Raj and I sat on the floor with Emithlen while he lay on his tummy. He fussed at first like he did every time I laid him on his stomach, but after a few moments, he quieted down and started making happy little noises. Lifting himself in little half pushups from the floor while I made excited noises and comments. I watched my son’s progress from birth to now and smiled with the changes my little man had already made.

Four months since he was born and my son was currently making more progress with growing than the rest of us where when it came to finding Corypheus’ whereabouts. It was helpful what Cole gathered in the Arbor Wilds, though, I wished he could have learned Corypheus’ whereabouts but instead, Cole confirmed that Corypheus sent the Venatori and Red Templars to scour the area for elven ruins, only confirming what both Solas and I already knew, and that was he looked for other foci.

I smiled at bean and wiped the drool from his chin when I felt Solas’ aura and heard the door open.

“Here comes your babae.”

His mouth split into a large toothless smile and his gurgles got louder as a soft mint green slipped from his tiny little fingers, magically raising himself from the floor. Casting a barrier around his body, Raj slipped his head under him and bean wrapped his long fingers around his ears. I glanced at Solas when he crested the top stairs with Felassan. Ignoring him, I spoke to Solas as he walked towards us.

“His magic is increasing.”

Concern filled my tone and Solas knelt on the floor and picked bean up with a smile on his face.

“I would be concerned if it did not.”

I stared at him confused with what he meant, and he chuckled as he held bean.

“He is unlike other children vhenan, he is an Evanuris, immortal. He will grow faster as will his magic, it is the way of things.”

I know I looked at him annoyed because he laughed and whispered into Emithlen’s ear.

“It appears I have made mamae annoyed with me again.”

I crossed my arms and stared at him.

“And you would be correct. Is there a book I should be reading so I know what to expect because if I wait for you to tell me, the void might freeze over.”
Solas glanced at me mischievously.

“I thought we could share an academic moment together.”

I stared at him as I remembered back to when Solas was changing bean and he got peed on. Giggling with the memory, I gave him a cheeky grin.

“Touché, ma’lath.”

I glanced at Felassan where he stood behind Solas watching bean intently. I didn't like the man being here no matter how many times Solas told me his presence was needed. I saw that his expression gave nothing away, but his lavender eyes spoke volumes—and he was curious about bean. I slowly stood up and went to pour myself a cup of tea while Solas played with our son and I thought about what he’d just said.

“So, he will grow faster than other children?”

I watched while Solas played peekaboo with Emithlen and my heart melted with how adorable the two looked. He glanced at me briefly before continuing his little game.

“Yes. Our son will physically and mentally grow in an exponential rate when he turns six months.”

I thought I would have a lot more time cuddling bean and my expression must have shown my dislike of having that time taken from me. I swallowed the lump in my throat as I stared at Emithlen’s waving little arms.

“How are we going to explain to the other’s Emithlen’s rapid growth spurt, Solas?”

I saw his small grimace and a small fission of fear coursed through my veins when his eyes met mine.

“I will need to think about this carefully, vhenan.”

“You could just leave,” Felassan added flippantly, his expression was of complete boredom.

I glanced at him with annoyance and shook my head.

“That is not an option while Corypheus is still running around. When he is dead, then I will disband the Inquisition and leave but not before then.”

I saw him shrug and cross his arms, his superior expression annoying me even more.

“It is an option, just not one you like,” he retorted.

I cut him off abruptly and coldly.

“It is an option for you, Felassan.” I pointed towards the stairs with a cold smile and gestured for him to leave. “There’s the door. Don’t let it hit you where the Creators split you.”

His eyes narrowed at me but thankfully he kept silent and I looked back at Solas who watched me with a teasing smile on his beautiful lips.

“I am sure you will think of something, but in the meantime, I have a meeting to get to with Josephine. Would you like to spend some time with bean, or would you prefer I bring him with me?”

Solas waved me off.
“I would like some time with my son.”

I pressed a kiss to his lips before walking towards the stairwell.

“Then I shall leave you to it. I won’t be gone long,” I said before walking down the stairs.

Sitting in Josephine’s office, I noticed the never-ending flow of assistants that came in and out. Josephine’s office reminded me of a beehive where Josephine was the queen bee and her many assistants, the worker bees. Josephine took each message or answered one question after another before letting out a small sigh and smiling at me. I don’t know where the woman gets the energy for all this chaos, but I wished I had some of it.

“The Empress has requested your presence and invited you to a ball at the Winter Palace. She would like to discuss with you her partnership with Duke Gaspard and Brialala.”

I tilted my head at her curiously.

“Has something happened?”

Josephine glanced at the door as it opened again with another messenger and I held up my hand.

“Excuse us please,” I said, and the messenger instantly stopped in his tracks. I looked at Josephine, “let’s take this discussion to the war room, where we can speak privately.”

We both stood and left her office, walking silently down the narrow corridor. Once we were inside the room and the door closed, I gestured for Josephine to continue.

“It appears that Brialala is propagating discontent between Gaspard and the Empress. It is making their shared relationship quite—strained and in turn, making the Council of Heralds uncomfortable.”

I knew I hadn’t seen the last of Brialala and sighed. Rubbing my face tiredly, I nodded my head with understanding.

“So, she continues to play the game… to what end I wonder though. Celine will never take her back because she will not accept the embarrassment and the scandal it would cause for her loving an elf. As it stands, Brialala can do nothing and could never rule over Orlais because she is an elf and Gaspard would sooner kill her than ever allow that to happen.”

Josephine looked as puzzled as I felt.

“It is unclear at the moment. Shall I tell her you will attend?”

I looked at Josephine with surprise.

“Are you crazy? I’m not going to expose Emithlen to that crowd of back-stabbing crazies.”

Josephine gently smiled at me and patted my hand. The gesture instantly had me feeling like an idiot because I knew she had something in mind that I didn’t know about.

“I would agree with you, Inquisitor. That is why I have found a suitable woman to work as a nursemaid for you during such times.”

I looked at her dumbfounded. Is she serious? Does she just think I am going to hand my son over to some woman? The more I thought about it, the more uncomfortable I felt, and the angrier I got.
Josephine must have caught on to my incoming mood swing as she continued to explain herself.

“Of course, you would need to get to know her and approve of the choice first, Inquisitor. I believe that once you have, your concerns will lessen.”

I stared at her silently and gritted my teeth, realizing that what Josephine was suggesting was the right thing to do. I knew that I was going to have to do something about Emithlen because I just couldn’t have him trekking all over Thedas while I fought Venatori and Corypheus. I just hadn’t thought about letting another woman feed him. The thought of another woman caring for him just didn’t sit well with me.

I opened and closed my hands for a few silent moments, noticing the way Josephine looked at me sympathetically and sighed.

“I know your right Josephine, I just don’t like it.”

Admitting it aloud relieved some of the discomforts I felt, and Josephine grabbed my hand and squeezed.

“If I were you, I would not like it either, Inquisitor. It is a woman’s duty to care and nurture her child. The idea of someone else doing that for us is unconscionable, even when we know that our responsibilities do not stop just because we have children.”

Listening to her, I nodded in agreement and sighed again.

“I will need to discuss it with Solas first.”

Josephine nodded her head in agreement.

“Of course;” she said before giving my hand a final squeeze and letting go. We left the war room and I passed through Josephine’s office, noticing the small group of assistants that waited for her return. Snorting at the sight of all of them, I headed back to my chambers. Something about allowing another woman the opportunity to take that bonding moment from me that I shared with bean turned my stomach into knots.

Crossing the keep, I saw Marian waiting by the door to my chambers, chewing on her lip nervously. I got to the door and didn’t feel a ward over it and looked at Marian curiously.

“The door isn’t warded Marian, why didn’t you go up?”

She looked at me briefly and then on the floor as she answered.

“I saw you leave without Emithlen and presumed that Master Solas and Master Felassan would be in your chambers.”

I gave her an understanding look and patted her shoulder, deciding to change the subject. Marian was making progress towards growing comfortable around mages and allowing others to know she was a mage, but everything takes time and she would let Marian find her own way.

“How were your classes this morning?” I asked her instead.

Marian smiled at me and her eyes lit up as she began to animatedly explain what one of her teachers had taught her in this morning’s lessons. I opened the door and she continued talking about the lesson as we walked up the stairs. Her complete joy with what she had learned took my mind off of hiring a nursemaid. When we reached the landing, Marian quieted as she saw Felassan and Solas.
I patted her shoulder and whispered in her ear encouragingly when I recognized her instant withdrawal into herself.

“Straighten your shoulders, take a calming breath, and walk to your desk, Marian. You belong here.”

Marian gave a small nod and I watched as she adjusted her reflex to hunch and appear small and insignificant before walking in front of the men to her desk. Marian nodded at Solas and Felassan as she passed them. Felassan glanced away with disinterest and Solas smiled back at her as he greeted her before looking at me again.

“Was your meeting with Josephine productive?”

I shrugged and walked towards the cradle. I saw that bean was sleeping and gently touched his forehead before answering Solas’ question.

“It appears that Briala is still maneuvering for a position between Gaspard and Celine. We received an invitation to the Winter Palace for another bloody ball and to discuss possible solutions to the problems she has created.”

I sat down in the chair across from Solas and Felassan as I spoke.

“Now that Emithlen is born and I have been given a generous amount of time to enjoy him, it would appear that it is time for me to get back to work.”

Solas’ eyebrows shot up in surprise.

“You want to bring Emithlen to Orlais?”

I held Solas’ surprised look and sighed heavily with what I knew I had to do and knotted my fingers together.

“It is not my ideal trip but Josephine has found a woman that can help me with Emithlen’s needs.”

“A nursemaid,” Solas said softly while holding my tortured gaze.

I could do nothing but nod my head, afraid to speak past the lump in my throat. Marian spoke up from her place behind her desk, drawing our attention.

“Lady Josephine must be talking about Siri. I suggested her since she just had a little girl around the same time you had Emithlen.”

I held Marian’s gaze while Solas questioned her about this woman, Siri.

“What can you tell us about her, Marian?”

I saw Marian swallow anxiously and then straighten her shoulders, looking Solas directly in the eye and I felt so proud of her and the progress she has made.

“She is one of the elven women saved from the Venatori in the Hissing Wastes. Her husband was killed by the Venatori out there and she now helps Lady Nightingale with writing messages in Elvish. She was educated by a Magister to read ancient texts. She told me that Sir Krem killed the Magister that owned her.”

I noticed Felassan's flinch at the words ‘owned her’ and gazed back at Marian. One of the things I appreciated about Marian was her ability to not take too long to summarize information. Solas’ eyebrow came up and I could see the curiosity in his eyes with this information as he looked at me.
“Well, at least we know a little about the woman and it is helpful that Marian already knows her. It couldn’t hurt to meet her.”

I nodded in agreement with him. Something about the idea that she had a child of her own set me at ease with the idea of allowing someone else to feed my son, I let out a small breath.

The dark forest was eerily quiet of any animals or bugs as Briala leaned against a large poplar. She had been waiting for him for over an hour. Tapping her fingers quietly against her crossed arms, she thought back to what the Dread Wolf had said to her in the Winter Palace and she suddenly wore a smug expression. *You were wrong Dread Wolf. Felassan would never abandon me, he loves me.*

She turned towards the sounds of twigs breaking and saw her teacher enter the small grove.

“How have you done what I instructed?”

She nodded and moved away from the tree towards him.

“How of course, I did. Celine and Gaspard are nothing but pawns on a chessboard and they don’t even know it. Celine thinks that Gaspard is planning an attack and that boorish fool, believes Celine is plotting to kill him. With the two overly paranoid, Celine has invited the Inquisitor to one of her parties next month to help with the rumors.”

Felassan smiled at her pleased with her work and kissed her forehead.

“I knew I was not wrong to count on you, little one. Soon, our time to strike will be upon us and I want you by my side when we do. Is that agreeable to you?”

Briala gazed up at him adoringly and nodded her head while staring deeply into his lavender eyes.

“There is nowhere I would rather be than by your side, Felassan.”

He pulled her gently to him and felt her face nestle against his chest. He caressed her head and stared into the forest where his brothers and sister waited for him. He loathed the idea of holding the mortal but he would do what was necessary to make their plan for complete rule over these weak creatures come to fruition. He bent and pressed a kiss to the top of her head before pulling away from her.

“Now go before you are missed, little one.”

Briala nodded her head and walked into the dark forest. She felt a sense of excitement for her moment to get even with the Inquisitor. She had shut her out of the talks between Celine and Gaspard, rejecting her own kind, but this time, she would have her revenge. She briefly glanced back at Felassan over her shoulder and saw his hand raise towards her in farewell and felt her pulse race. She would make him proud of her if it was the last thing she ever did.

Felassan watched her make her way through the forest before walking deeper into the darkness.
himself, his lavender eyes changing to a blood red. Xebenkeck quickly shed his disguise as Mythal's sentinel while Imshael and Gaxkang came out from behind a couple of large trees to greet him.

“Out of all of us brother, you are the consummate actor. I do believe that little girl actually believes you care for her.”

Xebenkeck took a bow, wearing a smug expression as he replied.

“She was not a challenge to read or to fool, brother. Her heart’s desire is for the ancient sentinel, and her hatred for Ras’Salladin has been tremendously beneficial for our cause.”

“Do we really believe Ras’Salladin will bring the young prince with her to Orlais?” Gaxkang questioned.

The cold tone of their sister’s voice filled the small area with frost, turning the leaves brown with her presence.

“She will bring him, and then we shall take him. Ras’Salladin and Fen’Harel will come for him and find him in the company of Andruil. The red lyrium has made the huntress delusional when it comes to the Dread Wolf. They will believe Andruil orchestrated the abduction of the little prince to get him back and we will finally be rid of Andruil. Perhaps next time we will release the brothers… they are so much more fun than this pathetic huntress.”

Imshael laughed and rubbed his hands together with the idea.

“And what about the others? Anaris, Geldauran, Daem’thal? How shall we take care of them?” Gaxkang questioned, looking uncomfortable. “Once we are rid of Andruil, shouldn’t we turn our focus on them?”

Xebenkeck and Imshael nodded their heads in agreement with Gaxkang.

“I agree. As long as they live, we will never truly be free,” Xebenkeck warned.

They stood looking concerned and deep in thought as the cool voice of their sister hissed around them.

“One problem at a time my brothers. For now, we focus on ridding ourselves of Andruil. Our plan is in place, now all we need do is wait.”

Xebenkeck sighed and nodded his head in agreement.

“You are quite right, sister. We must not lose focus now that we are so close.”

The other’s agreed with her with silent nods of their own.

"Good, now let's return to the castle. It is almost time for Andruil's next dose of red lyrium."

Imshael gave everyone a wicked smile as he rubbed his hands together again with a sadistic gleam in his eye.

"I shall meet everyone there,” he offered quickly before changing into his raven form and flying off.

The others quickly followed and flew behind him.

Chapter End Notes
babae - daddy/father
mamae - mommy/mother
Thank you, everyone, for your continued support with my story. Your comments and kudos are very much appreciated.

Our combined silence was awkward as Siri sat across from me holding her daughter and I didn’t know what to say or even how to begin this conversation, so instead of talking, I observed her quiet demeanor. Her russet brown hair was tied back into a tight braid. Her eyes are a soft brown that holds anxiety and sadness. There was a quiet strength to her that I liked, and I recalled Marian telling me that she was working for Leliana by transcribing reports into elven. It was an ingenious idea for the elven agents Leliana had dispersed over Thedas. The fact that she was employed by Leliana in this way also made me curious if she would be here to spy on me as well. Gazing off towards the balcony, I thought seriously about it and then mentally shook my head no. There wasn’t anything Leliana didn’t know about me so there would be no point in the maneuver and Leliana never did anything without a reason or a benefit, plus, Cole would tell me if she was.

“Marian tells me that you write in the elven language, does that also mean you can speak it?”

Siri gazed at me a bit uncomfortable before nodding her head ‘yes’.

“I can, my lady,” she answered with a soft voice.

I shook my head and gave her what I hoped was a reassuring smile.

“You don’t need to be so formal, Siri, just call me Fenlin.”

She smiled at me, nodding her head in agreement and I continued in common.

“It is unusual to find an elf that knows more than just a few words of the old language. I’m glad that you can speak in both languages, it will help when I want to say something privately to you.”

I watched as Siri only nodded her head in agreement and said nothing. I slightly twisted my fingers together, trying to figure out how I was going to even talk about this. We again sat in awkward silence and I shook my head. Boldness! I can’t take bean with me when I go to fight Corypheus.

“I have to admit that the idea of someone else caring for my son in such an intimate way is very uncomfortable for me.”

Siri nodded her head in agreement with me and I was starting to think the woman was never going to speak until she cleared her throat and gave me an understanding look.

“As a woman and a mother, I can sympathize. I don’t think I would like the idea of someone else taking my bonding time away from me, but I wanted to offer you what I knew would help you take care of your son. What you are doing is so important for all of the people of Thedas and I know that what you will accomplish will give my daughter an opportunity that was never offered to me.”

I glanced at her daughter who slept in her arms, digesting her words and noticed that she appeared to
be the same age as Emithlen and gestured towards her.

“May I ask what her name is?”

Siri looked at me blushingingly for a second and then brushed her finger over her daughter's cheek.

“I named her after our rescuer.”

I instantly thought the girl's name was Krem since he was the one who killed the Magister that had once owned her and smiled, about to say it and she spoke quietly cutting me off.

“Her name is Fenlin.”

My jaw could be heard hitting the floor in surprise. I just stared at her in dumbfounded shock, completely speechless. I... I don’t... what does one say? When she saw my speechless reaction and I’m sure I resembled a gulping fish out of the water with the way my mouth just kept moving with nothing coming out, she rushed to explain.

“I should have asked you if that would be okay, but I was so happy to finally be free of Magister Handrin. He wasn’t a horrible Magister as many are known to be, he educated me and treated me decently in the beginning. He even allowed me to marry,” she swallowed and then touched her daughter’s cheek lightly before continuing. “At least that is what he was before the Venatori came and then that all changed. Blood magic became my master's focus, and the Venatori wanted him in that desert and before long he took me and Hendel to that desert with him. We knew we needed to try and escape, especially when we realized I was with child but the Venatori kept a vigilant guard over our cage. It was the night you came to the Venatori camp that my master was working on a specific location spell that required more blood, but before he could grab me, Hendel stepped in front of me and told our master to use him instead.” I saw her eyes fill with tears and yet they didn’t fall even when she took a shaky breath. “Then you and your men assaulted our camp, freeing us from our cages and I couldn’t think of a name more fitting for her than of the strong woman who gave us an opportunity to have a real life... a free life.”

Her soft brown gaze looked up from her daughter and stared at me apprehensively. I didn’t know how to react to her admission. I glanced at where Emithlen slept in his crib wondering if I could have endured what she had and still be strong. Would I have survived watching my husband sacrifice himself for me and our unborn child? Standing, I moved to sit next to her.

“May I hold her?”

Siri nodded and slipped her daughter into my arms and I touched her soft cheek tenderly. The lightweight of her rested easily in my arms and I studied her little nose and small pointed ears with enjoyment while she slept. She was so much smaller than Emithlen and again I am reminded that my son is not mortal but an Evanuris.

“You are so beautiful,” I whispered, touching her soft skin. Tears welled in my eyes as I stared at her sleeping little face and sniffing, I glance at Siri.

“I don’t know what to say, Siri. I am truly honored that you would name your daughter after me... and,” swallowing the large lump in my throat, I softly laughed. “And I am totally going to spoil her now just because we share a name.”

Siri softly laughed with me while I gazed back down at her sleeping daughter in my arms.

“Would you mind if I put her in the cradle with Emithlen?”
She shook her head and I moved to lay her next to him. As soon as I laid her down next to bean, I bit my lip curious to how he would react to her and Emithlen rolled towards the new warmth in his sleep and put a small arm over her, snuggling closer. The simple action is so adorable, I can't help crying and instantly my decision is made. If bean could take so easily to Siri’s daughters’ presence, then it was meant to be. I looked at Siri as she stood to come and look at what I saw and her own eyes watered with how cute the two looked sleeping.

“I would be very happy if you would help me with Emithlen, Siri. Would you be opposed to starting tomorrow and leaving for the Winter Palace with us by the end of the week?”

Siri wiped at her face and we shared a watery smile as she nodded her agreement.

“I would be honored, Fenlin.”

Slipping one of his long tunics over my head, Solas folded his clothes as he did every night and placed them on the chair. Pulling the covers back, I crawled in and sighed with enjoyment as the sensation of soft sheets and thick blankets enveloped me. My mind spun with thoughts of everything I needed to get ready, for our return to Orlais. Solas slipped in beside me and I rolled towards him, wrapping my arm around him and snuggling against his side. One of our nightly rituals was snuggling with each other and talking about our day before going to sleep.

“Siri has agreed to come with us to Halamshiral with her daughter. She will watch over bean while we deal with whatever stupidity Briala’s created.”

His fingers ran through my hair and I pressed a kiss to his chest as I continued telling him everything about my conversation with Siri that afternoon. Even now, I was still shocked by the fact that she named her daughter after me. Explaining to him how Siri came to be with the Inquisition, I finally tell him about her daughter’s name.

“Siri named her daughter after me.”

I felt his breath suddenly stop beneath my cheek, along with his fingers in my hair and glanced up at him, seeing his shocked surprise.

“She said she named her after the woman who saved her. I was so stunned by it, I didn’t know what to say. Still don’t really, it is all so surreal,” I admit.

He pressed a kiss to my forehead.

“I can tell that you are pleased that she will be accompanying us,” he replied calmly, and I nodded.

“Yes, I am. I wished you had been there when I laid her daughter next to bean. He snuggled right into her, Solas. Besides the fact that it was absolutely adorable, I couldn’t not accept her offer after seeing how easily our son accepted her daughter.”

He smiled at me and pushed some of my hair out of my face.

“She is aware that we are leaving for Orlais by weeks end then?”
I nodded and pressed another kiss to his bare chest. The smooth feeling of his skin beneath my fingers teased me and I found myself distracted from our conversation. The large expansion of the bare chest exposed to me made my pulse race. It had been so long since we had been intimate that I was starting to think we might never again.

“Yes, she does and she will help me with the itinerary as well, but right now, I would like it if you would focus on me?”

My comment brought an expression of surprise to his face and I smiled at him impishly before pulling my tunic over my head and throwing it to the floor. His beautiful eyes blew wide with my sudden nakedness and his gaze sent shivers of anticipation along the surface of my skin. The flow of desire snaked through our bond, warming my skin and I traced my fingers over his chest lightly while he watched me.

“Not that I don’t like how you are looking at me, ma’lath, but I would prefer you to take a more hands-on approach.”

He slowly caressed the side of my face and then down my body as if he were remembering the curves and his eyes held an edge of anxiousness. Smiling at him, I placed another kiss to his lips wanting to convince him that I was more than ready to reestablish our lovemaking. My sighing breath teased his and his hesitant fingers around my hips tightened, pulling me just that centimeter closer to him.

“It is not that I don’t desire you, vhenan. I just don’t want to…”

I grasped his neck and kissed him deeply. His tongue danced with mine willingly and my body lit with immediate flames in response. I felt his response pressing against my stomach and smiled against his lips.

“What? Get me pregnant again?” I teased and kissed him again.

“Vhenan,” he whispered against my lips and the feeling of his small breath set me aflame. “I do not want to hurt you.”

I couldn’t see how he could hurt me and sigh with frustration before grabbing his face, making him look at me as I bit his lower lip.

“Make love to me, Solas. It has been far too long since we have, and I want to make sure I can remember how it works.”

I nipped at his lower lip again as I teased him and his hand fisted in my hair as his mouth became hungry, consuming all of me with just his lips and I melted against him, enjoying the sensations he invoked. His hands glided over my sides waking up all my senses and a moan escaped with the sensations he caused making him groan. Taking his face in my hands, I pulled him from my neck.

“I need you… all of you,” I whispered against his mouth. "Will you deny me?"

His lips lit little fires within me, and I moaned again while his mouth smiled against my collarbone. "Never," he mouthed against my feverish skin before his lips moved lower. I grasped his head and arched my body with the sheer pleasure of his lips on my skin.

“I cannot put into words how much I want you,” he whispered against my hips before dragging his teeth teasingly over the surface and moving lower.

I arched against his torturing mouth, groaning with a build-up of unreleased frustration.
“Stop making me wait, Fen’Harel, I can’t take anymore.”

The feel of him suddenly tonguing me, sent my sense skyrocketing, and I cried out.

“Vhenan,” he whispered raggedly and did it again while my body was engulfed in flames.

“Solas”

Clenching my eyes closed tightly, the flash of lights behind my closed lids was almost blinding as Solas’ careful manipulations against my sensitive flesh sent my body flying towards its release. Gripping the bedsheets tightly, my body tremored while the room filled with my moans of pleasure. The first orgasm I’ve experienced in months rips through me almost violently and the smell of ozone fills my senses. Opening my eyes to watch the firework display my magic has created, I felt his mouth tease my navel and gaze down at him.

Solas’ eyes gaze up at me over the planes of my stomach and his cocky smile only kick-starts my desire for him into overdrive and I quirk a finger at him, beckoning him to me.

“Come here wolf, I’m far from done with you yet.”

He nips at my hipbone with a soft chuckle at my demand before covering my body. Our gaze locks and I caress his face as I feel him pressed intimately against me. My whole body needs him, needs this connection between us again and I pull his face to mine. Kissing him languidly, drawing a low moan from him when I arch my hips towards him and he slowly fills me, finally, my body breathes and then in the next breath a sharp wince of pain replaced the previous pleasure I was feeling.

Well, that is most unexpected. There was discomfort and the sensation froze me, my muscles tightened. Everything felt so different and the sound of his low groan against my neck told me I wasn’t the only one feeling this way. How the hell was I to know it would feel like the first time all over again? This was what he meant by not wanting to hurt me. I pressed kisses along his collarbone and chest as we lay locked together for a moment. There was no hurry to our lovemaking as we reacquainted ourselves with each other using lips and touch while my body gradually stretched to accommodate his presence inside me. My body relaxed and his nibbling along my jaw sent licks of desire racing through me again and I wrapped my legs around his waist when my body started to tingle with anticipation.

His slow, careful movements lit me on fire that consumed my breath and if there was an inch of space between us, he would have been too far away from me as my body moved languorously beneath him. Our mingled sounds of pleasure filled my ears with each movement as our bodies reached for that blissful oblivion. Our bond shimmering with the connection, filling me with emotions while my body raced for that feeling our beautiful reunion promised. Lacing our fingers together, we reached for it together and swallowed each other’s moans of release.

Panting, both of us breathing heavily, I stared up into his eyes and the love we shared flowed between us as we lay locked together just looking at each other as if we hadn’t seen each other in so long. I had not realized how much I’d missed this intimacy, these types of moments.

“Ar lath ma, vhenan,” he whispered, tenderly pressing his lips to mine.

I slipped my arms around his neck, holding him to me and kissed him back deeply.

“Sul bellanaris ma’ lath,” I replied against his lips and his arms tightened around me.
ma'lhath - my love
Ar lath ma, vhenan - I love you
Sul bellanaris ma' lath - for eternity my love
Family Trip to Orlais

Chapter Notes

My wonderful friend finished this for me showing Solas and Fenlin in such an intimate moment and I wanted to share with everyone following my little drabble her absolute talent. Thank you, everyone, for your continued support with my story and I hope you enjoy the latest chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

I helped Siri slip the baby carrier on that I’d asked Helene to make for her and showed her how it worked. She looked at me with surprise as I slipped bean inside of mine now that hers was securely on. She followed my example and placed little Fenlin within the carrier leaving her hands free and laughed with delight.

“This is ingenious, Fenlin.”

“Thank you, but it was just my design, Helene is the true artist in the way she took a picture and made it real.”

We both turned with the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs and Josephine’s head came into view holding her clipboard. She smiled as she walked towards us, holding out a gold etched invitation with a lion stamped onto the parchment.

“Inquisitor. The Empress has offered you the use of her estate again for our stay while in Halamshiral.”

I returned her smile, knowing that Celine liked giving the impression she was giving us a wonderful gift, but the fact is, she really just wanted unlimited access to meet with me and it would annoy Gaspard to no end. Taking the invite, I gave her my orders.

“That is very generous of the Empress. Tell her we accept and send her our appreciation with her offer, Josephine. Also, please inform Cullen that I would like a full retinue to escort us to Halamshiral.”

Josephine gave me a small nod before leaving the room and I turned towards Siri and Marian who was seated behind my desk surrounded by mountains of paperwork. Never have I ever appreciated someone so much as I did Marian.

“Marian, I will leave the correspondence in your capable hands while I am gone. If you come across anything that you are unsure of, feel free to put it aside until I return.”

Marian nodded her head in understanding and then glanced at the floor looking a bit rattled while tapping her fingers on the desk. I saw the small agitation and wondered what was bothering her when she finally spoke up.

“Will… Cole also be going with you?”
I wanted to help her understand Cole and saw her nervous swallowing and a small smile flittered on my lips for a brief second before wiping it off. *No, just stay out of it and allow those two to find their own way.* Sharing a knowing look with Siri, I answered Marian.

“Yes, he will be going with us.”

I noticed the little frown that formed around her lips as she nodded her understanding before taking a deep breath and pasting a smile to her lips as she looked at me.

“Of course, how foolish of me to ask Fenlin. Dareth shiral,” she offered us with a forced bright smile.

I was so impressed with Marian and her resilient nature. I knew she had feelings for Cole, and she was struggling to come to terms with them, but I had faith she would figure it out on her own. The fact that our resident mind reading spirit hadn’t heard her confusion was weird to me. *Maybe he is just as confused.* Too many thoughts ran through my head about the two and I mentally pushed them away to focus on the here and now. *They will figure it out.*

Marian held her shoulders back and even though I could see a sadness in her gaze, she was determined to act as if nothing was wrong. I smiled at her and readjusted bean as I realized the many qualities Marian had. There is her thirst for knowledge; it was inspiring. That she was also trying to learn elven from Siri as well as continue her magical studies and work for me as my assistant all at the same time was astounding. Smiling, I walked to her and gave her a small hug, making sure not to squish bean between us.

“Ma serannas, da’len.”

Marian smiled and gave us a wave before Siri, and I left my chambers to meet Solas and Felassan in the main hall. When our gazes met, I mentally groaned with his cold gaze. *The man is as obnoxious as having a zit in the middle of my nose.* I really wished Felassan wasn’t coming with us but as Solas logically pointed out to me, perhaps he could talk some sense into Briala since he had been her teacher. Solas bent and pressed a brief kiss to my lips in greeting and I smiled up at him.

“Everything is packed onto the carriage. Shall we,” he said with a gesture towards the doors.

I nodded and took a deep breath, praying for patience in abundance as we crossed the keep. *Whichever God is listening… give me the strength to deal with Felassan for this trip and to not lose my temper or toss him out of the carriage onto his ancient ass to walk.*

The first hour of our ride inside of the carriage was as silent as a tomb until bean grew fussy with hunger. I ignored the way Felassan’s eyes followed my movements and slipped bean out of the carrier, pressing a small kiss to his cheek as I spoke to him soothingly.

“Hush, hush now little man. There is no need to cause such a ruckus, mamae is right here.”

Solas helped me by removing the carrier so I could position bean in my arms to feed him. Unbuttoning my shirt, Solas slipped a small blanket over me and bean as I brought him to my breast. His finally contented little rutting sounds as he suckled hungrily, filled the small cabin and I leaned back into the circle of Solas’ arms. I heard Felassan’s sigh of annoyance and kept my eyes closed, ignoring him and whatever he was about to say.

“Yes, that not why this other one was hired? She is supposed to feed the little one, yes?”
I clenched my teeth together and silently counted to ten ignoring his questions. Felassan went out of his way to goad me and I knew it. Today, I would succeed in ignoring that ancient ass sitting smugly across from me. My eyes only opened when I heard Siri’s curt reply, somewhat surprised since she was normally quiet.

“This one has a name and I am here to help her when she must be away from her son, not interfere when she is perfectly capable of caring for her child.”

Siri’s tone was frosty, and I smiled at her before looking at Felassan with a raised eyebrow. Solas chuckled from behind me as he addressed Felassan.

“Why must you insist on being so insufferable, old friend?”

Before he could answer, Siri spoke up as she adjusted little Fenlin.

“Because he is naturally insulting, and obviously takes great pleasure in the matter that his manners are atrocious.”

Her insightful response made me laugh and Felassan turned slightly towards Siri with an expression of annoyance on his normally stoic face.

“Excuse me?”

She glanced up from her daughter who slept against her quietly and stared Felassan straight in the eye, showing her own annoyance with him.

“Unless you apologize for your crude behavior, there is no excuse for you.”

Oh, snap! I glanced between the two, curious to see who would win this little battle of insults. I recognized that Siri may have been enslaved by a Magister of Tevinter, but she had not allowed her mind to be broken by him and what he had done to her. In the small time I've had in getting to know her, she was absolutely delightful. She was not shy about asking questions, curious about beans magic and wanting to prepare herself with what to do if she were ever to encounter it while Solas and I were away. Putting my breast away now that bean was done eating, I leaned forward and put him on my shoulder as I began the ritual of burping him while I watched the little drama unfold before me.

“For a nursemaid, you are far to outspoken. Did you not understand that women of your station should be seen and not heard?” Felassan retorted and I heard Solas’ soft groan of despair with his friend’s sarcastic response. I was, however, starting to think that making him walk was a good idea as his comment made me stiffen with my own anger.

Siri shrugged with indifference to Felassan’s insult and rolled her eyes at him almost scornfully.

“Perhaps you prefer your women to be silent and biddable because you are weak and intimidated by a woman that knows her own mind.”

I watched while Felassan’s expression grew livid with Siri’s remark and yet he sat silently staring at her. At that moment, bean decided to burp loudly and break the silent standoff between the two. The sound made me giggle with the absolute ridiculousness of the whole argument and I handed bean to Solas noticing that he too, was smiling.

“Well the little prince has put in his two coppers worth into the conversation,” I joked, and Siri also laughed. Felassan was the only one not smiling and stared out the side window in silence, ignoring us.
Siri and I shared an understanding look before she leaned back and began feeding little Fenlin who had awoken during their verbal sparring. Closing my eyes, I leaned my head against Solas’ shoulder suddenly very tired and felt him softly kiss the top of my head.

After three days on the road in a carriage with Siri and Felassan, I wanted to slice my own throat. The two hadn’t stopped bickering and poking at each other since we’d gotten up this morning and I was gritting my teeth at the two. The day we were to arrive at the harbor to take our boat to Val Royeaux was the day Felassan had finally crossed the line with Siri and the loud slap of her hand meeting his face rang through the small carriage.

“No wonder your husband left you, you only know how to plague a man!”

Felassan snapped at her sarcastically and I immediately looked at Siri as her eyes widened and her face paled considerably just before her cheeks flushed red and her hand came across Felassan’s cheek, surprising the ancient.

“Don’t you ever speak of him. You don’t know what he did for us… for me. He was more man that you will ever be in your lifetime.”

I heard the tremor in her voice and passed bean quickly to Solas before pounding on the back of the carriage, signaling the driver to stop. I glared at Felassan, so disappointed with him as the carriage came to a halt and I took Siri’s hand, helping her out of the carriage and leaving the two men. Maybe some fresh air and a reprieve from Felassan’s asinine nature would help clear out Siri’s mind from his horrible words.

Solas gazed down at his sleeping son before he spoke quietly, informing Felassan of his immense misstep with Lady Siri.

“You overstepped the lines of decency with your ill-spoken words earlier. There is much to Lady Siri’s tale that you are not aware of, lethal’lin.”

Felassan snorted and rubbed his cheek, still surprised with the woman’s quick strike.

“I do not care for her tale of sorrows, old wolf. She is an insolent, foolish elf. There is no helping her kind.”

Solas glanced up from his sleeping son and held his old friends gaze quietly as he explained.

“Siri is one of the slaves we helped free from the Venatori while in the Hissing Wastes. We did not arrive in time to save her mate, who that very day, had valiantly died for her and their unborn child when their master needed another sacrifice.”

Felassan glanced at him quietly as he digested the small tidbit of information about Siri. The woman was a constant thorn and yet he now understood why she’d struck him. He nodded sharply at Solas just before the two women returned and glanced out the window.
The boat to Val Royeaux was just as trying as the carriage ride was as it didn’t seem that there was an end in sight to Siri and Felassan’s arguing. It was exhausting how they picked at each other over every little thing. In the beginning, I had felt happy that he had stopped trying to pick a fight with me all the time but now it just appeared he had changed his focus to Siri. In the crowded dining area with so many of the Inquisition soldiers, Solas and I sat at a table with the arguing duo along with Josephine, Leliana, and Cullen. Bean gratefully fell asleep about an hour ago so I could grab a bite to eat and I was utterly done in.

Our son had made himself quite clear that he did not appreciate being on a ship by crying almost all night and all day long since boarding. The difference between his cries and that of little Fenlin’s when she was unhappy, were that Emithlen threw a grand fit that included bursts of magic to emphasize his displeasure with the whole situation. I took a bite of the stew that sat before me and tiredly chewed, not even awake enough to taste it. One more night and we would finally complete our three-day nightmare by arriving in Val Royeaux and getting off this floating hell. Then, maybe my son would sleep and in turn, let his parents fucking sleep too.

“Why must you be such an impolite clod?” Siri snapped, setting her spoon down drawing my attention.

“Perhaps I should be asking why you are continuously snappish and quick to anger?” Felassan retorted with a raised eyebrow.

I sighed and rolled my eyes at the two as others around the table observed their bickering. I couldn’t help but think that Siri was combustible around Felassan, like gasoline. Where Felassan, I think took great pleasure in being the match to set her off with his constant arguing. I heard Leliana’s small chuckle across from me and I spooned in another tasteless bite of my dinner as Siri turned towards me, ignoring Felassan’s last comment.

“I was thinking that perhaps tonight we could try something different that might help Emithlen sleep,” she offered before taking a bite of her own dinner.

I looked at her almost desperate to try anything just to get more than two hours of sleep when I heard Felassan’s intake of breath to give some sarcastic comment. I glared at him. Our gazes locked as I silently warned him to keep quiet and his mouth audibly snapped closed before I looked back at Siri with a hopeful expression.

“I will try anything. His objections can be heard throughout the entire boat and I am sure no one is getting much sleep no matter what wards we put over the door.”

I ignored Felassan’s snort and kept my gaze on Siri before my temper snapped and I commanded Felassan to leave the room. For all the dislike I felt for the guy, I loathed the idea that I could command him in any fashion even more.

“Maybe he will calm if we lay him with Fenlin. Perhaps the feeling of another so close will be soothing for him.”

I looked at Solas and saw that he too had matching bags under his eyes like mine and he nodded his
agreement with the idea.

“It could not hurt to try.”

I looked back at Siri and nodded my head in agreement.

“If you do not mind, Siri, I would appreciate any help at this point. We are both just so freaking exhausted, we don’t know what else to do.”

She smiled at me kindly and gripping my hand in a show of sister solidarity.

“I do not mind Fenlin, I know my daughter would sleep better as well. She has not been as vocal as master Emithlen, but she has not been sleeping very well either.”

Later that night as everyone prepared for sleep, Siri came to our small cabin where Solas and I had prepared a pallet for her next to ours. The traveling cradle Bull had made for me, sat against the wall at our feet, lashed to the wall. I held Emithlen who was already beginning to fuss and get agitated as if he was aware that I wanted to sleep. I laid him down and he looked ready to scream just as Siri laid little Fenlin next to him and his eyes grew round in shock with the new addition to his bed. His head turned towards the little person with curious grey-blue eyes and found a pair of green eyes staring back at him just as curious. Their combined silence brought a sigh of relief to the three exhausted adults watching them. When I saw Emithlen yawn tiredly, I smiled at Siri.

“I think it’s working.”

“Thank the Creators,” Siri whispered with her own sound of relief.

Solas kissed the top of my head and took my hand.

“Let us take full advantage of this moment and get some much-needed rest before either one decides to change their mind.”

When Solas and I disembarked from the ship in Val Royeaux, it was with smiles of blessed relief. The children had slept most of the night and only woke to have diapers changed or to be fed. It was a schedule that both Siri and I were quite used to and decided to let the children sleep together on the return trip as well. Staring up at the blue sky and breathing in the salty air, I walked down the dock towards Josephine.

“I have reserved the lodgings that you requested in the Alienage, but I must ask again Inquisitor, are you sure you would not be more comfortable at the Val Jerdavain with the rest of us?”

I smiled at Josephine and patted her shoulder.

“I am sure, thank you, Josephine.”

She nodded her head and Solas took my hand wearing a small knowing smile as I winked up at him. We entered the alienage and saw the large Vhenadahl tree decorated in the middle of the small courtyard. Felassan groaned at the site of it as I dropped a few coins into the offering bowl before walking past, ignoring him. Solas opened the door and Tavin stood behind the counter, writing
something down and he glanced up to see who had entered and a large smile grew on his narrow face as he dropped his quill and came around the counter towards us.

“Solas, Fenlin, it has been too long.”

He greeted Solas with a manly greeting by grabbing him by the forearm before moving onto me and kissing me on each cheek. I smiled at him so happy to see him and he glanced down at the large bag I wore curiously, and I slipped bean out so Tavin could see him.

“Tavin, I would like you to meet our son, Emithlen.”

Tavin gazed down at him and clapped his hands happily for us.

“He is a handsome child that you two have created.”

The bond between Solas and I hummed with the pride he felt at the compliment and I smiled up at him as Tavin continued speaking.

“The rooms for you and your friends are prepared as you requested lethal’len, and dinner will be ready in an hour.”

I smiled at him and patted his arm as I walked by him for our room. Climbing the steps, I pointed to the room across from us for Siri.

“Your room is in there, Siri.”

She nodded and opened the door walking inside and I looked at Felassan who wore an expression of disgust.

“Your room is next to Siri’s, Felassan. Have a nice rest, we will see you at dinner.”

“You actually expect me to stay here.”

I heard his disgusted tone of voice and smiled up at him, tired of the constant struggle between him and me.

“No, I expect you to complain Felassan, like you always do,” I retorted and entered my room without a backward glance.

Solas entered after me and closed the door without looking at Felassan as he warded it. Taking bean from me, I started to remove the carrier by untying the sashes while looking at him.

“You are absolutely positive that we can’t just leave Felassan somewhere… like in a hole… with dirt over the top of it,” I offered with a playful smile as I pulled the carrier off.

His soft laughter soothed me, and he returned my playful smile as he held Emithlen, gently rocking him to sleep.

“He will be of great assistance with Brialal, vhenan” he reminded me again.

I turned towards the large tub with a loud groan, making Solas laugh even more and started to prepare our bath.

“So far, he has proven to be of great assistance in giving me a bloody headache.”

I felt Solas’ arm slip around my waist as I turned the water off when the tub was finished filling and I
hadn’t realized that he had laid bean down.

“You could command him to silence, vhenan.”

I shook my head vehemently with just the idea of it.

“No, I may not like him, but I don’t need to be that kind of a bitch, and you know I don’t like having that kind of power over anyone.”

Solas pressed a tender kiss to the side of my head.

“That is what I love most about you, vhenan. Your concern for others and their feelings, even when you do not like them.”

I glanced up at him with an impish smile and touched his chin teasingly.

“Sweet talker.”

The playfulness in his eyes swiftly changed to something much hotter and he quickly captured my lips hungrily which I returned the kiss just as enthusiastically. We had not been alone for a week and since our night of rediscovering each other, we were like a couple of teenagers. Solas peeled off layers of clothing as did I, not breaking the kiss. Pulling on the laces of his leathers, I nipped his bottom lip making him moan excitedly. Helping each other out of our clothing, he picked me up and stepped into the tub carrying me. Sitting down, I felt the heat of the water splash against the back of my legs as I continued to hold his gaze lustfully while my body craved him.

“We have about ten, maybe fifteen minutes before your son will interrupt us,” I warned him and Solas turned me so I could straddle his lap.

“Then we should not waste one moment,” he whispered against my lips before filling me with his desire.

Wrapping my arms around his neck, I held on to him as he led me swiftly towards oblivion. Our passionate breaths mixed with the sound of water lapping against the side of the tub filled our ears and when he bit my shoulder, marking me, my body shook with my powerful release. Both of us spent and trying to catch our breath with the impromptu coupling, I giggled with the absurdity that we were sneaking these moments like a couple of horny kids. He returned my playful smile and kissed me quickly, grabbing the washcloth.

I grabbed the bar of soap from the small table and without another word, we continued with our bath, enjoying this intimate moment between us before bean would wake.

Chapter End Notes

Dareth shiral - Safe journey
Ma serannas, da’len - Thank you, little one
Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support of my story. When I first started this story, I wasn't sure if anyone would want to read it and it is so humbling to see how many of you are reading it.

“On the highest throne in the world, we still sit only on our own bottom.”
— Michel de Montaigne

Celine’s estate was vast as we approached. The large, palatial home with its dark blue wash and golden columns and accents loomed gaudily in the daylight as we rolled into the circular driveway in the carriage. I had completely forgotten what the Empress’ estate looked like and glanced at Siri busily staring out the window quietly and I patted her arm reassuringly as I focused on Cullen’s men that were already here when I stepped out of the carriage. Walking towards Cullen with Solas walking beside me, he smiled at us as we approached.

“Inquisitor, our men are in position.”

“Thank you, Cullen,” I said nodding my head and walking by him for the front door that was held open for us. We entered the large foyer and I glanced around at the highly polished marble pillars and floor tiles with the rooms vaulted ceiling and murals of ocean scenes painted on the surface. It still surprised me to see the sheer opulence the Empress used to decorate the estate. There was a long line of elven maids in front of us as everyone entered and Josephine quickly stepped forward, taking over, to my relief.

“If you would be so kind as to show us to our quarters, we would like to freshen up before dinner.”

The one in charge of the housekeeping staff, a human, of course, stepped forward. The woman wore a crisply pressed periwinkle blue outfit and blonde hair wound so tightly into a bun it pulled the skin around her face back and clapped her hands smartly. A maid for each of us stepped immediately forward, gesturing towards the grand, horseshoe-shaped staircase. I stared at it and repressed a shiver as the sight of it reminded me of the staircase in my parents’ home and I felt the comforting touch of Solas’ hand on my lower back as I was sure he felt my discomfort shimmer through our bond. Siri stood next to us just silently taking in the grand room with large, curious eyes.

“You appear to be lost, little one,” Felassan whispered next to her ear and I internally groaned, immediately wanting to slap him.

I overheard Siri’s tired sigh that was full of annoyance and then her coldly, whispered reply back to him.

“Mythal’s balls, if you’re going to breathe on me, at least wash your mouth.”

I snorted and covered my mouth as a laugh escaped at the shocked expression on Felassan’s face before he stood back up abruptly, glaring at me as I couldn't keep the hilarity of the moment from the look on my face. Glancing at Siri, I winked at her and followed behind the maid leading Solas and I to our room.
The maid opened the double doors that led into a huge sitting room that was more room than anyone could possibly need. I peered around Solas and noticed the hallway that led to probably the bathing chamber and a bedroom. We walked all the way inside and the maid curtsied, speaking towards the floor.

“I will make sure your things are brought up promptly, my lady. Please make yourself comfortable and if you need anything, you only have but to pull that cord, Your Worship.”

I grimaced with the use of the title and glanced at the long golden cord in the corner before walking towards the maid.

“Please stand and tell me your name, I would prefer if you called me, Fenlin.”

I saw her blue eyes glance at me nervously before staring back at the floor uncomfortably while her voice tremored with her reply, and it angered me a little that she was afraid of me... supposedly one of her own. The idea that every servant in this house was an elf really started to piss me off and I swallowed my annoyance with Orlesian’s and the constant self-entitlement they indulged in.

“My name is Ashley.”

I smiled at her warmly.

“It is wonderful to meet you, Ashley. If you would be so kind, please make sure they bring the cradle up first before anything else. Our son needs a nap after he is fed.”

She gave me a timid smile when she must have realized that I was not like Orlesian nobles, nor was I like Briala and pretended to be above everyone and backed out of the room, closing the doors. I turned towards Solas and he moved around the room carefully. I could tell he was looking for anything out of the ordinary and sat down on the couch. Slipping Bean out of the carrier, I noticed that he was looking around curiously and sat him up so he could get a good look. Solas came back into the room with a small nod, telling me that everything was okay. The soft knock on the door made him detour from walking towards us and to the door instead. He opened the door and Bull stood in the hall holding the cradle with Dorian holding the bag of Emithlen’s things that held his clothes and nappies. I smiled at them and got up from the couch, talking softly with Bean.

“Oh, look whose here, Uncle Bull and Dorian with your things, little man.”

Emithlen broke into a large smile and gurgled his happiness while flailing his little arms excitedly.

Bull chuckled as he walked in and set the cradle down just as Dorian set the pack down and walked towards me, taking Emithlen from my arms. Bull stood behind him and held out a large finger that Bean quickly grasped onto as he gazed at the baby over his lover’s shoulder. I turned from the beautiful picture the three of them made with the sound of more knocking and Solas opened the door again as two footmen entered the room carrying our bags. Josephine followed behind them carrying the box that held my dress for the ball and I hid my grimace at the sight of it.

Well, at least this time I’ll actually have some cleavage to show off. The silly thought made me snort, drawing Solas’ attention and I just shook my head at him with my foolishness.

Josephine moved around our space like a prim school mistress, directing the footmen on unpacking our bags and I groaned, watching these unknown men unpack our things. Josephine pulled out my gown and shook it with a smile before hanging it in the large armoire against the pale, golden wall. I glanced at Solas and saw that he too was uncomfortable watching others put our things away and took his hand, lacing my fingers with his. He glanced down at me and we shared an uncomfortable look before looking at Josephine as she dismissed the footmen when they were finished.
“Dinner is at seven, Inquisitor. The Grand Duke and the Empress will also be in attendance this evening.”

I glanced at her for a brief moment and then sighed as I looked at bean and realized I would have to leave him with Siri for the dinner. After hearing this, Bull glanced up from making faces at Emithlen.

“Don’t worry about it, Boss. I can carry the cradle over to Siri’s before dinner, if you want.”

I smiled at him gratefully and nodded my head.

“Thank you, Bull, I would really appreciate it.”

He nodded and went back to sticking his tongue out at bean making him gurgle and laugh. Smiling at him, I looked at Josephine suddenly unsure where she had put Siri and Josephine quickly put me at ease.

“I have placed Mistress Siri in the room next to your own.” She pointed towards a door just next to a small golden settee against a wall as she continued. “That is the connecting door between the rooms, so you will not have a need to move the cradle unless you really want to.”

Walking towards the door, I knocked and heard it unlock and Siri stood in front of me, holding little Fenlin. I smiled at her, really grateful she had chosen to come with us to Halamshiral.

“The Grand Duke and the Empress will be at dinner tonight and as you know, I don’t want Emithlen anywhere close to them. Would you like Bull to bring the cradle to your chambers before dinner or would you prefer to keep it over here in ours?”

I swallowed my discomfort and repeated to myself that this was no different than just going to a meeting without him as Siri glanced at where the cradle was next to the couch that was also close to the door that connected our rooms and smiled.

“I think it would be easier if we leave it where it is, so as not to disturb him when you return after dinner. I can always place little Fenlin in with him to keep him company if he chooses to become fussy.”

I nodded with her judgment and turned back towards Josephine.

“Okay then, we will be ready for dinner. Please advise everyone to ignore all talk of Emithlen. If anyone is to address the existence of our son, then it will be done by either Solas or myself.”

Josephine nodded her head in agreement.

“As you wish, Inquisitor. I will advise the others of your wishes.”

With that, she left our chambers and I rubbed my face already tired of being in Orlais.

“And the great game of bullshit begins,” I muttered.

Bull laughed as well as Siri and she placed a comforting hand on my shoulder.

“I believe in you, Fenlin. You will handle whatever needs to be handled.”

Her simple words of confidence bolstered my souring mood and I patted her hand that sat on my shoulder.

“Thanks Siri.”
I left her doorway and heard the soft click of it shutting behind me as I walked towards Solas. His eyes followed my steps and I knew he was watching me so carefully because he could feel how heavy my heart was with the sudden reality of leaving our son tonight. I trusted Siri and I liked her an awful lot but that did not stop the feelings from quickly flooding me. I felt that in the few weeks I had already known her, we were growing close, like sisters, but that didn’t keep my mind from torturing me with thoughts that I was abandoning my son.

Solas stepped towards me and took my hands, holding them within his gentle grip as his eyes held mine.

“Never feel this way about what must be done, vhenan. You are not deserting our son, you are protecting him, never should you confuse the two.”

I heard his words and felt the strong conviction he felt through our bond, lifting me from my feelings of being a horrible mother. He touched my chin and lifted my face so he could look me in the eye, and I saw in his eyes that he believed everything he just said and smiled at him.

“Thank you, ma’lath.”

He bent and pressed a kiss to my lips, and I took strength from his feelings and actions for a small moment before turning to look at Dorian and Bull who were still busy fussing over bean. Solas was right and I felt suddenly lighter about the idea of leaving our son tonight.

Dressed in a dark black gown with gold accents, I kissed bean again and looked at Siri. Her gaze held a well of understanding and in its own way, reassured me. Swallowing my discomfort with leaving, I squared my shoulders.

“I have already fed him, and he should be good for a while. If you need me for anything, don’t hesitate to interrupt me downstairs.”

She smiled at me and nodded her head.

“Don’t worry, Fenlin. If anything is to go wrong, I will come and get you immediately.”

She took my hand and gripped it for a brief moment before letting me go and I turned towards Solas who also wore a black suit with gold accents and the simple sight of him stole my breath. Suddenly, I was grateful for the distraction and smiled at him.

He held out his hand and I took it before I lost my courage to leave our chambers. When he opened the door, Felassan waited for us just outside and I held back an annoyed sigh at the sight of him. Surprisingly, he too wore a simple black suite with golden accents and even though I disliked the man, he was handsome looking in the nights attire. His expression was aloof and the hold I had on Solas’ hand tightened, and he squeezed back reassuring me. Felassan stepped aside as we walked through, and he closed the door behind us before bending to speak quietly into my ear.

“I may not owe you my loyalty, Fenlin, but I would be pleased if you would allow me to be your banal’ras for this evening.”

I glanced up at him with surprise and saw the seriousness of his request in his lavender gaze. He’s serious. Studying him quietly for a moment, I finally nodded my head with his request, unable to ignore this little olive branch he was holding out to me. Maybe he isn’t such a hateful ass all the time.

“Thank you, Felassan. I think I might breathe easier knowing you are with us tonight.”
He curtly nodded at me before stepping back and folding his arms behind his back similar to the way Solas stood and a memory flashed through my mind of Assan standing in a similar fashion. I looked up at Solas and saw the small tilt at the corners of his lips and straightened my shoulders for what was to come in the next room.

“Guard your bits, boys, the Empress and the Duke are a pair of slippery bastards.”

Both Felassan and Solas softly chuckled and Solas wrapped my hand around his and led us down the corridor.

The conversation around the table was stilted and uncomfortable as Gaspard and Celine stared at each other with distrust. The room was thick with the tension between the two. Setting my fork down, I took a sip of my wine prepared to address the elephant in the room as Celine spoke.

“It has been reported that congratulations are in order, Inquisitor. You are a mother now, are you not?”

The cool, light blue gaze of Celine’s stared at me through the silver mask that covered over half her features. Tonight, her white-blond hair was plaited down her back and her dark, royal blue gown, exposing her slender shoulders. The almost translucent paleness of Celine’s skin made me wonder if she had ever seen daylight or was she really just a social vampire that only came out at night.

I clenched my hands in my lap while holding her steady gaze.

“Yes, it is true,” I replied simply before reaching for Solas’ hand that lay on the table. “Our child was born five months ago.”

Celine nodded at my answer, taking a sip of her wine before continuing.

“It is my understanding that your Consort…”

I abruptly interrupted her and felt Solas’ fingers slightly tighten over mine warningly as he felt the instant flash of anger with Celine’s dismissal of him.

“He is my husband, Your Majesty. Not my Consort, Concubine, Paramour or any other title you want to use to dismiss his existence in my life.”

Celine and I exchange hardened gazes before she finally glanced away from me. I would slap the mask off her face if she dismissed him as my mate one more time and be dammed the fucking consequences.

“I meant no disrespect, Inquisitor. Orlesian’s do not recognize such arrangements between elves as having any legitimacy.”

Why is it so damn hard for Orlesian’s to actually have any compassion? I began counting to ten and took a small breath to calm myself, relaxing my tightened jaw before I spoke.

“It is quite normal, Your Majesty,” I replied with a bitter tone that I couldn’t disguise. “Orlesian’s are not expected to know anything beyond the end of their own noses. For you to learn anything about the elven, it would require for you to care and we both know, you don’t.”
I ignored Josephine’s choking to my left as I continued to hold Celine’s gaze emotionlessly. Celine lifted her goblet of wine at me and bowed her head just slightly.

“Touché, Inquisitor.”

I had about had enough of this bullshit banter between us and finally addressed the reason I was asked to come.

“Now that we have the pleasantries out of the way, please, Your Majesty, begin with what you have been told to lead you to such distrust in your cousin.”

Celine tore her gaze from me and glanced at Gaspard and a heavy sigh escaped her. Silently stunned, I saw the Empress for who she really was for such a brief moment and I almost thought I imagined it before the bottom half of her masked face wore an expressionless look again.

“Information that an impending attack upon myself and the council is imminent from my cousin. Troup movements and guard replacements have been happening recently leading to the validity of the allegations.”

I listened silently and folded my hands on the table, looking directly at Celine.

“May I inquire to when these allegations and rumors began?”

She looked at me for a moment thoughtfully before answering.

“A few months ago.”

I nodded my head and turned to look at Gaspard. The man appeared to not even be listening but instead staring at me hungrily while Solas sat stiffly to my left. I could feel Solas’ anger with Gaspard’s hot gazes at me flowing between us and took a small breath to steady myself while I pushed reassuring love through our bond.

“Cool it, husband. I held his gaze for a silent moment before he barely tilted his head towards me, and I glanced across the table back to Gaspard.

“Grand Duke, would you be so kind as to also tell us what you have learned to lead to such distrust in your cousin.”

Gaspard gave me what he thought was his charming smile and I barely refrained from making a disgusted noise like Cassandra’s.

“It was also a few months ago that my agents began finding evidence that my Cousin was plotting to have me assassinated while out on a hunting expedition.”

I stared at him for a moment thinking that type of accident would be almost to good to be true before looking back at Celine.

“I don’t need to remind either of you that a spell was cast over the candles in front of you that will color the air if you are lying, so please keep that in mind as I ask you both to be honest not only with me but with each other. Your Majesty, are these allegations true? Have you plotted to assassinate your cousin?”

She shook her head adamantly.

“No, of course not. Gaspard commands our military and works diligently within our cabinet using a sound mind for reason and strategy. In the beginning, I thought your idea lunacy, but as the year has passed, I have grown to realize what an asset he is to me and the council.”
The flame did not change color with her answer, and I sighed mentally with relief. *For once, these noble tits are going to be honest.* I looked at Gaspard and gestured for him to answer as well.

“No, I have no plans to attack my cousin or the Council of Heralds. She handles the diplomatic bureaucracy with a delicate hand, much better than I. She is well aware that I have no patience for such drivel. I have grown to appreciate my position and also, I do not have to deal with such boring topics as parties and what is in fashion. If I were to plot out an attack against my cousin, it would be insanity for me for I do not wish to deal with her troubles.”

I held his gaze for a moment before he looked at Celine and continued in a quieter tone than I had ever heard from him before.

“Cousin,” he began and reached across the table, taking her small hand within his own large one, completely surprising her and everyone around the table with his sudden gentleness. “Before all of this deceit began, we would sit and have a drink in front of the fire every night before retiring, just discussing the day’s events. I have missed these quiet moments with you, my cousin.”

I saw the softening of the lower half of her face and caught the way her hand tightened on his.

“As have I, cousin. I too miss sharing my troubles with someone that understands.”

They shared a look for a moment before they both looked at me and for once, I actually appreciated the two nobles sitting in front of me and started thinking that maybe not all was lost.

“Then we need to find the source of these lies. The only one missing from this dinner is Briala, where is she this evening?”

Celine looked away as Gaspard shook his head.

“I do not know where that little spy has gotten to. She has not been to any of the meetings for some time and when she does attend, she is always lurking in one corner or another.”

My gaze swung towards Celine and she was still looking away from me uncomfortably.

“Your Majesty?” I asked, pulling her blue gaze back to mine and saw her swallow nervously.

“I have not seen her for a few weeks. The last time we spoke,” I watched Celine swallow anxiously before continuing. “She was very angry with me and swore she would not speak to me ever again.”

I could just imagine what had gotten Briala pissed off and sighed, glancing back at Felassan. His expression was one of cool indifference and I glanced back around the table.

“Then we need to find her and hear her side of things, yes?”

I sounded like I was giving Briala the benefit of the doubt even though all my reports pointed to all the discord between Celine and Gaspard being instigated by her. Both nobles nodded their agreement.

“Perhaps she too has been receiving false reports,” Celine said sounding hopeful.

Gaspard silently shook his head and glanced at me again with a knowing look. I held his gaze as we shared a look that said we both knew she was behind the intrigue just like she had done before. Picking up my wine, I took a small sip as I thought about how we were going to find her.

“We shall soon find out,” I replied.
Shall We Dance, Andruil?

Chapter Notes

Some of you are probably surprised with the early post but I needed to get it out there since I am going to go out with a friend tomorrow. I also will warn you that this chapter is double the normal size because it was either cut it in a place that would seriously leave you hanging or just leave it as a very long chapter, so I do hope you will enjoy the length of this chapter.

Again, I really want to thank everyone that is following my story, leaving comments, are new to the story and just beginning the journey. Thank you, for your continued support.

(Sentences in italics are to be understood as spoken in elven.)

About to stand now that the dinner was concluded, which I thankful for that because I didn’t think I could take much more of their company, when suddenly the door burst open into the dining room, startling everyone around the table. Solas and I immediately stood up when we saw that it was Siri who stood in the doorway visibly shaking.

My whole body stiffened with the sight of the horrible pattern of bruises coloring her face along with bleeding from her nose. Tears rushed over her bruised cheeks as she stood in the doorway holding herself. Her face was stricken with fear and she suddenly wobbled as if she were about to fall when Felassan fade stepped to her swiftly before she hit the floor, catching her as her softly spoken words froze my blood and echoed in my ears as loud as thunder.

“I… I couldn’t stop them. They took them… they…” we watched her swallow and grip Felassan’s arms tightly, staring at him desperately. “They took the children.”

My whole body vibrated violently and my knees felt unsteady when Solas grabbed my arm to keep me upright. Our bond flowed with our combined fear and I couldn’t get my brain to wrap around what she had just said as I stared at her, my body a rush of emotions I couldn’t decipher.

“What do you mean, gone? That’s not possible…” I muttered, still in a daze when I suddenly held Siri’s panicked gaze. “By who?”

She held out a small slip of paper in her scraped and shaky hand and I took it quickly from her not noticing the way she instantly returned to continue gripping Felassan. Scouring the words, I covered my mouth as a choked sob escaped me and Solas’ arm tightened around me while he read over my shoulder.

Come to me or I will kill them and you know I will not hesitate.
Do not make me wait, Assan.
Andruil

My magical aura expanded with my sudden fear and anger narrowing on the words, blowing the dining table against the far wall. Celine’s shriek of fear didn’t even phase me. Ignoring the sudden clamor around the broken dinner table, I took a step towards Siri and her eyes expressed her own fear and anger as I knelt and took one of her scraped hands. Looking at her bleeding and bruised face, I knew she’d put up quite a fight trying to save our children from whoever took them and
slipped some of her hair behind her ear.

“I am sorry I wasn’t there to stop them, Siri, I promise, I will bring your daughter back to you and I promise, I will make them pay for this.”

Her hand gripped mine tightly and she spoke in elven so only me, Solas, and Felassan could understand her.

“They were not of this world, Fenlin. There were three of them... they arrived as ravens through the window. They bragged about using me as the messenger, wishing they could have told you themselves... be very careful, Fenlin. They took great pleasure in knowing you would follow.”

_The Forbidden_, my mind filled in quickly. _Those rotten little sons of bitches would pay for this and wish they’d never left the Abyss_ and I looked at Felassan.

“You wanted to be my banal’ras for this evening, then your task is to find me their trail, Felassan.”

He held my gaze for only a moment before his tight, angry features nodded and he let go of Siri with a brief and hesitant expression before leaving. Still unsure about his departing look, Josephine moved to my side and knelt, looking at me anxiously.

Celine and Gaspard were in an uproar over what had just happened in the dining room, and I closed my eyes to their noise, grateful when I heard Bull growl warningly at Gaspard to shut up before he knocked him out. _I just want my son back_. My jaw hurt with how hard I was clenching it and wished this was all just a nightmare and I would wake up with my son in his cradle next to my bed. The sound of Josephine’s voice snapped me out of my delusions, and I gazed at her worried face.

“I will make sure Siri is taken care of, Inquisitor,” she said. I nodded, letting Siri’s hand go and stood, holding her scared gaze. Bull moved to pick up Siri from the floor while Dorian went with him to help with healing. He glanced over his shoulder at me worriedly as I watched them carry Siri away. There were so many emotions rushing through my bloodstream, I could hardly keep myself inside my own skin.

“I do not know how they were able to get into the estate without being seen Fenlin, but I swear, I will find out.”

I shook my head at Cullen’s expression of anger mixed with worry over the missing children and I couldn’t let him think that this could possibly be any of his fault.

“This is not something you could have guarded against, Cullen. I have no time to explain to you, but I promise, I will when my son is returned to me.”

Cullen sharply nodded his head and I pushed my fear away as my anger took over with the thought of Andruil even touching my son and left the room with Solas before giving into the sudden rush to change into my feline form. His aura was cold and filling me with his own cool anger and it tethered us together. The Dread Wolf’s aura caressed over my own fiery rage, cooling my need to change and I fed off of it and everything Solas had said before about being able to walk between both Evanuris and Forgotten made sense. There was light and dark within me and the connection to both filled me with the rage I would need to get through this nightmare. Shoving the door into our room open, I went to the bed and pulled out a bag that held my armor from beneath along with another bag that held his that Solas had not seen me pack when we were in Skyhold and tossed it towards him. He caught it out of the air and ripped it open, seeing his armor inside.

I had only brought our armor as a precaution and because it was Orlais and they were known to be a
bunch of narrow-minded bigots. Silently we pulled off our formal dress and replaced it with our armor. The sounds of chainmail and buckles getting buckled filled the room. Dorian walked through our door without knocking just as I was tightening Andruil’s dagger to my thigh, holding our staves and I glanced up at him knowing my eyes were swirling with molten silver as my rage only grew the longer I was away from my son and the churning thoughts of Andruil having my son rushing through my head did not help. *I will enjoy making her pay for this.*

“You will need these,” he said, holding them out without flinching at my furious gaze.

We grabbed our staves from him just as Felassan came to the door with Cole and Dorian turned towards them with a hopeful expression.

“They trail leads south into the Emerald Graves,” Felassan said with clipped tones.

I looked at Solas anxiously. *The Venatori and Red Templars are heading there.* Cole’s soft voice encroached on the silence.

“I can follow them. They made sure we could, they don’t want to hurt them. They only wanted to make sure you would come.”

I shut my emotions down as they tried to rise to the surface and turn me into a sobbing mess. Squaring my shoulders, I nodded at him.

“When I get my hands on them, they will wish they never left the Abyss. Lead us to our son and little Fenlin, Cole. They will regret that they took either one.”

His expression was calm when he nodded and turned away from the door and we followed behind him for the stables.

Our horses were prepared when we got to the stables. We raced out of the estate’s gates as though the hounds of hell were on our heels. Neither Solas or I would or could slow down until we reached the Exalted Plains and after traveling for eight hours and two mounts changes we were finally there and yet I still couldn’t quiet the terrified feeling that continued to grow within me. With the break of dawn just cresting over the tips of the distant mountains we reached the Inquisition camp on the edge of the Emerald Graves and left the horses.

Solas and I knew that the horses were only slowing us down and their inability to move swiftly would only get worse as we entered the rough forest of the Emerald Graves. But in our alternate form, we could move swiftly over the rugged terrain. Solas and I silently communicated, comforted each other’s fears through our bond. When I started feeling like I had lost our son, I would feel his warmth filling me, giving me hope.

Using a fade step to get as far from the Inquisition camp as possible, we changed into our animal forms after we could no longer make out the light from the fire.

“Get on,” I told Cole, kneeling next to him. Using my bent front legs, he leapt on and once he was, I took off without another thought. Fade fire flamed with each step I made as I raced across the plains towards the Emerald Graves not wanting to lose one more moment. From the corner of my eye, I saw that Felassan was astride Solas’ back, bent low and that with each step, his paws leapt with magical flames.

Glancing back to where Felassan perched, his expression was fierce as he held onto Solas and for once, I was actually glad to have the ancient along. Cole’s soft words of direction reaching my ears
while we ran and I leaped over fallen trees and rocks that stood in my way. My heart pounded but not from the running. It pounded with fear for our son and I heard Cole’s voice again, close to my ear.

“The guardian will stop her, she will come to protect them from her.”

Guardian? And then it suddenly clicked in my scattered and terrified mind who he’d meant.

Mythal

Solas’ wolven paws ran next to mine as we shared a brief feeling of relief and dread with the information and put on a burst of speed as we reached the deeper, more jungle-like forests of the Emerald Graves. Is this where she will call in her marker for sharing her gift of the dragon language? I could only pray that she would not ask that of me. My gaze stared steadily ahead through the dense foliage of the forest as my thoughts churned with the possibility and I leaped over a fallen tree as I heard Cole’s whispered words.

“Go left, up the steep path.”

I changed my direction and raced up the path Cole directed me to, running ahead of Solas and continuing to pray for son's safety.

Imshael carried the cradle that held the two sleeping babes and placed it down in front of Andruil. Her red rimmed, yellow eyes glared at the sleeping children with contempt.

“Which one is hers?”

Imshael was not going to tell her. He needed to buy more time for the wolf and his mate to get here and held her angry gaze, hoping that the obvious trail they had left behind them would lead the ancients here quickly before Andruil could do anything to the little ones.

“I do not know, my Queen. Perhaps both are of the wolf and shadow,” he offered with a bow.

Andruil gazed back down at the sleeping faces disgustedly. How could he do this to me? To us? She stared angrily at the little bodies as a shiver of revulsion raced through her. Everything in her wanted to remove the little rats but it would be too soon for what she had planned. She wanted that slave to witness the death of her children. Make her pay for trying to steal what was hers and glanced at Imshael, waving the cradle away.

“Just keep them quiet until she gets here. I will not have my vengeance interrupted by their noisy mewling.”

“I will make sure they stay asleep, my Queen.”

Imshael replied quietly, picking up the cradle and carrying it out of the room. Closing the door behind him, he saw his brother’s waiting for him and both of them looked unnaturally uncomfortabe at the cradle he held. Even for him, though he acted uncaringly, he did not like looking at them.
“I don't know if it was wise to listen to our sister when she proposed this plan, brother. This is beneath even us,” Xebenkeck commented unhappily.

“There was no other way to guarantee Ras’Salladin would come,” Imshael replied as he set the cradle down.

“Is our freedom and thirst for ruling over all these quicklings, worth bringing the wrath of the wolf upon us?” Gaxkang walked towards the cradle, his gaze trained on the sleeping children feeling somewhat perplexed that his brother was unable to ascertain which was which and touched the small crown of the little boy that lay with his arm around the little girl. The small dimple in the child's chin reminded him of the wolf and with the simple touch he felt the enormous energy flow through the small child and his head tilted when he realized his brother had purposely lied to Andruil.

“You knew which was the wolves all along,” he stated quietly.

“Yes,” Imshael admitted, staring down at the sleeping children. “The goal was to get Ras’Salladin and Fen’Harel here to remove Andruil, not kill helpless children. If they do not come before Andruil grows restless than it is our job to remove Andruil ourselves.”

The three stood quietly watching the children sleep until they felt an enormous power shift, vibrate through the air with violent resolve and their heads came up quickly to gaze at the door.

“They have finally come, it is time for us to take our leave, our job is finished.”

Imshael and Gaxkang walked towards the open window, changing quickly to their raven forms while Xebenkeck cast a protective barrier around the spellbound children before changing his own form and flying out the window after them.

When the door closed, Andruil stared up towards the roof and yelled out her heartbreak and anger.

“How could you do this to me?”

Silence reigned in the room when she dropped her face into her hands, filled with torment. Distorted thoughts and memories rushed through her mind and she could no longer be sure what was real and what wasn’t. He’d loved me once… hadn’t he?

Mythal’s anger was barely contained with the abhorrent actions that her daughter had lowered herself too and the vibration filled the air around the crumbling ruin when she entered the room that held her child’s pathetically weak, aura. She heard a disjointed song radiate from her and revulsion settled deep in her soul. Her aura searched the room and found the small, twin heartbeats of the children in the next room and felt a sense of relief fill her. At least she has not harmed them.

“He did nothing to you, daughter. You have always refused to see that he never loved you.”

The powerful sound of her mother’s voice filled her ears and she pulled her face out of her hands to look up. There, she saw her mother standing in the doorway staring at her with furious disappointment.

“You’re not here… you’re not real… you can’t be real.”

Mythal shook her head at her daughter’s delusions and watched while Andruil rubbed her face
No… I’m seeing things again. If only I could see my wolf with such clarity.

Mythal overheard her daughter’s crazed thoughts and took a heavy breath full of sorrow for what was yet to come when Fenlin would arrive and gazed at her daughter knowing all too well how this night would end. *She is too far gone to be saved and far beyond my help now.* Taking a step towards her, her daughter’s head lifted with the sound of boots on the stone floor, and she looked at her again with eyes full of rage and hate as she realized that she was indeed, not an illusion.

“You come now, why? Wasn’t saving her enough? You could have supported me and yet you chose her when you knew how much I despised her very existence?”

Mythal took another step towards her daughter even as her heart broke at the sight of what her daughter had become. Her pale visage and red rimmed iris’ made her want to wretch with the sight. *She is no longer mine, but has become some other creature I do not know.*

“I saved her because of what she did for our people and for him. Can you not see that it took courage to give her own life to stop what you would have carelessly caused with your manipulations? Your actions in challenging Fen’Harel would have caused the war between ourselves to only increase. Assan knew this and her honest sacrifice that she gave that night for your selfishness stopped Fen’Harel from killing you. That type of devotion, that spirit of complete belief and love, deserved to be preserved.”

Andruil snarled at her and took a step towards her mother.

“You knew I loved him and that she was the only thing standing in my way of obtaining his love, and yet, you saved her… for him, thwarting everything I had worked so hard for.”

Mythal held her daughters corrupted gaze and nodded as she recalled how her shadow had given herself to stop her daughters’ machinations. Her daughter had not seen the look of anguish on Fen’Harel’s face as he watched his chosen mate fall just to preserve their alliance.

“Yes, I did.”

Her simple answer without explanation infuriated Andruil and sparks flew from her fingertips with anger for her mother’s lack of forthcoming information.

“Why are you here, Mother? Trying to save your precious Assan again?”

Mythal held her daughter’s furious gaze and crossed her arms as a sigh of sadness escaped her.

“You have taken something that does not belong to you, daughter. Your actions have only sped up your inevitable downfall and ultimately, your death. Tonight, you will die by her hand and there is nothing I can do about it. The wolf you desired for so long, hunted for in every corner of the fades, will kill you as he has wanted to for more than a millennia if she does not.”

The certainty in her voice infuriated Andruil and she lashed out angrily towards her mother with electrical magic, which Mythal deflected easily, angering Andruil further with her own obvious weakness. Mythal did not wait for her daughter to speak or act again and moved so quickly, Andruil was caught unaware and found herself tightly gripped around the throat. Her mother’s face was so close to her own and snarling at her menacingly, she felt something in her shivere with fear as she held the cold and uncaring yellow gaze.

“The fact that my own daughter would debase herself to such a point as to ally herself with
Forbidden and then steal helpless children, tells me how desperate you have grown. You are not the
daughter I thought I knew but have become some diseased creature that has taken over her form,”
she snarled into her face. “If you were of a right mind, I know you would have seen this as the
vulgar maneuver that it is. You’ve awoken a creature you are not prepared for and your rival with
her mate, will come. They come to destroy you for taking what wasn’t yours. I pray the spirits will
take pity on you, daughter, for I will not for this disgrace.”

Her harshly spoken words devastated her and Andruil began crying with the realization that her
mother loved Assan more than she did her and spat at her angrily.

“I can see you won’t lose any sleep or shed a tear for my passing. You never loved me like you do
her. She was always more important to you,” she snarled while angry tears slipped down her cheeks.

Mythal held her daughters throat and felt the barbed arrows of her words, pierce her heart with
precise strikes. Where did I fail her? She shook her head and with her other hand, lifted her
daughters hair so she could look into her red-rimmed eyes, resigned to her daughter’s destruction and
silently said goodbye.

“What you never understood da’len was that I never loved you any less. Your machinations tied my
hands fifteen-hundred years ago and now you must pay for what you have done.”

Andruil’s eyes held hers for a moment when the sound of the door violently blowing inward made
her jolt and glance over her mother’s shoulder towards the noise. She saw her Dread Wolf standing
so handsomely in the doorway and smiled as if everything that had just transpired had never
happened.

“My love,” she said to him and saw his disgusted expression and felt her heart stammer within her
chest. Why is he looking at me so coldly? Everything I have done has been so we could be together.

“I’ve come for my son, Andruil. Where is he?” he replied coldly.

Her smile slowly faded with his words and she shook her head at him. No... he doesn't mean
that. Her gaze fell on the dark-haired woman that stepped out from behind him looking at her
murderously, exuding Assan’s aura and anger rushed her system with the sight of the small elf
standing so close to him. Mythal let her go, and stepped aside, gazing into Fenlin’s angry gaze.

“The children are in the next room. I will gather them and prepare them to leave when you are
ready.”

Fenlin nodded sharply and Felassan stepped into the room, gazing at Mythal with stunned silence,
immediately kneeling.

“My Queen,” he whispered.

I grabbed his shoulder and yanked him back to his feet, ignoring his suddenly angry gaze with my
rough handling of him.

“Now is not the time banal’ras, help her secure the children, then your promise is fulfilled… please,”
I quietly asked of him. The last word sounding almost pleading while trying to soften my previously
coarse actions towards him.
I would not release him of his promise until I held my son in my arms and my quietly spoken request awoke something in him and he nodded walking towards Mythal. I glanced at her again and then turned my furious gaze back to where Andruil stood staring at me with hatred. *She looks... like shit.* Assan’s memories showed me a completely different woman. Though she was vicious and cold, her pale, creamy skin that used to show a beautiful woman now held a sickly pallor that stretched tightly over her narrow frame. Her yellow gaze now had a red haze around the iris’, and the soft song of red lyrium could be heard eerily as I stepped further into the room. *She is altered... but not like the red Templars.*

“You appear altered, Andruil,” I commented walking even further into the room.

“As do you, Assan. You’re much shorter than I remember, and your red hair is gone, but your aura is exactly as I remember it. So patronizing and full of itself.”

I returned her cold smile and folded my arms behind me while Solas followed closely beside me, his anger swirling around us in angry whips of energy to mix with my own.

“I suppose it is… but I should warn you, I have very definitely changed, Andruil.”

I knew my warning fell on deaf ears and I unfolded my arms from behind me and tapped the hilt of her dagger that sat on my thigh, pulling her gaze. Looking down at the dagger, a sardonic smile lifted the corner of my mouth as I glanced at her.

“Oh yes, how rude of me, I should thank you for your wedding gift, shouldn’t I? We didn’t know where to send the thank you card, but we did find your gift quite entertaining.”

Her yellow, red-rimmed gaze met mine with a twisted smile on her lips and I saw the joy expressed on her face that she felt in giving us the reminder.

“I knew you would remember. I know I will never forget how it felt to finally be rid of you,” she offered.

I gazed at her with a twisted smile of my own.

“How could I ever forget,” I replied, and we began slowly circling one other, keeping our distance. “You did stab me in the heart with it and yet, I return.”

Her maniacal laughter echoed around us with my response.

“I am pleased that you still now your place and come when your betters summon you. Perhaps I shall do you the favor of killing you swiftly again, but then again, why ruin my fun. Why he would ever choose you, will always confuse me.”

I shook my head and laughed at her, enjoying her look of discomfort as I ignored her bait to try and get me angry. I could feel Assan’s cool, military-minded tactics fill my thoughts and a unnaturally calm feeling surrounded me. It was a reckoning for who I was and who I am now that was coming.

“He chose me because I wasn’t narcissistic and batshit crazy, that should be a good enough answer,” I replied, baiting her as I held her cold gaze when she suddenly stopped moving.

“You are beneath him,” she snarled, taking the bait and I laughed.

“Every chance I get,” I replied sarcastically, enjoying the way her pale skin blanched to an even paler shade as she understood my innuendo and her cheeks suddenly flushed red with anger.
Andruil sliced her hand through the air and I stared at her with a bored expression of my own while my fingers tapped the hilt of the dagger at my thigh.

“Enough talk. I will enjoy your cries of agony when you see your child suffer for your disobedience,” she snarled.

I felt my gaze sharpen on her with the threat to Emithlen and something inside me snapped, growing exponentially darker with my anger. I had never experienced this emotion before but it was powerful and dangerous.

“You won’t get the opportunity to even touch my son, Andruil because I don’t plan on dying.” My voice vibrated around the room warningly and all the rage I felt for her filled me.

She held my gaze and pointed towards the ground arrogantly.

“Give me my blade and kneel slave,” she said in a commanding voice that vibrated the air around me and at one time, I would have dropped to my knees like Felassan.

I kept standing and shook my head at her with a menacing smile dancing on my lips as the growing darkness inside me filled my feral side of me that drank in her sudden uncertainty.

“Oh, don’t worry, I plan on returning your blade back to you, just not the way you expected me too.”

She stared at me with a shocked expression when I didn’t kneel and pull her dagger from my thigh, flipping it in my hand so that I now held the blade end and I shook my head as my rage started to overflow.

“You, delusional fool, I warned you that I was not who you remembered and yet you continued to ignore the obvious. You will face me, all of me this time, without the binding shackles of a Sentinel but as an Evanuris,” I growled, my voice vibrating through the air.

Andruil held my gaze uneasily and I smiled at her coldly when she quickly realized I was no longer her mother’s Sentinel.

“That isn’t possible,” she uttered angrily, drawing energy around her and I threw the dagger, hitting her in the chest, over her heart, not deep enough to kill but enough to shock her. Fade stepping to her, I grasped her throat angrily before she could move and held her gaze so she could get a good look at the hatred I harbored for her. My aura moved around us with angry gusts of wind, licking at anything not latched down in furious whips. The pieces in the room flew through the air around us as we stood in the eye of my own hurricane made of furious rage.

“No, it is quite possible you sadistic bitch. You have stalked my wolf long enough and then dare to take my son from me, threaten his life like you have some right to do so. Your time has come, and it is long overdue that you finally get what is coming to you.”

My sinisterly spoken words made her look at me uneasily before I felt her body slightly shake and her gaze turned panicky. Her magical energy was severely diminished, and I felt almost sorry for her… almost, but then the memory of her stabbing Assan in the heart played through my mind and she spoke.

“But he is mine… you can’t kill me, you are my mother’s creature, you must obey me,” she sputtered, and I saw blood slip from the corner of her mouth even as she spoke her unsure words.

I stared into her eyes, seeing that she believed everything she was saying just before I pushed the
dagger deeper making her gasp.

“No, Andruil. I was your mother’s shadow a long time ago, you killed her, freeing me. I am no
longer bound as her shadow, and haven’t been for quite some time, but I bet Imshael failed to
mention that tiny bit of information to you when you took him into your service. That little detail that
your mother released me?”

I could see the surprise in her eyes as they darted from me to Solas and then back to me.

“As to your claim on my mate, you have none. He is mine and will always be mine from this life to
the next. I take great pleasure knowing you will die knowing that.”

Her rage-filled gaze held mine as I pushed the dagger home, piercing her heart and she gulped.

“You never deserve him, he was supposed to be mine,” she uttered and coughed, large bubbles of
blood slipping from her mouth to soak the front of her leathers and the feral side of me delighted in
the sight of her blood.

I held her corrupt gaze and at this close distance between us, the red lyrium song was louder and I
noticed the spiderweb tracks of red running down her pale throat.

“He will never be yours,” I replied, holding her up as she took her last breaths. I waited for the light
to die in her eyes before I let her slip from my grasp to fall into a heap on the floor at my feet.

I glanced at Solas, his gaze holding mine and I felt no remorse for finally having my revenge for
what she had done to us, only a huge relief with knowing she could never threaten us again. He took
a small step towards me and held his hand out. I moved away from Andruil’s dead body and took his
hand. The feel of his solid warmth brought me back to reality and I glanced around.

*Emithlen*

“Emithlen and Fenlin,” I said hurriedly, and we moved towards the door Mythal and Felassan had
taken earlier.

Solas followed behind me, hurriedly dashing through the door and found the two ancients holding
the children. Mythal held our son, rocking him in her arms, quietly singing to him while Felassan
appeared to be telling little Fenlin a story. I stopped abruptly, still holding Solas’ hand tightly, seeing
Mythal stop singing and speak to bean.

“Your mamae comes to take you home now, little prince. Auntie Mythal will watch over you until
such time when it is your turn.”

My heart squeezed with her words and I saw the glitter of tears on her face when she bent and kissed
his forehead. I let Solas’ hand go, walking towards her and her eyes met mine.

“Your son is healthy and unharmed, my friend,” she said, handing Emithlen to me.

I took my son from her and kissed his head lovingly, holding him close to me. The instant relief I felt
at finally holding him, filled me. Looking at her, I smiled gently.

“Thank you,” I whispered brokenly as Solas moved to stand behind me and touch our son. The relief
that flooded our bond brought tears to my eyes and I glanced up at him. Our eyes locked and I gave
him a watery smile before glancing back down at our son. He was safe and I glanced at Mythal
realizing that she must be feeling a pain like no other right now. I was selfishly pleased with holding
my son again while her daughter lay dead in the next room.
Her eyes held mine with understanding and she nodded, reaching out to Emithlen, touching his cheek tenderly.

“I can see the worry you have in your eyes for me and I would not change my decision even if I could, Fenlin. My nephew is a beautiful spirit worthy of my protection, as you are, and I look forward to watching him grow to manhood. He will be a strong leader for the people when it is his time to take his place amongst the Evanuris.”

I held her knowing look and only nodded, swallowing the ball of emotion that threatened to rise up now that Emithlen was truly safe and in my arms. Everything Mythal was saying, I would ponder on later… much later, for now, I would just focus on the fact that the children were safe. I glanced at Felassan who was holding little Fenlin to him as he walked towards us, his expression relaxed now that the children were safe. I had never seen him like this before and I started to wonder if the presence of Mythal is what has changed his attitude. His gaze holding Mythal’s, I saw that she understood his questioning look as she began to speak.

“I know you have questions for why I chose her.”

Felassan nodded, keeping silent.

“Because old friend, I knew she would never abuse the power given to her.”

Felassan held her gaze and finally bowed his head, his expression guarded.

“If it is what you wish, I shall stay and watch over her in your absence.”

Mythal touched his face tenderly and Felassan looked so approachable in this moment, I could hardly believe it was the same man that made me grit my teeth and focus on not killing him every waking minute of the day.

“No, my old friend. I do not wish for you to just watch over her.”

His gaze flew up from the ground to look into hers and I stood in shock with her words until she finished what she wanted him to know.

“I wish for you to live, my old friend. Care for her son, for he will have need of you in the future,” she said simply, and then touched little Fenlin’s cheek and smile. “As to this little one, she will be important to him as her mother has become important to you, and you will be needed to watch over them both as well. Are you willing to do this for me?”

Felassan only nodded and bowed his head to her and Solas grasped my shoulder. I glanced at him and then back to Emithlen as he slept against me. I listened to Felassan as he answered Mythal.

“As you wish.”

Mythal turned and touched Emithlen’s cheek tenderly one more time, smiling at me softly.

“He is everything I knew he would be. I look forward to the mischief he will cause later;” she said, her eyes sparkling teasingly.

I glanced up at her and smiled, softly snorting.

“Well, he is his father’s son. I can only imagine,” I replied, earning a throaty chuckle from her.

Mythal smiled at me and then kissed my cheek before pressing a soft kiss to Emithlen’s forehead and
then little Fenlin’s in parting.

“I can see what lies ahead for you both and your trials will be arduous, but I bless you both with long lives and strength to overcome what you must, my little ones. I know neither of you will disappoint me.”

Beans aura expanded with her words of blessings and I felt his little magical aura vibrate against me and glanced towards little Fenlin who lie protectively within Felassan’s arms and saw her little body glow softly with the blessing and knew then that Mythal had just given the little one more than just a blessing but had given her immortality. Sighing with a sudden feeling of despair with how I was going to explain any of this to Siri, I could do nothing about what she had done know but only nod with Mythal’s wishes and watch her leave.

Shit
The Ride Back

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone is having a fabulous day and please excuse my tardiness in posting later than usual today. Sometimes editing is a real pain in the butt.

I knew that I should nurse the children before we started the arduous hike out of the ruin and found a place to sit down. The room was silent as I nursed Bean, and when he was finished, Solas took him from me. Our bond hummed with his relief as he held his son’s gaze that was so much like his own. I motioned for Felassan to bring me little Fenlin and he walked towards me, quickly placing her in my arms.

Removing the spell from her little body, her green eyes flashed open, looking at me. I could sense the child was winding up to begin sharing her displeasure and I blew softly in her face, surprising her.

“Now, now, little miss. I know some very grave injustices have been foisted upon you, but you are strong, just like your mamae and will endure until I can get you back to her.”

Her little hand clenched and moved back and forth with her agitation and I caressed her cheek, putting her into position to nurse her. Her eyes glanced at me for only a moment before she latched on and fed hungrily. Relieved that she didn’t reject me, Solas and I shared a thankful gaze before Felassan broke the silence.

“Now that we have the children, it will take us longer to return than it was to come here.”

I kept softly touching little Fenlin’s cheek as she nursed while Solas answered him.

“Are you in a hurry to get back to Halamshiral?”

I noticed the annoyed expression Felassan gave Solas and I started to wonder what Solas meant as Felassan answered him.

“I am only concerned for the children’s safety. We will be completely exposed as we return. The ones that conspired to lead us here are still emancipated and could take the opportunity to attack.”

The fact that the Forbidden were still out there rankled.

“They won’t and they will not be free for long.”

The men quieted with my barely controlled, angry words. I knew they were looking at me but I continued to try and keep myself calm as little Fenlin’s green eyes gazed at me, sucking hungrily. This little person was trusting me to protect her as was her mother, and if I really wanted to overwhelm myself, I would admit that it was everyone depending on me. I swallowed a bit uncomfortable with the realization and glanced up at Felassan and then towards Solas.

“The Forbidden made a dangerous mistake when they took the children. Now that my son and little Fenlin are safe, the true hunt begins. They thought Andruil was merciless in her pursuit through the abyss when she hunted them, looking for Solas, but she never gave them the true death for their kind, just an inconvenient re-birth. I, however, will not be so courteous.”
I felt Solas’ agreement with me flow through our bond and I glanced back down to little Fenlin since she had stopped nursing. Propping her over my shoulder after I covered myself back up, I began the process of burping her just as Cole suddenly appeared in the room holding two, long pieces of cloth that resembled drapes and I looked at him curiously.

“You can use these to carry them, just like the ones you have made.”

I smiled at Cole’s ingenious thinking and had another thought that might speed up our return and Cole nodded his head, hearing my thoughts.

“That would work, we could.”

“What would? For Mythal’s sake, could you make sense and finish a damn sentence?” Felassan questioned sounding annoyed with our one-sided conversation and Cole just glanced at him.

“I can use the cloth to make an improvised carrier for the children that you and Cole can wear. Granted, we won’t be racing across the Graves like our trip here, but it will be faster than walking and I would like to get little Fenlin back to Siri as quickly as possible.”

I saw the way Felassan glanced at where little Fenlin lay over my shoulder sleeping, especially now that her tiny belly was full. There was something about the look that softened his normally cool, amethyst gaze, that caught me off guard.

Think about that later.

Moving towards Felassan, I slipped little Fenlin back into his arms so I could take the cloth from Cole and begin wrapping Cole so he could carry Emithlen.

We traveled down the steep path and made our first stop about halfway to the Inquisition camp when the children began getting fussy. Solas gathered wood and created our small fire, while Cole went hunting for dinner. I nursed bean while Felassan walked around our little makeshift camp trying to soothe an annoyed little Fenlin that waited her turn. My eyes followed him curiously when I overheard him talking softly to the baby.

“If your mamae were here, she would tell me that I was doing this all wrong and make fun of me.”

I softly snorted and gazed back down at bean nursing hungrily and continued to listen to him, surprised with the tender way he spoke to the baby and a new thought started to form in my head. Could all that animosity between Siri and Felassan have been an attraction? I mentally laughed at the thought. Don’t go chasing unicorns where there are none, I reminded myself but then I recalled the way Siri had gripped him in the dining hall. Then there was the fact that Felassan had not only rushed to catch her from falling but had looked at her reluctantly before leaving her.

I gazed at Solas and he gave me a knowing look as he glanced at Felassan and then back to me. Emithlen was done nursing and I stood up with him, walking to Solas.

“Well you take him so I can nurse little Fenlin?”

Solas smiled at me, taking our son and I turned towards Felassan, taking little Fenlin from him. Her sparkling eyes stared up at me as I put her into position and when she latched on, I ran a finger over her head that displayed a flaming color of reds and oranges in the firelight. Her little nose and cheekbones resembled Siri’s as did her chin. I had a feeling that little Fenlin would be tall, probably like her father. She was almost as long as Emithlen and I began to wonder what other features would she inherit from her father.

Watching her nurse, I was grateful that Andruil had not hurt the children. I still didn’t understand
what the point was in using the children to draw us out. I would have gone gladly if someone would have just told me where the crazy bitch was hiding. Moving little Fenlin to my shoulder and buttoning up my shirt, I patted her back. My mind was a crazy jumble of thoughts and ideas of the Forbidden’s purpose behind it all. How did any of this help them get any closer to achieving their goal of taking over?

Cole quietly returned with a couple of rabbits already dressed out and placed them over the fire on makeshift skewers. He sat down next to me, watching what I was doing and I wondered if Cole was the key to helping me find them. Before I could put my question out there, he shook his head.

“I cannot do that—they are, different. I can only hear them if they are close.”

I sighed, feeling a sense of frustration at my inability to keep them away from what was the most important to me. Cole’s head tilted and I knew what he was doing even before he spoke.

“It is not your fault. They used the elf spy—she made them not trust. That helped get you here.”

Cole’s simple little statement made my ears perk up and I looked at him curiously.

“Elf spy, do you mean Briala?”

Saying her name aloud, Felassan stopped pacing and came closer to listen.

“Yes? They used her.”

“But how? How could they use her, Cole?”

Cole’s liquid blue eyes fell on Felassan and pointed at him with his chin.

“Him”

I looked at Felassan and he looked as confused as I felt. Solas had been standing behind me, quietly listening as he held bean but now he spoke up.

“Do you mean, one of the Forbidden assumed Felassan’s form? Deceiving Briala into thinking it was him?”

Well, that makes sense.

Cole turned towards Solas and nodded.

“Yes, she wanted him.”

My eyes widened with surprise and I saw Felassan stiffen with the revelation.

“That’s absurd,” he quickly said.

I heard Solas’ sigh.

“Is it? Did you not stay with her while you trained her?”

I watched a hardened glint frost over Felassan’s lavender eyes.

“Yes, I did, but I never bedded her.”

Felassan was rubbing his neck, his body full of agitation and anger with Solas’ silent implication.
“But that doesn’t mean she didn’t want you to,” I said, looking at him now following where Solas was going with his statement.

Felassan threw his hand up in aggravation, trying to stare me down.

“And how does any of this matter?”

I smiled at him, standing and walking towards him. He stood stiffly almost as if he was waiting for me to snap at him and instead, handed little Fenlin over to him. His tense posture immediately relaxed as he took her.

“It matters because that is how one of the Forbidden was able to manipulate her. They used her desire for you and if we are correct, the one that is pretending to be you will continue to use her.”

His gaze came up from little Fenlin and looked at me. His expression of surprise was clearly written over his narrow, aristocratic features.

“They would continue to use her in the same fashion as you once did. Information and intrigues, but with a small alteration to the normal routine, they feed a bit of her desire.”

Felassan looked disgusted and I couldn’t agree with him more. Turning away, I checked on our dinner before sitting back down between Solas and Cole.

“Then it is imperative that we find Briala in Halamshiral,” Felassan said.

I nodded my head before leaning against Solas’ arm, staring at our son.

“Maybe if we find her, she can lead us to them.”

Felassan finally sat down with us around the fire, pulling his cloak around him, snuggling little Fenlin as she yawned sleepily.

“Somniera, vherlin,” he whispered to her. (Sleep and dream, little kitten)

I hid a smile at the normally indifferent sentinel’s gentleness with little Fenlin. Watching him and the way he was with her was like watching Solas with Emithlen. There was a possessive action that clearly stated to anyone watching him that the child was his. This is going to get real interesting. Siri is definitely not going to like him inserting himself as the child’s protector.

Once we were close enough to one of the Inquisitions camps, Solas and I returned to our elven forms. Taking bean from Cole, we walked towards the camp. The sounds of soldiers running towards us were our greeting.

“Your Worship.”

I grimaced with the title and looked at him, not recognizing this soldier.

“Please send word to Commander Cullen that we have the children and are in route to Halamshiral.”

The young man nodded quickly and rushed off to send a message to the estate as another soldier walked towards us and I recognized this one as lieutenant Barnes… I think.

“We have mounts ready, loaded with supplies.”
I smiled at him. “Thank you. It’s lieutenant Barnes, right?”

His cheeks tinted a soft rose with embarrassment as he nodded enthusiastically.

“Yes, Inquisitor.”

Solas softly chuckled from beside me and I ignored him. I can’t help it if I am good with names. Patting the soldier's arm just grateful to be one step closer to bringing little Fenlin back to Siri, we walked around him.

“Well, let’s try and make some time while we still have the sun.”

Barnes led us to the horses and we mounted up and got on our way fairly quickly.

Our arrival back at Empress Celine’s estate was chaotic in comparison to the race to save our children and the return trip back after successfully killing Andruil. Inquisition soldiers mixed with Chevaliers appeared to line every square inch of the courtyard. My group of people was piling out the front door and out into the courtyard and I saw Dorian’s expression of relief when my eyes met his. Dismounting with Solas’ help, I watched Siri race out of the front door towards us, pushing people out of her way like a battering ram. Felassan walked towards her, holding little Fenlin and she burst into tears as she took her from him.

Solas and I made our way towards her. Her eyes met mine and I began to water up.

“Thank you,” Siri whispered, holding her daughter close.

“Because of me, she was in danger and I am sorry for that, Siri.”

She shook her head adamantly at me.

“There is nothing for you to apologize for. It was not you who stole my child but you who have returned her to me, unharmed. That is what is important right now. I know that you and Master Solas will find a way to make sure this never happens again.”

I nodded my head at her, noticing the way Felassan stood very close to Siri. I glanced at him, taking in his protective gaze over the two and what Mythal had said now made sense. ‘She will be important to him as her mother has become important to you.’ A throat cleared behind us and I turned to find it was Cullen who’d made the noise. His expression was full of relief.

“I understand that you want answers on how this happened, Cullen. Can it hold until we return to Skyhold?”

His expression went from relief to anger and I waited for the argument.

“Have you lost your bloody mind? How am I supposed to protect you and the children from this happening again?”

“You’re not. Your soldiers cannot protect the children from the magic that was used, we can now that we know how they did it.”

I could see that my answer didn’t please him but he did calm down and lose the temper that had suddenly flared.
“It was a mage that took the children?”

I shook my head. “Not exactly, but that is what I would like to discuss with you back in Skyhold where there are fewer ears.”

Cullen didn’t look pleased with the idea of waiting but he nodded his head and gestured towards the palatial estate.

“As you wish, Fenlin. Forgive me, you must be exhausted.”

I smiled at him understandingly as Solas’ hand pressed against the small of my back, leading us towards the front door where Josephine waited and I held back a small groan.

“Inquisitor, we were all so pleased when the raven arrived informing us that the children were safe and that you were in route to Halamshiral.”

I smiled at her as she continued.

“Everything is prepared for you to attend the ball at the Winter Palace tomorrow night. Is there anything else that you require me to do?”

I felt an annoyance at having to attend at all but held back the comments that came to mind.

“No, Josephine, thank you. I just want to bathe Emithlen, then myself and fall into bed.”

She nodded and smiled at me.

“Very well Inquisitor.”

We took the steps to our room and Solas went about preparing a small bath for bean. Solas came back into the room and I noticed he had removed his armor as he took bean. Reaching up, he cupped my cheek tenderly.

“I will bathe our son while you remove your armor and prepare for your own bath.”

I smiled at him and pressed his hand against my cheek.

“I love you.”

He bent and pressed a kiss to my lips as gentle as his touch.

“And I, you,” he whispered against my lips before leaning away and walking down the hall.

I went to our bedroom and began unbuckling buckles and removing my chainmail. I was glad that Siri had little Fenlin back but now I had to find the courage to tell her about Mythal’s blessing. Wearing only a long tunic, I bent and picked up the chainmail, folding it and laying it on the chair against the wall. I had thought a lot about how I would tell her while we traveled and the only solution I could come to was to tell her about myself, which also meant that I would be exposing Solas.

Lost in thought, Solas returned to our room carrying a freshly bathed bean and I smiled at them when I heard beans little giggle that pulled me from my worried thoughts.

“I can feel your concern about Siri and little Fenlin, vhenan.”

His gaze held understanding before he focused on getting Emithlen dressed.
“I can see only one way to explain it to her and that would mean telling her who we are—what we are.”

He stood up, holding bean and walked towards the cradle that someone had brought into our room. Laying our son down, he turned back to me.

“Then that is what we will do.”

I stared at him in surprise and he smiled, walking towards me. Stopping in front of me, he cupped my face and stared into my eyes.

“If we do nothing, she will think something is wrong with her daughter when she starts growing at an exponential rate. That her child has been possessed when she heals quickly. Telling her who we are will help her understand and I believe that Siri can handle the truth.”

Kissing me lightly, he lifted his lips from mine and pressed his forehead against mine.

“There is enough time to discuss this later. For now, we should take our bath and then retire for the evening.”

I winked at him with a mischievous smile.

“I think you’re just trying to get me naked, wolf.”

His eyes sparkled back at me and a smug smile tugged at the corners of his luscious lips.

“Perhaps,” he said, taking my hand and leading us towards the bathroom.

Giggling, I let him lead. I breathed easier with his small gesture of flirtation, signaling that our routine would and could return after the emotionally crazy week we’d had.
After nursing Emithlen and laying him down, I went to Siri’s room to see if she would mind watching him while I went with Solas and Dorian through the estate to set wards that would keep the Forbidden from entering again. Approaching the door between our rooms, I lifted my hand to knock and overheard arguing from the other side and my hand hesitated. Taking a moment, I distinctly heard Felassan’s deep voice and then Siri’s and sighed already having an idea to why they were arguing. Felassan hadn’t left Siri’s side since he returned and I could see that his constant presence was grating on her nerves. Knocking on the door, I waited and suddenly it was flung open and I stepped a little back. Siri stood holding the door, her expression nothing short of an impending explosion. I cleared my throat and glanced from Siri to Felassan and then back to Siri.

“Am I interrupting?”

“No”

“Yes”

They answered at the same time loudly. Siri stared daggers at Felassan as she repeated herself.

“No, you are not.”

Now I felt unsure if I should impose on her since it was obvious she was in the middle of something and stepped back a bit more, ignoring Felassan’s annoyed growl.

“You’ve already interrupted, so say what it is you have to say.”

His tone set my back up and I glared at him.

“Don’t be such an ass, Felassan,” I replied with a sigh of annoyance and looked at Siri. “I was hoping you wouldn’t mind watching Emithlen while I help the guys place the wards around the manor.”

Siri nodded her head quickly.

“Of course, don’t be silly. Please, bring him over.”

I left to gather bean from his cradle when I overheard Felassan speak to Siri, his deep tone laced with frustration.

“Our conversation isn’t done, Siri.”

“Yes, it is. I’ve said all I will on the matter, now get out.”

I softly snorted hearing Siri’s mockingly stubborn refusal and shook my head. Felassan had no one to
blame but himself for the way she acted towards him. *If only he wasn’t such an abrasive jerk, he might actually get her to listen.* I jolted with the sound of her door closing a bit harshly and picked up bean. Carrying him down the small corridor back towards the sitting room, I saw Siri leaning up against the wall, covering her face. I moved towards her and rested my hand on her arm.

Her hands slipped away and she saw my concern for her and tried for a wobbly smile which was unconvincing.

“Siri…”

“We can discuss it later, I’m fine,” she interrupted. Reaching for bean, she smiled at him. “Come on handsome so your mamae can get some work done before tonight’s gala.”

I grimaced with the reminder that tonight was the ball and my expression must have been funny because Siri was laughing.

“Thanks for the reminder, you are such a friend,” I joked with her.

Siri laughed again and waved her hand at me to dismiss me.

“I believe you had things you needed to do?”

She laughed as I rolled my eyes at her and kissed beans forehead before leaving back through our adjoining door.

Solas, Dorian, and I went through the estate, warding doors and windows. I caught Cullen following us through the rooms with Bull tagging along behind him and mentally sighed as I realized they were doing so as a kind of protection detail. It was going to be a while before everyone would relax again. So far, this whole trip was one giant pain in the ass, even Josephine, who loved parties and mingling with nobility, acted as if she regretting coming. We finally finished warding the entire manor and I was a bit tired from using so much magic. Rubbing shaky fingers over my forehead, Solas’ arm came around my waist.

“I will gather you something to eat and then you will get some sleep, vhenan.”

I raised an eyebrow at him for his use of a commanding tone and I instantly had a snarky reply ready to fly. Meeting his worried gaze, I snapped my mouth shut and just rolled my eyes at him instead. My little action caused our bond to hum with humor and it didn’t take but a blink of the eye for him to press a kiss to my cheek.

“Perhaps you will allow your overprotective mate to nap with you as you regain your strength.”

Smiling with his way of apologizing for his commanding tone with me, I turned my face towards him and pressed a kiss to his chin, teasingly batting my eyes at him.

“I might be persuaded.”

The humorous hum that previously flowed through our bond changed to a shared feeling of desire as he pulled me closer to him. Staring up into his smoky gaze, everything about him made my body hum and it was a feeling I would never grow tired of. His head bent closer to mine and I closed my eyes as I felt his teasing lips skim over my jaw.
“You will find I can be very persuasive.”

His simple statement sent shivers of anticipation through me. The heat of his breath teased the skin of my neck as desire raced through my system like a grass fire in a wind storm and I gripped the front of his tunic. *Cheese and rice! Get yourself under control before you take him in the middle of the library.*

“When you want to be,” I replied. The sound of my voice was thick with desire and his soft laughter teased my ear. The feeling only intensified my desire for him and when he stepped back, I felt the loss of his body heat even as I felt relieved at the same time. Solas gave me a knowing smirk and I stuck my tongue out making him chuckle.

“I shall endeavor to prove to you my sincerity.” Taking my hand, we left the library for our room as my body grew warmer with anticipation on how persuasive he would be.

With the laces on the side of my gown tied, I took a long look at myself in the mirror. I hardly resembled the woman I was and it was odd to see the changes reflected so clearly back. Physically, I looked stronger, leaner, with more definition to my body, but it was my eyes that truly showed how much I’d changed. I was no longer the scared little artist, but a strong fighter. There was a hardness to my gaze that I hadn’t noticed before and I wondered when it had started. Sighing a bit while quietly comparing myself from almost four years ago, I ran my hands over the front of the gown making sure it was laying correctly before turning towards the doorway.

Solas stood in the doorway quietly watching me and his intense gaze felt hot on my skin as he looked me over. His black uniform with the silver sash draped over his left shoulder brought out the blue in his eyes and also made my heart do little flippies with how strong and wide his shoulders were. Giving myself a moment to let my gaze wander a bit, my eyes stopped at his full mouth. The small tilt at the corners of his lips made me want to kiss him and as if he could read my mind, the corners of his mouth drew higher as his knowing smile grew and I blushed, looking away with how easily he could read me.

His hand tilted my chin up to hold my gaze and I could see his desire for me reflected back.

“You look very beautiful tonight, vhenan.”

I reached up and dusted his shoulders, ridding him of imaginary dust, smiling up at him.

“Thank you, and you look pretty handsome yourself.”

He bent and kissed me briefly just as a knock and Josephine’s voice came through the door.

“Inquisitor, the carriage is waiting.”

I crossed my eyes and Solas chuckled as I answered her.

“Thank you, Josephine. We will be down shortly.”

Crossing the room, Siri stood in the doorway between our rooms and gave me a reassuring smile. After everything we went through, I didn’t want to leave our son. Solas’ fingers entwined with mine as I shared my worries through our bond. I knew we had warded the windows and doors, prepared for the Forbidden if they were dumb enough to return but every part of me didn’t want to leave him.

“Master Pavus and the Iron Bull are staying behind this evening to watch over you and the children."
What transpired before will not happen again, Siri.”

Siri nodded and glanced at our door as it opened. Felassan walked in and his eyes immediately went towards Siri as Dorian and Bull followed behind him. I glanced between the two and wanted to laugh at the irony of it. Body language was key and right now Siri’s was aggressively telling him to take a hike. She had her arms crossed tightly over her chest, a frown not only on her lips but on her forehead, and there was a hardness to her brown gaze that told Felassan, ‘back off Jack!’.

“Well, now that everyone is here, we should probably get moving before Josephine returns to find out what is taking us so long.”

I glanced up at Felassan with a raised eyebrow and his expression was full of frustration and anger before he turned on his heel and left our chambers. Dorian made a ‘tsking’ noise with his tongue, watching Felassan storm out of the room and I laughed.

“It appears there is more going on than I was aware of.”

I saw Siri stiffen and shake her head adamantly.

“There is nothing going on between me and the egotistical brute.”

I wanted to groan when I saw Dorian’s raised eyebrow and sarcastic smirk form.

“Thou doth protest too much, my dear.”

Siri’s face lit up before she turned on her own heel and walked into her room. Shaking my head, Bull chuckled.

“Do try to play nice, Dorian.”

He looked at me with false surprise.

“I’m always nice.”

“No, you’re not, so try.” I quickly replied as Solas escorted me out the door to the sounds of Dorian’s snort and Bull's loud laughter.

The carriage ride to the Winter Palace was not long and the silence inside the compartment was almost laughable. Felassan sat across from Solas and me, staring out the window with a pouty expression. Studying his expression curiously, I recognized the gleam of frustration I saw in his eye, having felt that way myself a time or two. Something in his expression caught my attention and I felt a moment of surprise. He has more than just feelings for her. Sitting up a little straighter I leaned a bit towards him, wanting to get his attention.

“Why don’t you try being sincere and tell her how you really feel?”

His expression of surprise was quickly hidden and replaced with one of anger.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

My own sigh of annoyance escaped me and I sat back in the seat.
“No, of course, you don’t.”

His lavender eyes stared at me angrily and I shrugged at him uncaringly before looking at the scenery through my window. *If he wants to wallow in his private little pity party for one, he could have it.*

The carriage grew silent again and we finally arrived at the Palace. We could see the procession of carriages ahead of us as people unloaded in front of the palace gates. Coming to Halamshiral this time was different. This time, everyone knew who I was and I wasn’t just some unknown. *This should make the disparaging comments even more interesting.* Catching Felassan’s gaze, I straightened my dress a bit.

“Let’s hope Briala comes tonight because we need answers.”

“She will be here,” he answered confidently and I glanced at Solas.

*I hope he is right.* The door opened now that it was our turn and Solas got out first. Holding a hand out for me to take, I picked up my skirt so I didn’t trip over the hem and stepped out with Felassan following behind me. Linking my arm with Solas’, we walked the cobbled path towards the palace.

“Lady Inquisitor Lavellan. Accompanied by Master Solas, Arcane Advisor to the Inquisition.”

We bowed towards Celine and Gaspard where they stood on the raised balcony overlooking the dance floor. The court announcer continued to introduce the others of my counsel as we walked down the small staircase and across the floor lined with nobles. I never did understand how nobility could think that talking behind a raised hand would muffle what they were saying because we could hear their quietly made comments about the Inquisition and me in particular very clearly.

“It is such a shame that they still choose to allow a savage to be the leader of the faithful.”

Solas’ arm stiffened beneath my fingers, overhearing the whispered remark and kept my smile pasted on my face. *Ah, yes. How could I forget the sheer bigotry of Orlais?* Our bond hummed with his anger and I poked his aura with mine teasingly. His eyes glanced down at me and I winked up at him teasingly and felt his arm relax again. Reaching the end of the long room, we walked up another set of stairs and bowed again before walking up the next set of steps where Cullen, Josephine, Leliana, Felassan, and Cassandra waited.

Glancing at Felassan, I silently asked him if he’d seen Briala yet and he shook his head no. Softly sighing my disappointment, I glanced around the room. There were numerous elven servants moving through the room and I began thinking about the last time I was here and they were Briala’s spies. *We might find her if they are still in her employ.* Josephine’s voice broke my train of thought on the matter.

“Please be sure to speak with the Dowager and some of those on the Council of Heralds, Inquisitor. Many of them need reassurance that the Inquisition is here to help keep the peace between the Empress and the Duke.”

Wishing I could ignore the self-entitled twits, I just nodded my head at her.

“Of course, Josephine.”

She smiled at me gratefully while Cullen rolled his eyes and I stifled the urge to laugh and agree with
him. Letting go of Solas’ arm, I glanced up at him.

“Well, I will go mingle with the nobles while you and Felassan search for Briala’s whereabouts.” He nodded and I looked at the others. “You guys spread out and listen for any information on what’s been going on. I can’t help but get the impression that even though we know Celine and Gaspard didn’t lie, that there was more going on behind the scenes than what was told to us.”

After extricating myself from a small group of council members, I walked towards Leliana who was just finished talking with a tall noble wearing a golden mask, resembling a lion. She smiled at him in such a friendly way that made it believable and yet I could see the small tells I’d picked up over the years that clearly stated otherwise.

The noble walked away with a brief glance in my direction as I stepped closer to her.

“Anything interesting?”

Leliana kept a pleasant smile on her face as she answered me.

“Of course, I have heard many interesting things,” she replied evasively.

Refraining from growling at her, I kept my own fake smile on.

“Yes, but was any of it useful to my earlier questions?”

Her blue eyes almost danced teasingly and I shook my head at her as she leaned closer.

“You were correct in doubting their sincerity. The two have not outright plotted against each other, but there are murmurs among the nobility. Rumors planted to strategically make the other look incompetent.”

I shrugged.

“Well, it is Orlais. That’s what they do, isn’t it? Start rumors, plot and deceive one another all the while trying to scramble their way to the top of the popularity mountain.”

Leliana nodded her head in agreement with me.

“Of course. It is the perfect stage to play the game. However, from what I have heard, Celine has finally decided to marry so she can have a direct line of descent for the throne.”

My obvious surprise seemed to please Leliana.

“Thus removing Gaspard chances at the throne completely.”

Leliana nodded and glanced around the room as she told me more.

“If she were to marry, her husband would replace Gaspard’s position on the council and any children she would bear would displace his succession to the throne.”

_No wonder Briala was able to start the rumors so easily._

“Well, that explains how Briala caused so much trouble.”

Feeling his aura, I turned towards the doors on the left side of the room and saw Solas walking
towards me. His predatory steps towards me and the width of his shoulders made my body tingle. Mentally sighing with private pleasure, my gaze devoured his every step until he stopped in front of me with his own hungry look.

“I believe we might have found where Briala is hiding. Felassan is following her now.”

I took his offered arm with a brief nod towards Leliana as I let Solas lead me away. Walking back towards the door he had just entered, he bent his head to whisper in my ear, his breath teasing the sensitive skin of my neck.

“Later you will show me in great detail what you were thinking when I entered the ballroom.”

His barely whispered words sent shivers racing through me and I winked up at him with a seductive smile. Mentally I couldn't stop my imagination from undressing him and my throat grew thick with carnal desire.

“With pleasure, ma’lath.”

He softly groaned and I laughed as he opened the door.

Chapter End Notes

ma'lash - my love
vhenan - my heart
The vestibule was lined with nobles wearing different masks, each one more intricate than the other, but all of them creepier than the next. Somewhere, I recalled Josephine telling me that the masks represented the different families and their status amongst the nobility. Nodding towards a noble couple standing with Josephine wearing masks that resembled a peacock’s flaring tailfeathers, Solas and I continued down the steps towards the front doors of the palace trying to blend in. I mentally snorted at myself with the stupid thought. Yes, two well-dressed elves are going to blend right in here… moron. Josephine returned my gesture with a smile as for the two nobles, they only watched us curiously out their golden masks. Continuing down the steps we reached the bottom and stepped through the doorway into the left corridor before descending another set of steps with a door at the bottom. Letting his arm go, he opened the door and I followed after him into a narrow, darkened corridor.

“Felassan should be this way.”

I nodded and let him take the lead, lacing my fingers with his. The corridor was unadorned and scarcely lit, telling me that this was used for servants to move through the different parts of the palace. I held my skirt up with my other hand to keep from tripping over the hem as we moved hurriedly down the hallway. Turning left and then right and then left again, I started getting very uncomfortable the further we went. The narrowness of the corridor and the lack of lighting made me feel like we were inside a tomb. How can the servants stand this? My fingers tightened around Solas’ hand and he glanced down at me for a moment before our bond hummed with his reassurance.

“Just breathe, vhenan, we are almost there.”

He squeezed my fingers as I closed my eyes and took a calming breath as he instructed. Opening my eyes back up, I looked up at him and nodded.

“Okay, let’s go.”

He squeezed my fingers again before continuing to lead us down the long corridor. After a few more turns, we found Felassan standing in a small room waiting for us and I took an easier breath with the open space.

“She is speaking with someone just beyond this door inside the pantry,” he said quietly.

Sharply nodding our understanding, Felassan opened the door and stopped so abruptly that I almost ran into him. I looked around his tall frame and saw what had stopped him so quickly. There stood his doppelganger with Briala. Fierce flames of anger rose swiftly within my veins at the sight of him and my lips set in a feral snarl… a Forbidden. Magic rose instantly with my growing anger. Warping the Fade with a flick of my wrist and the fake Felassan was slammed against the wall, held by the unseen force.
“Let him go!” Briala yelled, pulling her daggers with quick movements and froze at the sight of Felassan standing with me.

Felassan barely moved and stepped in front of me, his tone, cold and angry.

“Him?” He pointed to where the Forbidden was held and laughed humorlessly. “It is a demon wearing a disguise to use you, da’len.”

Briala’s eyes narrowed and she shook her head at him, gripping her daggers even tighter.

“I’m to believe that you are the real Felassan? Prove it,” she snapped.

Felassan looked at me over his shoulder and I sharply nodded before walking towards the Forbidden with barely controlled rage. The closer I got, the narrower it’s lavender eyes got.

“Do you want to do this the hard way or the easy way.”

The demon rolled its eyes at me and looked at Briala beseechingly, playing on her feelings for him like a master violinist.

“After everything we’ve shared, why are you even listening to their lies? Please my love, help me, you know how I feel about you.”

Briala took a step in our direction with the Forbidden’s promised words of love and Solas snarled loudly from where he stood next to Felassan.

“Take one more step towards them and the servants will be cleaning your blood off the tiles for months.”

Briala’s troubled gaze darted from me to Solas angrily. I could see the confusion in her gaze, but she made no further movements towards me and I looked at the demon again with a raised eyebrow. The demon held my gaze defiantly and I smirk at it as I closed my eyes and focused on a bright white flame within my mind’s eye. I visualized the flame growing larger and larger, filling my hands with flame and started to recite the words that would remove his spell and reveal his true form.

“May the truth I seek be revealed to me. May the hidden come to light because I command it, it will be, show me in plain sight what is hidden from me.”

The air in the small room filled with my magic, and the Forbidden slowly changed before everyone’s eyes, revealing himself and I stared coldly into Xebenkeck’s black eyes. There was a soft gasp from Briala but I ignored her… I was here for this creature and his brothers.

“It appears your kind has forgotten completely what it was like to be hunted,” I said menacingly, stepping even closer to it. “I am looking forward to reminding all of you.”

Xebenkeck didn’t flinch with my words, but his eyes held a flicker of unease when they looked at me and then over my shoulder. Solas had moved closer to me and his cold anger filled me, fueling my rage.

“Where are the others, Xebenkeck?”

Solas’ words were like lashes against the creature and I realized it was his aura affecting the creature, causing him to flinch and not his words. Xebenkeck stared at him mutely and as the silence grew, my impatience grew with it and my voice vibrated through the room threatening to shake the palace on its foundations.
“Speak you vile creature and I promise you a swift death. Continue as you are and I promise you an eternity of hell the likes you have never experienced.”

The demon held my angry stare for a moment longer before finally nodding his head.

“We knew what we did would earn us the true death for our kind. Andruil’s hunts were an annoyance only because she lacked conviction. Perhaps we should have known you would not lack such confidence.”

Solas moved closer, and I held Xebenkeck against the wall with the fade. I couldn’t wrap my mind around why they would go so far if they knew we would seek justice for what they’d done.

“Then why? You could have returned to the abyss and we would have let you be for your transgression.”

Xebenkeck looked at Solas with a mocking smirk on his face and I instantly wanted to wipe it off.

“Yes, like good little attack dogs. Go back to our masters and be leashed.”

Solas shook his head at Xebenkeck.

“You fancied your path at one time. When you grew displeased with your position, you had a choice in changing your situation.”

The creatures humorless laughter echoed in the chamber, grating on my nerves.

“Of course we had choices and we made them, that is why we took your son. It was a means to correct a mistake and we needed to remove Andruil from the picture so our goal could be realized.”

Solas’ arm shot out and his hand wrapped around Xebenkeck’s neck and I stepped aside as our bond boiled with combined fury.

“You chose wrong.”

His eyes were molten whirlpools of quicksilver as he took another step closer to Xebenkeck.

“Where are the others.”

Xebenkeck held Solas’ cold gaze before glancing at me for a flicker of a moment before answering him.

“They’ve returned to the abyss. I am only here to gather more information from the quickling.”

NO!

“You’re lying. You just got done telling us how unhappy you were there and now you want us to believe that you would return there?”

Solas glanced at me, his mouth an angry slash across his handsome face with Xebenkeck’s news, and he explained.

“They sought the protection of the Forgotten from us.”

The realization of what that would mean chilled me and I squared my shoulders, stepping closer to Xebenkeck.
“Then you didn’t go far enough, creature. The maneuverings of your kind were your downfall and now every one of you will pay for using my son as a pawn in your little game and placing him in harm's way.”

I looked up at Solas and I knew he could feel my anger with our current situation. It would take careful planning and consideration if we were to follow the others into the abyss. I sighed heavily and rubbed my neck with frustration. Damn it!

“Let him go. He will serve to warn the others that we are coming for them. Hiding behind the Forgotten’s coattails won’t save them, not this time.”

Solas nodded and released Xebenkeck. The creature wore a surprised expression.

“You would risk war with the Forgotten over this?”

The incredulity laced his voice and it was my turn to smirk at him.

“You underestimated my wrath when you took my child for your little game. So to answer your question—yes, in a fucking heartbeat. Now scurry back to your brothers and warn them, we are coming for them. I would say warn your masters but it would be a waste of breath since I already know you won’t.”

Xebenkeck looked at me and then Solas before walking around us for the door. In a flash before Xebenkeck could get far, Briala’s dagger landed in the middle of his chest and the creature made a ‘tsking’ noise as he pulled it out and dropped it on the floor unfazed. The sound of metal hitting stone, clanging in the room, made Briala flinch and Xebenkeck gazed at her for a quiet moment before looking at Felassan with a knowing smirk.

“Be cautious with that one. Her desire for you runs very deep.”

Felassan’s expression did not shift with the information and Xebenkeck finally left the room and Briala moved to pick up her dagger from the floor only to find herself suddenly shoved against the wall by Felassan.

“Your idiocy knows no bounds,” he growled into her face.

Briala’s mouth opened and then closed like a fish.

“What were you hoping to accomplish? You’re an elf. You would never be allowed to take the throne and causing such discordance between Celine and Gaspard, you no longer can manipulate them from within. So again, what did you think you would gain from your scheming?”

Briala stared up at him and from where I stood, her expression was full of hurt and it dawned on me that it might not have been her idea to start it all and I spoke up.

“It wasn’t your idea was it?”

Her gaze slid to mine and there were noticeable tears welling in the corners as she nodded her head before looking down at the floor, her shoulders slumped. She hoped to gain him.

“I thought it was Felassan who was asking it of me—I didn’t know it wasn’t him.”

Felassan let her go as if she’d burned him and turned away from her. His shoulders were tight and anger clearly written over his face. I could only nod my understanding and felt sorry for her. I didn't like Briala, but I could empathize with wanting to do whatever your heart told you to do for the one
you loved and I held my hand out towards Solas. Felassan wouldn't need an audience while he spoke with Briala.

“My love, we are done here. Shall we return to the party before we are missed?”

He took my hand, pressing a gentle kiss to the pulse in my wrist as an answer and I glanced back at Felassan.

“We’ll see you later.”

He nodded and Solas led us from the room. My mind was a swirling vortex of thoughts. Corypheus, the Forbidden and the Forgotten. Should I have let Xebenkeck go to warn the others? What if they decide to let out the other Evanuris? So many what ifs were running through my mind like chaotic gremlin’s stealing my calm. Taking a small breath to try and calm my racing mind, I closed my eyes briefly, letting Solas lead me.

One bad guy at a time.

Opening my eyes, my mind began to calm as I focused on that phrase and glanced at Solas’ strong back in the dim light, absorbing his silent strength. Now if the Gods would stop throwing bad guys at me, that would be great.

We entered through a doorway leading into the kitchens, bustling with activity. The room was lit brightly and I blinked a few times to let my eyes adjust. The staff glanced at us curiously with our sudden appearance and I patted Solas’ arm, glancing around the room with a forced expression of surprise.

“I don’t think we can be alone in here,” I said gazing up at Solas mischievously. Playing along with me, he smiled.

“Agreed, I believe I took the wrong doorway.”

Some of the staff snickered with our false embarrassment and the cook walked towards us wearing an annoyed expression.

“If you’re not here to serve, get out of my kitchen, you're in the way.”

Solas slightly bowed towards him.

“Our apologies serah, we will take our leave.”

Taking my hand, he led us from the kitchen and when the door closed, he snorted and shook his head at me and I smiled up at him impishly.

“What? We had to say something.”

His hand came up to cup my chin, his face growing close enough for me to feel his breath on my lips.

“Indeed, but your excuse made me wish it were a room we could be alone in.”

His words softly puffed over my lips before his mouth pressed against mine. Leaning into him, absorbing the kiss and his warmth for this small moment, his hand slipped to the nape of my neck as he deepened the kiss. When we broke apart, I was breathless and trapped within his gaze, never
wanting to leave it.

“We shall continue this discussion later.”

Smiling, I kissed him quickly again before he got out of reach.

“Is that what that was—a discussion. I think I like your way of talking,” I teased.

He softly laughed as he put my hand on his arm and led us towards a set of steps that should take us back to the party. We entered the atrium where there were small groups of nobles standing together. We wove our way through the room, ignoring their curious looks as we looked for my council and finally found Leliana with Zevran standing by a small table in a corner. Zevran winked at me with a devilish smile as we approached.

“Why kitten, you are undeniably glowing. What kind of trouble have you two been up to?”

I blushed and shook my head at him.

“You are such a big child with a dirty mind, Zevran.”

His deep laugh made more than one noble woman’s head turn to look for the source. I couldn’t blame them, Zevran simply oozed sex appeal that called to almost every woman in the room.

“Of course I am, it is the only way to have fun when surrounded by all the stuffy people.”

Leliana shook her head at him before looking at me seriously.

“Were you successful?”

I nodded my head.

“Yes. It has been taken care of.”

Leliana looked around us and then the room before looking at me questioningly.

“Where is Felassan?”

“He will be along shortly,” I replied. Her blue eyes narrowed slightly with my simple answer and I held her gaze unflinchingly. I knew I didn’t have much of poker face, but Leliana knew when not to push it and gave a small nod.

“Of course, Inquisitor.”

Zevran continued to study Solas and me for a moment longer before slightly shrugging as Leliana glanced towards Celine and Gaspard.

“They will want to have a formal meeting with you and their Council of Heralds. It is all for appearances, but they will use the meeting as a means to quiet the council’s concerns.”

I didn't even hide the fact that I was rolling my eyes at the layers of Orlesian bullshit I had to wade through and answered her with a patient tone.

“When is this meeting supposed to take place?”

Zevran softly chuckled at my expression while Leliana’s expression never changed from her one of polite indifference.
“Tonight.”

Of course, they would want to do that tonight. Sighing, I nodded, resigned to my situation and let Solas’ arm go.

“Then I best get over there so I can get to bed sometime before dawn. Will you please send Siri a message. Inform her that we will be detained till late and not wait up for us. Let her know we will get bean in the morning so we don’t disturb them.”

Leliana smiled, bowing her head towards me as her expression changing to one of understanding. Taking a deep breath, I squared my shoulders and walked towards Celine and Gaspard wearing my fake smile. No rest for the utterly weary I guess.
Meetings and Miles to Go

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support and reading. It is such a privilege and joy to have so many people leaving comments, kudos and words of encouragement.

You guys are the best!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

I stopped the sigh from escaping loudly and closed my eyes, taking a deep breath to keep myself from snapping at the nobles around the table as the conversation between the council got as heated as a high-stakes tennis match over what Briala had done. I sat between Comtesse Solange Montbelliard and Duke Cyril de Montfort who continued to disagree with each other using sarcastically bored tones.

“All of this misunderstanding was caused by that meddlesome elf that at one time, the Empress had arrested for her treachery. Then, with the Inquisitor’s urgings, the devious little urchin was allowed to return to the Winter Palace.” The Duke shook his head and tapped one long, tapered finger on the surface of the table. “If everyone would have listened to my counsel in the beginning and not that of the Inquisitions when I strongly urged that we remove her before this type of trouble began, this never would have occurred.”

I glanced at him with a raised eyebrow and his face blushed embarrassingly. His tapping finger immediately ceased before hurriedly glancing away from me.

“I… what I meant to say was…”

I know exactly what you meant to say you weaselly little bastard.

“That was such a passionate recollection of what happened, one could almost call you captain hindsight.” I knew my tone was sarcastic but I didn’t care. I was tired of all the posturing the nobles around the table were making. “You intimated that again, you and the council were manipulated by myself, another meddlesome elf. The only thing that surprised me out of that whole load of fertilizer was that you actually refrained from calling Briala or myself a knife-ear. I suppose I should graciously thank you for such consideration,” I said drily. My tone was deceptively calm and the room fell silent.

“My apologies, Inquisitor…” the Duke stammered.

I waved him off and turned towards Celine and Gaspard.

“You asked me to address your council to alleviate their combined concerns about Briala, I have done what you requested. I have already explained that Briala has been dealt with and will no longer pose any threat to you or to this council. As to any further manipulation and conniving, that is between the two of you,” I said gesturing between the two cousins. “It was recently brought to my attention that you’ve chosen to finally get married, your Majesty, congratulations,” I offered off-handedly with a small nod before I continued. “However, your happy event would displace Gaspard not only from the possibility of inheriting the throne but from his position on this council.
Arrangements to secure that your fidelity with him stays intact is what we should be focused on right now, not beating a dead horse into the ground by continuing to repeat how Briala manipulated everyone in this room with only a few words and absolutely zero effort.”

Marquis Etienne de Chevin sat forward, his expression full of anger obviously towards me.

“I do not need to be coddled and ordered about like some child, especially by the likes of you. If no one else in here will say it, then I will. It is high time that we stopped taking advice from an outside influence like the Inquisition, who has strayed not only from the Chantry but are led by a faithless heathen.”

I shook my head and clapped my hands at the Marquis while glancing around at the other council members. Both Celine and Gaspard looked uncomfortable and with their combined expressions of anxiousness and uncertainty, everything suddenly seemed very funny to me and I started laughing with the lunacy of this whole past week. First, my son is kidnapped and taken to a lunatic that I was only too happy to get rid of. Then Mythal decides to make my life even more interesting by blessing my friend's daughter with immortality. Then Briala and the Forbidden hook up and cause a bloody nightmare here in Orlais only to then turn around and tell me that I might as well declare war on the Forgotten if I want to get my justice and now, I was forced to deal with these idiots. It was the cherry on top of a big, steaming pile of shit. Dashing away tears from the corners of my eyes from my laughter, I stared at the Marquis whose face was turning purple from anger and I almost started laughing again at how ridiculous he appeared.

“I think you are confused, Marquis. I’m not here to hold your damn hand,” I said still chuckling. Clearing my throat, with my laughter finally under control, I stared at him coldly as I remembered how Florianne had manipulated the same room full of people. “I’m here to prevent you fools from throwing Orlais into chaos by allowing Venatori the ability to infiltrate your ranks again. Maybe you have conveniently forgotten how easy it was for Florianne to manipulate all of you, but I have not. Once Corypheus is taken care of, I will gladly wash my hands of this place and be done with the lot of you.”

Looking around the table, I pressed my hands against the surface and stood. Celine and Gaspard looked uncomfortable, slightly flinching with my movement and I recalled that the last time I sat at a table with them, I threw it against the wall in an explosion of magic. I gave them a reassuring smile and stepped away from the gaggle of morons that made up the council.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I must bid you good night. Though your circular arguments are absolutely stimulating, I can see that you won’t make any progress tonight.”

Comte Lothair Doucy sitting near Gaspard, cleared his throat, trying to get my attention before I left and I glanced at him.

“Inquisitor, if I may take just one more moment of your time.”

I nodded at him, waiting for him to continue.

“We should discuss the consequences of Briala’s machinations in the morning and how we will proceed in cleaning it up, will you be in attendance of that meeting?”

I held his green gaze that peered at me from behind his silver mask that favored a swan and shook my head.

“No, I will be returning to Skyhold as I have nothing further to discuss with any of you. What you do from here on is on you, I only came to stop Briala from her scheming at the request of her
Majesty, nothing more.”

Taking a step towards the door needing to escape their bullshit, Celine spoke up quickly.

“I would still like to have a word with you, Inquisitor.”

My feet stopped and I sighed heavily, turning back towards the Empress.

“Your Majesty, what more could we possibly have to discuss?”

She silently stared at me before she stood and walked towards me.

“Just a minor item. Let us walk together, so we may discuss this. I’m sure you must be tired and would like to retire for the evening.”

“As you wish, your Majesty.”

I went to her side and followed her out of the door, just grateful to get out of that room before I couldn’t suppress the urge to slap the stupid out of someone. Glancing at Celine’s profile as we walked together, I couldn’t help but think she was a beautiful woman. Her porcelain skin was flawless from what I could see beneath her mask. Her wheat-blonde hair coiled intricately on her head before converging at the nape into one long braid that hung down her back, showing off her slim neck. Her royal blue and gold gown accentuated her slim form, cinching tightly around her trim waist. She was an attractive woman with a very conniving mind.

“What has become of Briala?”

Her quiet question surprised me and I stopped walking. Celine also stopped and turned towards me, waiting for my answer. Perhaps there was more than just a dalliance that occurred between Celine and Briala.

“I would have to ask my banal’ras that question.”

Celine’s startled blue eyes widened behind her silver mask with my answer.

“What?”

Her voice trembled a bit and I raised my eyebrow at her curiously, folding my arms behind my back. Mentally I groaned at myself with my sudden position since it was like Solas’ lecturing pose.

“Your Majesty, your only concern right now should be how you can keep Gaspard from declaring an all-out war against you right now, not about Brial’s fate.”

Celine stood silent for a bit before nodding her head in agreement.

“Of course, you are right,” she answered. “Again, you have my gratitude for supporting me when I requested for you to come.”

I curtsied to her and grabbed the side of my gown, lifting the hem just a bit, glad to finally get away. With quick steps down the long corridor, two guards opened the double doors for me that led into the grand ballroom where everyone was still waiting for me. I smiled when Solas stood up to greet me and I went to his side quickly. Leliana and I shared an understanding gaze that said we would discuss this later and Solas led me out of the ballroom.
We returned to the estate in silence. Grateful for the quiet of the small carriage, I laid my head on Solas’ arm. His fingers squeezed mine and I smiled in the dark with the simple action. Felassan stared out of the carriage window, appearing to be lost in thought. Arriving at the mansion, everyone got out of their carriages and with the torchlight that lined the circular driveway and path leading back to the main door, I noticed that I wasn’t the only one that looked worn-out.

The front door opened before me, and I thanked the footman that held the door before heading for the u-shaped stairs. The sounds of multiple footsteps on the marble steps shuffling behind me reminded me of a chain gang returning after a long day breaking rocks. Mentally laughing at my silly thoughts, I turned right at the top of the staircase with Solas as everyone split off for their own accommodations and walked towards our room, opening the door quietly, not wanting to disturb Siri and the children.

Entering the room, I wasn’t surprised that candles were already lit, illuminating the room so we could see. I made a mage light and Solas extinguished the candles before we walked down the short hallway to our bedroom. His expert fingers briefly waved and all the candles in the room simultaneous lit, bathing our room with soft light and I dispelled my mage light.

Reaching for the laces along my side, the hand that I had just seen light the candles, gently brushed my fingers aside and I glanced up at him. His gaze held a fiery promise and my pulse sped up while his fingers masterfully unlaced my gown. Reaching up, I unbuttoned the collar of his uniform as we continued to gaze into each other’s eyes.

The gown slipped softly to the floor and I stood bare to his heated gaze. Biting at my lower lip, I heard his low growl before he swept me up in his arms and carried me to our bed. The swift maneuver stole my breath and before I could get it back, his lips were against mine and I no longer cared if I ever breathed again. Running my hands over his chest, I pushed his shirt and uniform jacket off his shoulders growling my own irritation at his clothing.

His hot breath and husky laughter bathed my shoulder as his mouth moved lower and I forgot my aggravation at his clothing. Lavishing attention on my breasts with his mouth, I moaned, scraping my nails over his head. My body was set with anticipation as his masterful lips moved over my stomach and my loud moan of exquisite pleasure escaped me as his mouth moved over the core of my desire. Each soft swipe of his silver tongue drew cries of pleasure from me as my body hurtled towards that exquisite release he so expertly led me to. My whole body exploded with pleasure as his mouth deftly focused on me and I gripped the bedsheets tightly as my body took flight with the intense rush of my release.

His knowledgeable lips trailed kisses over my hip, back up my body and I cupped his face, bringing those delicious lips to mine. Lips locked with mine, he pulled off his shirt and jacket impatiently. My hands moved over the soft skin of his sculpted chest, and I swallowed his moan of pleasure as he felt my hands slide over the ridges of his stomach.

Our combined hunger for each other was pushing our limits and my fingers unlaced his breeches with quick movements, moaning into his mouth when I reached my goal. Wrapping my hand around his silken member finally releasing him from the confines of his clothing, my breath quickened. My gentle caress’ made him tear his lips from mine and nip my chin playfully before I felt his teeth gently scrape over my shoulder.

“Vhenan,” he softly moaned against my heated skin.
“Lath’em, ma’lath,” I moaned against the solid muscle of his chest.

“Bel’annar’is, vhenan,” he offered as he slowly made love to me.

The inside of our carriage was filled with an awkward silence. Siri sat across from me holding a sleeping little Fenlin while staring out her window and Felassan mirrored her position by staring out of his own window. Both their postures were stiff and angry and it made me wonder what was going on with the two. I glanced at Solas who was holding bean as the gentle rocking motion of the carriage had lulled our son to sleep as well.

Leaning against the velvet padded backrest, I thought about Briala. Felassan never did tell me what happened to her and I looked at his angry profile that was focused on staring outside.

“Felassan, where did you send Briala after we left?”

His lavender gaze finally looked away from the window to me. His expression looked uncomfortable for a brief moment before it became the cool, indifferent mask he normally wore.

“She was escorted away from the Winter Palace back to the alienage in Halamshiral.”

Absorbing this information, a heavy sigh escaped as I remembered her stricken look when faced with Felassan’s cold anger towards her.

“You believe she will not cause any further trouble?”

Felassan shook his head at me and I couldn’t fathom how it could be true.

“But she was in…”

Felassan interrupted me quickly, surprising me.

“It doesn’t matter what she thought. It was never a possibility.”

His gaze darted towards Siri and then back to me. I caught the small tell and held his gaze, deciding to have a little fun with him and he must have seen the mischievous glint in my eyes because his gaze narrowed at me, his expression changing to one of warning.

“It was never a possibility, you say…” I trailed off and tapped my chin, making sure he caught my glance at Siri and then back to him and saw him stiffen. “Not for Briala anyway.”

His eyes darted towards Siri then back to me. There was a small twitching at the side of his jaw where I could tell he was grinding his teeth together to stop himself from replying. Siri chose that moment to glance towards us curiously and I smiled at her cheekily.

“Whatsoever are you talking about?”

I opened my mouth to answer her and Felassan quickly replied before I got a chance.

“It is of no consequence.”
Solas shook his head and a small giggle escaped me as I sat back again, holding Felassan’s annoyed gaze while Siri shrugged her shoulders and went back to looking outside. I held his gaze for a long moment before it went from annoyance to an expression of pleading with me to keep silent. I finally gave him a small nod, acknowledging that I would keep quiet and heard his small relieved breath before he went back to looking outside. I didn’t understand why he cared if Siri knew that Briala had feelings for him. I glanced out my own window to look at the passing scenery now curious to how Felassan would even get Siri to give him a chance. The arrogant ancient wasn’t so full of himself now when it came to Siri and her daughter.

If Siri could have seen that side of him, she might not be fighting him so hard. Like a lightbulb going off in my head, that’s it! I glanced at Siri. Her eyes closed and slightly moving with the motions of the carriage and smiled. I just had to find a way for her to see Felassan’s more attractive side.

Chapter End Notes

- banal'ras - shadow
- Lath'em, ma'lath - love me, my love
- Bel'annar'is, vhenan - Forever, my heart
On the Road

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your continued support of my story. It really means a lot to me.

(anything written in italics and in quotations is to be thought as spoken in elven.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

We arrived at the harbor and everyone dismounted from their mounts except for the four of us who had ridden in the carriage with the children. Stretching my back, it was nice to be out of the small carriage. As I started maneuvering Emithlen into his sling which was coming very close for him to be too big for, his grey-blue eyes glanced around with all seriousness. It was almost laughable when he recognized where he was and I felt his little body stiffen. With a knowing sigh, I waited for the beginning of an all-out fit with the rise of his magical aura and heard his sudden hiccup and low whine. Solas leaned over and took Emithlen from my arms, slightly surprising his son and he instantly stopped fussing as they looked at each other.

“Hush little one.”

I smiled at the picture he made. His features soft and loving while he stared into a miniature version of himself. My heart did this little fluttering thump within my chest just watching him and it was difficult to look away. Glancing over my shoulder, Felassan was looking at little Fenlin with the same adoring look while Siri had her head turned towards the boats and the water’s edge, completely oblivious to Felassan’s gaze, but little Fenlin wasn’t. She was looking right back at him, her little emerald eyes holding his lavender ones until she raised a little hand towards him. Felassan quickly held his own hand out to her and she immediately gripped one of his long fingers, gracing him with a large smile, provoking a similar smile from him.

Siri’s head turned quickly towards the interaction between her daughter and him, her expression startled. I know she couldn’t miss his soft expression while he stared at her daughter and this was the side of him, I wanted her to see. The little clearing of her throat drew his gaze and they stared at each other silently. If he could show her more of that side of him and not the know-it-all, seriously rude and obtuse side of him, he could totally convince her he was worth her time.

Glancing back at Solas, he was now holding Emithlen so he could see everything and our son’s curious eyes looked around at everything, once in a while pointing at something, babbling and Solas would look at where he pointed and then answer. We arrived at the ship and Bull walked up, clapping his hands, drawing Bean’s attention.

“What are you up to, little one?”

Bean’s instant smile and laugh at the site of the large Qunari was adorable and he held his arms out towards him. Glancing at Solas, I felt his magical aura expand with his happiness. Reassurance coursed through our shared bond when he felt my unease. Emithlen’s magic was growing at a rapid pace and it worried me. Though Solas has reassured me time and time again that it is the natural course of things, I still couldn’t help it. Watching Bull take Bean from Solas, he got on the boat, following Dorian. Solas gestured for me to get on and I only hoped that this boat trip wouldn’t be as sleepless as the first one.
Two nights in and the journey across the water was going much smoother this time since we kept the children sleeping together. Tomorrow we would dock in Jader and begin the journey back to Skyhold and I looked forward to sleeping in my own bed for a change. I glanced towards Dorian and Bull each holding a child, keeping them entertained with stuffed toys and smiled. It was odd how the two children had grown so close and yet it wasn’t. There were no other children for bean to interact with and maybe that was the reason. Regardless, it was reassuring, knowing he wouldn’t grow up alone.

Watching the two children giggle and smile, a small, worried sigh slipped out. I still didn’t have any clue how I was going to tell Siri about Mythal’s blessing. How did one go about telling someone that an elven Goddess helped save their child and then bless, said child, with immortality? I quietly shook my head and gazed around the dining cabin of the ship. Solas was talking with Felassan topside and Siri was taking a nap and that left everyone else talking while enjoying their meal.

The idea of telling Siri who I was, was daunting. I didn’t worry about her possibly telling anyone, I guess I was worried about how she would react towards me. She wasn’t ignorant to whom the elven Gods were, I just didn’t know how she felt about any of them. Glancing around at those I had grown to think of as family, it hurt to know that I would have to say goodbye to them someday. To know that someday they would all grow old and die while I did not was a heavy burden I felt laying on my shoulders.

“It doesn’t have to be.”

Cole’s soft voice came from beside me and I glanced at him. His watery blue eyes studied me as his head slightly cocked to the side making the large, floppy brim of his hat touch the table.

“I can’t tell everyone, Cole.”

His head shook back and forth in disagreement and I sighed.

“You could—you can—they would understand.”

Now it was my turn to shake my head at him.

“No, Cole, they wouldn’t.”

My tone was firm and he sighed heavily and I chose to try and change the subject.

“What about Marian, when will you tell her?”

Cole’s eyes darted away from mine and he started fidgeting with the spoon on the table.

“I don’t want to frighten her.”

I took the spoon from his hand, laying it back on the table. Taking his nervous hand into my own, I squeezed it gently, just wanting to give him some comfort.

“You don’t think she hasn’t heard the talk around Skyhold? Everyone knows what you are, Cole.”

He refused to look at me but didn’t push my hand away.
“Yes—a demon.”

I shook my head, angry if that is truly what the people of Skyhold said about him.

“You are not a demon, you are Cole. The one who represents compassion. You help those who need your special talents and I will not let you tell me that my dearest friend is a demon.”

He finally looked up from the table and there was a wry smile on his lips.

“You don’t like to think that is what they think of me because you love me.”

Softly laughing, I squeezed his hand.

“Of course I love you silly, you’re my best friend, right next to Dorian. I don’t appreciate what they say about him either. Plus, I have a feeling Marian will not call you a demon.”

He appeared to be considering my words when Cullen approached our table.

“Will you go topside with me, there is something I wish to discuss with you—privately.”

Nodding my head, I squeezed Cole’s hand one more time before getting up and following Cullen. We walked up the narrow staircase to the deck and went to the railing. I looked out over the water, enjoying the soft glimmering of twilight over the water. Glancing at Cullen, he looked troubled when he stared out over the water. Something about his expression made me nervous as I waited for him to talk.

“Rayna wants her parents to come to Skyhold.”

Oh, that’s all? I let out my held breath and softly laughed. He glanced down at me with annoyance and I shook my head at him.

“By the look on your face, I thought it was something worse.”

He rubbed the back of his neck and gripped the railing.

“They aren’t happy about our being together. She thinks that if they come to Skyhold and meet me, they will finally accept our relationship.”

I listened to him, hearing the nervousness in his voice and thought it adorable.

“So, what’s the problem?”

Cullen glanced at me and then back out to the water.

“If they don’t like me, she will be hurt. I don’t want her to have to choose between me and her family.”

Cullen’s tone was sincere and laced with concern.

“Cullen,” I said quietly, pulling his attention. “Only Rayna can make that decision, not you. Being in love with someone isn’t always easy or convenient. You can’t plan it like a military movement. I know you don’t want her to get hurt but have you thought about the possibility that her family might actually like you?”

He snorted.
“I’ve prayed to the Maker every day for that to be the case.”

I patted his arm in reassurance.

“I will tell you the same thing I told her the day she admitted her feelings for you to me. Her family only knows how Orlesian’s treat elven lovers. They have witnessed them being used and discarded and fear that is the case with their daughter and you.”

His eyes narrowed with anger.

“I would never be so careless with her. I love her and when this is over, I want to pledge myself to her.”

I smiled knowingly.

“That’s why Rayna wants her parents to meet you, Cullen. She knows you love her and would never take your relationship with her lightly. She needs her family to see that she isn’t a dalliance for you, that you are serious.”

His angry expression faded as he finally understood why Rayna wanted her family to come to Skyhold. I patted his arm again, smiling impishly.

“Would you please stop worrying about what they will think of you and just be yourself. It will not take them long to see what she sees in you because it is what I see in you.”

His face grew a touch red with his embarrassment before Solas came up behind me, slipping his arm around my waist, loosely. I tilted my head up to look at him and he glanced down at me tenderly, sending the small nesting butterflies in my stomach into a flurry.

“I hope I am not interrupting.”

I shook my head and Cullen cleared his throat.

“No, I just needed a woman’s opinion about something.”

Solas nodded his head with understanding and glanced back down at me.

“Are you ready to retire for the evening?”

I nodded my head and let him lead me across the deck to the stairway.

“Good night Cullen,” I said before starting down and saw him wave at me before turning his gaze back out over the water.

It made me feel really good knowing that he was finally happy with someone that I knew adored him. Now if only my wonderful matchmaking skills would pay off and get Siri and Felassan together.

Our arrival into Jader gave way to a hustling group of men unloading cargo. We wove through the throngs of workers and travelers towards the next carriage. There were two carriages parked and I
stared at them a bit uncomfortable, silently scoffing at myself, never would have believed that I
would miss riding. A carriage was disgustingly boring and like a fool, I’d left my drawing material in
Skyhold to keep me occupied. I glanced about and saw the Inquisition soldiers preparing their
mounts with Cullen and Cassandra. To the right of the group was Bull, Dorian, Sera, Zevran,
Leliana, and Cole all preparing their own mounts.

I could just modify my carrier so bean could ride with me—it wouldn’t be a big deal. I was so busy
thinking about it that I jumped a little when Solas’ smooth voice spoke into my ear.

“What has put that frown on your forehead, vhenan?”

I glanced at him for a moment before looking back at the horses and then the carriage.

“I don’t want to sit in a carriage for four more days, Solas. I need fresh air, scenery—the outdoors.”

He softly laughed and slid a finger down my cheek tenderly, sending off little sparks throughout my
body.

“I cannot argue with you. I too do not like the confinement of the carriage. I will talk with the
Commander.”

I smiled at him gratefully as Siri stopped beside me.

“You do not want to ride in the carriage?”

I looked at her and shook my head.

“I miss riding and to be honest, I’m tired of sitting inside of those things. It just feels so stuffy.”

Siri smiled and continued walking towards the carriage carrying little Fenlin. Felassan stopped next
to me and I glanced up at him as his gaze followed Siri. I hadn’t thought about the fact that I would
be leaving those two alone and mentally clapped my hands with the possibilities. Throwing Felassan
a cheeky grin, I started towards Solas who was waving me over.

“Enjoy!” I said teasingly.

Filled with surprise, his lavender eyes quickly looked at me, realizing that we weren’t riding with
them. I laughed and headed towards the mounts leaving an uncomfortable looking Felassan standing
in the middle of the path.

For our first night, we camped outside of Orzammar. The guards outside of Orzammar’s gates saw
Varric and their stoic expressions changed to something close to contempt. I noticed that Varric
didn’t seem to be to offended by their reaction but instead gave them a large smile with a two-
fingered salute. Both of the guards brushed the undersides of their square chins causing Varric to
laugh. Clearly, this was the dwarven version of flipping someone off.

“Who pissed in their porridge,” Bull asked as he sat down.

Varric chuckled and continued oiling Bianca.
“Don’t get worked up over it, Tiny. I’m a surface dwarf with no cast and they have a real hardon for any dwarf not living in Orzammar.”

I listened to Varric’s explanation and scratched my head.

“Well, wouldn’t they technically be surfacer’s too since they are outside guarding the gates?”

Varric started laughing and I smiled impishly.

“You know what Sketch… you’re right.”

The conversation around the fire was fun and light as Cullen told us stories from when he was in the academy, training to be a Templar.

“Repeating the Chant of Light while the candles burn down while in full armor was not the most exciting and the new recruit that had arrived a week before was slowly falling asleep. In the middle of the last verse, the recruit fell sideways and the sound of his armor hitting the stone floor made such a clamor.” Chuckling, Cullen poked a stick at the fire. “The recruit immediately jumped up and grabbed for his sword, thinking we were under attack while the rest of us laughed at him.”

Everyone laughed and shared different stories. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught Felassan moving to sit down next to Siri. Just as he sat down, she stood up and walked to her tent. Guess they’re ride didn’t bear as much fruit as I’d hoped. Yawning, I stood up and bid everyone a goodnight before retiring to my own tent. Well, maybe tomorrow we will see a break in the wall between them.

Leaving our tent, I saw Siri glaring at Felassan and I rubbed my face. Clearly no break in the wall today. Solas came out behind me, carrying bean and saw the standoff and shook his head before kissing my cheek.

“Have you thought that perhaps what you are hoping for is in fact, impossible?”

I waved my hand, dismissing his words.

“Nope, and I’m not about to give up now. I can give you three very good examples of why I shouldn’t.”

His expression showed patience but I knew he was curious and I smiled at him cheekily, ticking off each one on my fingers.

“Bull and Dorian, Cassandra and Varric, and” trying to give him my cute eyes, I batted my lashes at him and he chuckled. “You and me.”

He pressed a gentle kiss to my lips, whispering against them making my heart want to leap from my chest.

“You were quite worth the trouble.”

The sounds of bean gurgling between us broke us apart and I pressed a kiss to his cheek with a silly smile on my face. Siri walked towards us, or more accurately stormed towards us, her face a
thunderous mask with Felassan hot on her trail. I saw the two and wasn’t sure I wanted to hear what was coming.

“Uh oh,” I whispered while Solas started softly laughing.

“Do not leave me alone with this—this—insufferable ass again,” Siri said stuttering.

I glanced from her to Felassan as he spoke up quickly.

“The only one here being insufferable, is you! I only tried to apologize for my previous behavior and you told me to find a cliff and jump off.”

I snorted and quickly covered my mouth, smothering my smile as the two held a staring contest.

“That is what you call an apology?! Apologies generally begin with “Forgive me or I am sorry”, not “listen, let’s begin again”, teldirthalelan!”

Felassan’s face grew red with his anger and I held up my hand, drawing their unwanted attention.

“Could you two try to be adults for a moment.” Siri’s eyes widened in shock while Felassan only seemed to grow redder. “I am not your referee, figure it out for yourselves.” Looking up at Solas, I smiled at him. “Come on my love, let’s get out of here before they drag us into a war.”

Solas laughed and followed me away from the two arguing elves.

In the middle of the mountain road, only a day from Skyhold, the sound of thundering hooves approached from ahead. Our riding formation immediately tightened up and three horses soon formed in front of me. It was a lone rider and he appeared to be an inquisition soldier. We watched the rider head straight for Cullen and I nudged my horse forward since there was a good reason the rider had been in a hurry to get to us.

“You’re sure this is what they saw?” Cullen’s voice was sharp and I glanced at the soldier and then him curiously.

“Yes, Commander.”

Patience wasn’t really one of my strongest virtues.

“What is it?”

Cullen held out the missive. Reading over it quickly and then rereading it, my heart started to pound.

~Corypheus, his General Sampson with an army of Red Templars in route to the Arbor Wilds.~
I looked at Cullen and swallowed past my nervous lump in my throat, *it’s time.*

“That’s our invitation, Commander.”

Cullen glanced at bean wrapped against me so he could look forward and then back at me before giving a sharp nod and looking at the soldier.

“Head back to Skyhold and tell Captain Rylan to begin preparations for the men to march.”

The soldier sat up straight in his saddle, snapping a quick salute.

“On your order, Commander.”

I glanced back at Solas and he seemed to understand what I didn’t want to say aloud. *Now is the chance to end this, I hope we’re ready.* Kissing the top of bean’s head, I turned my horse and walked back towards Solas and glanced around at the others waiting for an explanation.

"Scouts have sighted Corypheus and Sampson in the Arbor Wilds."

Bull slammed his fist into the palm of his hand.

"About damn time, Boss."

I could only nod my head in agreement as a million thoughts ran through my mind at once.

Chapter End Notes

* teldirthalelan - one who will not learn; idiot
Time for Action

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone will enjoy the update and thank you for everyone's continued support. You guys reading and following their journey really inspire me to continue.

Thank you!

Twilight was upon us as we crossed the long draw bridge and the sound of the horn, announcing our arrival, echoed through the valley. Entering the large courtyard, the castle was a bustle of activity. Soldiers were packing wagons with weapons, crates of supplies and who knows what else.

It was apparent that Cullen’s orders were in full swing. Watching them move with hurried steps drove home that many of them would not return. With a heavy sigh, I turned my borrowed mount towards the stables when a young man ran towards us. Skidding to a halt, out of breath, he reached for the reins.

“I’ll take him, your Worship.”

Ugh! My face must be scrunched up because Solas was softly laughing next to me. I dropped the reins for the stablehand to take while Solas dismounted and took bean so I could slip off. I patted the horse’s neck as the stablehand led him away. We turned towards the side entrance of the castle and entered through the kitchen. The staff here was also busy preparing dinner.

Many of the workers greeted us with cheerful voices, welcoming us back and I waved at Francois as we passed through the door leading into the dining hall. The room was packed with nobles discussing the news of Corypheus and his Red Templars and I felt my shoulders stiffen at the sight of so many masks. If we are lucky, we will pass by them without them noticing. We had made barely four steps into the room before we were approached and asked questions.

“Your Worship, when will you be leaving?”

Well, that was a stupid thought.

I loathed the use of that title more than the others and prepared to answer the Marquis politely when another noble quickly added another question.

“Will you be calling in all of your allies to vanquish this, Corypheus?”

I held up my hands before I got bombarded by more questions and the room went quiet as they waited for my answer.

“My Lords and Ladies, though your questions are indeed valid and your curiosity understandable, I cannot answer them at this time. When my council and I have come to a decision, everyone will be made aware.”

Solas’ hand pressed against my lower back reassuringly as we continued our path through the dining hall towards the stairs. I just wanted to get to our room and take a nice hot bath. When we entered the main keep it was bustling with activity as well. The castle’s staff passed us carrying linen’s either
clean or dirty, some of them smiling at us in greeting others to busy to have even seen us. So far no one else was trying to stop us and Solas opened our door, closing it behind him and warding it for privacy.

I glanced up at him and saw that bean was pleasantly sleeping on his shoulder and smiled. Something about seeing them together always made me smile.

“I shall lay him down in his cradle.”

I nodded and continued up the steps.

“You do that and I will start the bath water.”

The mischievous twinkle in his eye made my pulse jump and I winked at him before hurrying up the steps. I would enjoy this moment of peace before obligations got in the way.

“Empress Celine and Grand Duke Gaspard have been notified. The Grand Duke has already begun rallying his Chevaliers. Their military should be deployed in time to meet up with us just outside of the Arbor Wilds.”

I glanced at the place where Cullen pointed to on the map. *Yay... Gaspard,* I thought while Cullen continued.

“Your actions at Adamant denied Corypheus his army of pet demons. With Orlais support, our numbers match his. Our own troops will be ready to leave by the week’s end. Supplies and our healers will be ready to leave the day before we march.”

“Corypheus’ disciples have been shaken with his continuous defeat.”

I glanced at Leliana and smirked.

“I’m sure the wanna-be God didn’t like getting his ass spanked by mere mortals.”

Zevran snorted, winking at me. Josephine set her clipboard down and folded her arms, tapping her chin.

“The question is, what is in the Arbor Wilds that brought Corypheus out of hiding, making him willing to uproot all of his major strongholds?”

“Well, his people have been ransacking elven ruins since Haven. We believe he seeks more. What he hopes to find, however… continues to elude us.”

I glanced down at the anchor in my hand before looking at Leliana.

“He looks to find what I stole from him in Haven.”

Leliana looked at me curiously and I held my marked hand up.

“Power, I stole his power to get into the Fade and take his throne in the Black City.”

I let my hand fall and stared back at the map as the door behind me opened.
“Which should surprise no one,” Morrigan offered as she walked in, stopping next to me. “Fortunately, I can assist.”

“Please, do come in Morrigan.”

She slightly sneered with my blatant sarcasm.

“What Corypheus seeks in those forgotten woods is as ancient as it is dangerous.”

Morrigan’s word games were mentally trying and I rubbed my face as I answered.

“And what is that, Morrigan?”

Morrigan began slowly, backing up and gesturing towards the door.

“Tis best… if I show you.”

I raised my eyebrow at her and followed her out of the war room. We crossed the garden and stopped at a door I had thought was a closet of some sort, and followed her inside the large one room, bedroom. Standing proudly against the far wall was an eluvian. *How in the hell did she get one of these?*

“This is an eluvian. An Elven artifact from a time long before their empire was lost to human greed. I restored this one at great cost, but another lies within the Arbor Wilds. That is what Corypheus seeks.”

I glanced at Morrigan then back at the mirror hoping I didn’t tip my hand that I already knew what it was and let her continue.

“I found legends of an Elven temple within the Arbor Wilds, untouched. It proved too dangerous to approach, and thus I turned elsewhere to find my prize. If Corypheus has turned his eyes towards the Arbor Wilds, he could succeed where I failed. The eluvian would be his.”

Swallowing anxiously, I gazed at the unassuming surface of the mirror that was unlike the one beneath the keep that Solas had hidden. *I wonder if all of them are different in design?*

“What does it do?”

Mentally, I cringed at my acting unfamiliar but Morrigan’s expression was delighted at my feigned ignorance. With a flourish of her hands, magic sprang from her fingertips, hitting the mirror and a breaking sound of glass filled the room as the mirror activated.

“A more appropriate question would be, ‘where, does it lead’?”

I barely held back my snort as the fact remained that Morrigan was never known to pass up an opportunity for being dramatic and she walked through the rippling surface of the mirror. I ran my hand over my neck unsure if this was a good idea and followed her through, entering a vast area of ruins. Glancing about, the vivid colors were blindingly bright and I squinted my eyes as the magic in this place infused my skin and my blood sang loudly in my ears.

Blinking a whole bunch of times, my eyes finally adjusted to the brightness and the wonders of this place became clear. I glanced down at my hand and saw that my skin had a soft glow exactly like it did when I was in the Fade. Quickly folding my arms and hiding my hands, I prayed for Morrigan to not have noticed and looked around.
Paths made of stone as smooth as glass, lined with ten-foot tall marble carvings of perfectly sculpted round trees, except the tops of these trees. The tops did not resemble wooden branches but more like deer antlers, shaped into perfect spheres. Assan’s memories filled me as I glanced at them. At night they would have radiated a soft magical light. Vibrant flowers mixed with lush, green grass grew through the devastated area. The beauty of it was astonishing but the lack of bird song and animals was destabilizing.

Small, ornately decorated little buildings with statues of sentinels carved into the rock surfaces, filled the area with either broken or corrupted eluvians. But it was the background of the area that silently tore at my heart. Buildings with spires laden with crystals still hung hauntingly suspended in the air, broken apart into jagged pieces. Silently floating in the sky while some of their pieces had fallen to lie on the ground, orphaned.

“If this place once had a name, it has long since been lost. I call it the Crossroads. A place where all eluvians join… wherever they might be.”

I had to keep reminding myself to keep my mouth closed and not helpfully fill in Morrigan’s gaps. Keeping my silence, I continued to glance around. Morrigan wasn’t completely wrong. This place was a center where the eluvians met but it was also a mecca of commerce and trade. It had been known as geral’an, the buying place. Many times Assan had come here to purchase goods from various vendors. Swallowing nervously I keep my eyes roving around the area as I finally spoke.

“This place is extraordinary, it is amazing to think how this place could even exist.”

Leaving an unspoken ‘still’ out of my sentence Morrigan crossed her arms and glanced around with me.

“It is curious but whose to say? Formed from the fabric of time and space, perhaps. The ancient elves left no roads, only ruins hidden in far-flung corners, this is how they traveled between them. As you can see, most of the mirrors are dark, broken, corrupted, or unusable. As for the rest, a few can be opened from this side, but only a few.”

I finally turned towards her, curious and uncomfortable about how she found this place.

“How did you find out about this place?”

Morrigan’s expression turned uneasy and her avoidance to answer the question was clear as she spoke.

“Ah… my travels have led me to many strange destinations, Inquisitor. Once they led me here. It offered sanctuary.”

My eyebrow came up.

“Sanctuary?”

Morrigan looked annoyed and she shrugged.

“Not all the mirrors lead back to our world. The ancients were nothing if not… resourceful.”

*Oh, bullshit!* I couldn’t help my snort of disbelief. The mirrors led to other elven provinces, not other worlds, but I bit my tongue and continued with my ignorance no matter how much I wanted to tell her the truth.

“And where do you think they lead to?”
“Places in between, like this one. I can describe it no better. For a time, I was safe from those who hunted me. But only for a time. One cannot remain in between forever.”

I turned back and looked at the eluvian we’d just walked through and wondered if Solas knew of this one. I mentally smacked myself in the forehead. If he’d known Morrigan had one of the eluvians at her disposal, he would have never let her keep it.

“Each eluvian can be opened with a key. The key can be many things. Each eluvian is different. I have knowledge as well as power. Often that is enough.”

*Not when a master locksmith can come along and change the locks and that is exactly what Solas will do.*

“Okay, well this is all very interesting, but what was your purpose in bringing me here?”

Morrigan’s smiles sometimes reminded me of a large cat playing with a mouse and she was looking at me like that right now as she answered me.

“This is not the fade, but it is very close. Someone with enough power could tear down the ancient barriers…” She looked at me knowingly and I now understood why she’d brought me here.

“And enter the fade in the flesh, like Corypheus wanted to do with the anchor.”

Morrigan nodded her head in agreement.

“He learned of the eluvian in the Arbor Wilds, as I did. He marshals the last of his forces to reach it. You have made Corypheus desperate, Fenlin. We must work together to stop him, and soon.”

She turned away from me and walked back towards the eluvian with unhurried steps and I followed after her still processing the information. If what Morrigan had just said was true, then we must get to the Arbor Wilds as quickly as we can.

After my leaving Morrigan in the garden, I entered the war room and found everyone still waiting for me, watching me curiously. Closing the door behind me, I glanced at everyone around the table and took a stabilizing breath.

“Morrigan believes that Corypheus is after an elven relic known as an Eluvian.” I could see the instant questions bubbling and I raised my hand, holding them off. “Just let me explain before you all begin to question me to death.”

Their annoyed sighs were comical and my fingertips tapped on the surface of the table as I thought of a way to tell them what I could without giving too much away.

“First off, an eluvian is a magical mirror that the ancient elves used for travel. If Corypheus gets his hands on such a relic, he could enter a place that isn’t quite this world and not completely the fade either, but a space that is in between. If he accomplishes that, he is powerful enough to cut through the veil and enter the Black City in the flesh.”

Everyone looked horrified with the idea but it was Cullen who gathered his composure the quickest.

“And Lady Morrigan has such a relic?”

I nodded my head ‘yes’.
“In Skyhold?”

His tone was growing very unhappy and I held his increasingly angry gaze.

“Yes.”

Cullen rubbed the back of his neck with agitation.

“Maker’s breath! She has placed everyone in Skyhold in danger having that thing here.”

Zevran nodded his head in agreement with Cullen and I shook my head at them.

“Unless you have the key, the mirror cannot be opened. It is not like a bloody door where you just turn a knob and pull.”

My sarcastic reply only aggravated Cullen more and he glared at me while I was growing steadily more impatient with his attitude.

“Right now you’re losing sight of the point. If Corypheus finds this eluvian in the Arbor Wilds, what I witnessed in Redcliffe will most definitely come true.”

That seemed to bring Cullen to attention quickly. Just the thought of it made my skin grow cold and a solid ball of dread filled me. The instant replay of seeing Solas’ dead body flashed in my mind, instantly punching a hole in my chest and I found it hard to keep my composure. Staring down at the table, I willed myself not to cry. It wasn’t real… it wasn’t real, I chanted, trying to remind myself when the door flung open, surprising everyone in the room but me.

Warm arms instantly encased me and pulled me closer to his chest, hiding me from everyone. The smell of elf root, parchment, and glacial ice filled my senses, soothing a bit of my fear. His angry tone filled the room and if I wasn’t trying to stave off a panic attack, it would have made me laugh.

“This meeting has ended. The Inquisitor is retiring for the rest of the day.”

No one said a word as Solas escorted me from the room and down the corridor while I continued trying to focus on my breathing. I tried to keep my mind from pulling me back to that nightmare but it was a struggle as unwanted flashes filled my thoughts. We entered the main keep and a nobleman blocked our path, his mouth open to ask a question. Unwilling to even try to see who it was, I buried my face into his side and listened to Solas’ cold tone.

“Now would not be an opportune time to bother the Inquisitor.”

Solas didn’t wait for an answer and walked us around the nobleman for our chamber door. As soon as I felt his magic cast the wards, the flood gates opened and I broke into uncontrollable sobs. His arms picked me up, carrying me up the stairs. Not a word was spoken as we reached the landing and he carried me to the nearest chair and sat with me in his lap.

My face instantly found that spot between his shoulder and his neck and I buried myself into him. His hands stroked down my back with reassuring strokes and my tears slowly started to abate. His love and worry for me filled our bond and I leaned back so I could see his handsome face.

His hand came up and gently wiped the tears from my cheeks. I knew he was waiting patiently for me to explain what had happened and the fact that he didn’t rush me, filled me with love for him to overflowing.

“Corypheus is heading to the Arbor Wilds to get an eluvian that is hidden somewhere there.” I let a
shuddering breath escape and looked at him terrified. “If he gets his hands on it, he can enter the fade and turn our world into that nightmare I experienced in Redcliffe.”

Solas’ gaze was understanding and he gently pressed his lips to my forehead. Closing my eyes, I listened to his soothing voice as it spread a reassuring balm over my fears.

“You must believe that we will stop him, vhenan. It will not come to pass.”

I leaned back and held his confident gaze, taking a deep breath and letting his courage and complete belief that we would stop him fill me. He cupped my face and my eyes closed as his lips captured mine in a gentle kiss.

“Someone very wise once told me that we could do anything as long as we were together and I believed her with my entire heart and still do.”

Somehow he always had the words to expel all my fears and a small smile pulled at the corners of my lips as I listened to him repeat something I had said to him.

“She sounds pretty smart,” I teased.

His gaze turned mischievous as his thumbs slowly traced my cheekbones.

“She is… she is also very stubborn, exasperating, exhausting, demanding…”

I pressed my lips to his smiling mouth, shutting him up.

“Beautiful better be in there somewhere my love or your sleeping on the couch.”

His laughter filled our chamber and he kissed me arduously, setting my system on fire and my arms wound around his neck loosely.

“There are no words to describe her beauty for she is a goddess.” His lips continued to tease the skin behind my ear and shivers ran through me as he continued to whisper against my already sensitive skin. “My eyes can only worship her and my actions may only show her how beautiful she is to me.”

His lips trailed down my neck and a soft moan escaped.

“Ooh… that was very smooth. Now I feel like I should express my appreciation for such worship.”

He swiftly stood, holding me in his arms and carried me towards our bed.

“I believe I will enjoy your method of showing me your appreciation.”

I giggled as he laid me down and pulled him towards me.

“I shall try my best.”

Batting my eyes at him teasingly, he softly growled at me before kissing me. Everything I needed to renew my belief that we would win was right here in my arms and I melted into him, my mind going blank as our kisses grew demanding and I drifted away from my worries.
I sat on the floor with Emithlen playing with some of the stuffed animals Krem had made for him when I heard my chamber door open. My stomach tightened nervously knowing it would be Siri climbing the steps with little Fenlin. Asking her to come under the disguise of our children having a play date just so I could tell her what Mythal had done and what was to come, was wracking my nerves.

Siri reached the landing and bean started clapping as soon as he saw little Fenlin.

“Look who's come to play,” I whispered near his ear, kissing the side of his silky cheek.

Bean started bouncing where he sat on the floor and I reached out to steady him as he couldn’t contain his excitement. Siri laughed as she sat down on the floor with little Fenlin that appeared to be just as excited within her mother’s arms. As soon as they were close enough to each other, bean quickly wrapped his chubby arms around her, pulling her closer to him almost toppling her over.

Siri and I laughed as we righted the children and set them closer together.

“Hey there Romeo, slow down. Girls don’t like to be dragged around.”

Siri and I shared another laugh as little Fenlin patted beans cheek and then grabbed a stuffed toy from the plethora surrounding us.

“Thanks for coming today. Bean has been absolutely unruly lately.”

Siri nodded and ran her hand gently over little Fenlin’s head, ruffling her flaming red hair.

“So has Fenlin, I wonder if they are getting ready for a growth surge.”

I internally grimaced that she had hit the nail on the head and cleared my throat.

“Yes, well, you’re probably right. Um… there is something I wanted to talk to you about.”

Siri’s soft brown eyes looked at me and she smiled.

“They cannot stay little forever, Fenlin. That is the natural way of things, is it not?”

I laughed a bit uncomfortably and Siri’s understanding gaze was now watching me questioningly. I needed to just come out and say it instead of playing ring around the rosy.

“Yes, you’re right… he can’t stay little forever no matter how much I would like him to. But his growing is why I asked you to come today.”

Siri sat quietly staring at me as I took a small breath for courage.

“What do you know about the Elven Gods, Siri?”
Siri snorted and looked at me like I had just derailed the conversation and she wouldn’t be wrong. I couldn’t seem to wrap the words I wanted to say into a comprehensible conversation and rubbed my face in frustration.

“What does that have to do with Emithlen’s growing up?”

I rubbed my face and blurted it out.

“Because Evanuris children grow at a different rate than mortal children.”

Siri’s eyes slightly widened and then she burst out laughing, thinking this was some great joke and right now I wished it were.

“You expect me to believe you are an Elven God?”

I physically winced with her wording and shook my head adamantly.

“Elven God—no, I am no God, I am an Evanuris though. The Elven Gods that the Dalish worship does exist, Siri.”

Siri’s expression started to register that I was completely serious. She glanced at Emithlen and then back to me, looking uncomfortable.

“Then you and Solas are what… ancient elven Gods or these... Evanuris? Why are you telling me all this, Fenlin?”

I swallowed nervously, preparing to answer her.

“Because—Andruil was behind our children’s abduction in Halamshiral. Mythal intervened to protect them with Felassan’s aid while I and Solas dealt with Andruil. When Mythal departed, she gave your daughter her own type of blessing…”

Siri stared at me nervously.

“What kind of blessing?”

I swallowed again.

“She blessed her with immortality.”

Finally—I finally told her. Siri looked as if I had just struck her.

“Why would an absent Goddess care about my child enough that she would grant her that?”

Siri’s voice trembled as she asked her question and I wished I had some kind of answer for her. I could only guess at Mythal’s reasoning and snorted, running my fingers through beans black curls.

“Mythal is—a mystery, and that is the only way I can describe her. Everything she does is for a reason and I am unsure what her purpose was for her gift to little Fenlin. She intimated that little Fenlin would become important to Emithlen and then she said, ‘I can see what lies ahead for you both and your trials will be arduous, but I bless you both with long lives and strength to overcome what you must, my little ones. I know neither of you will disappoint me.’”

Siri glanced down at little Fenlin playing with bean and started to quietly cry. I couldn’t imagine what she was thinking and felt so horrible, moving closer to her so I could wrap her in my arms.
“I’m so sorry, Siri. None of this would have happened if Andruil wasn’t set on trying to kill me…”

I felt her shake her head against my shoulder and then lean back to look at me.

“No, don’t be. It is one thing to hope that your children will live longer than oneself, but it is entirely different when you know it for a fact. It is a small relief to know that she will not be alone.”

I hugged her tighter and heard her quiet mumble spoken into my shoulder.

“Is Felassan—also like you?”

Her cautious question made me smile.

“Yes and no, he was once a sentinel for Mythal.”

Siri leaned back and laughed, wiping her eyes and trying to make light of the situation.

“Well, that explains why he is such an ass.”

I laughed and nodded in agreement as she looked at the children.

“You mentioned that immortal children grow marginally faster than mortal children. How so?”

“Solas explained that it was a rapid type of growth, mentally and physically. The first cycle starts at six months old and by the time that cycle is finished, they resemble toddlers.”

Siri’s expression of surprise was like my own when Solas explained it.

“How long does a cycle last?”

“One month.”

Siri covered her mouth and stared at the children.

“How shall we explain to others these changes? I mean… we can’t just tell them who you are. The Dalish alone will clamor for answers from the three of you not counting your own counsel.”

I reached out and touched beans cheek as he babbled nonsense that only little Fenlin could understand.

“I don’t know yet. Solas and I have talked about it and our only answer would be to tell the council at least what we are… not so much as who we are.”

Siri looked at me questioningly.

“Was Solas also a sentinel like Felassan?”

I worried my lower lip, unsure if I should tell her and her expression was clearly curious as I shook my head no.

Siri laughed and patted my shoulder.

“Well, don’t look so worried. It’s not like he’s the Dread Wolf…”

My stricken look with her offhanded, absolutely correct comment she’d made, Siri cover her mouth as she realized just exactly who Solas was.
“Mythal’s mercy… you are mated to the Dread Wolf.”

I held her uncomfortable stare quietly for only a moment.

“Yes, I am proudly married to Fen’Harel and if you start spouting that nonsense the Dalish says about him, I’m going to scream.”

Siri shook her head and snickered.

“I can already tell you that the stories about Fen’Harel are untrue. He is not as monstrous or cold as the Dalish has depicted him, but then again, they have never witnessed the Dread Wolf playing with a baby.”

I giggled and held Siri’s soft smile.

“Thank you for trusting me, Fenlin. I promise to never speak of what you’ve just told me to another soul.”

I smiled at her.

“I already knew that, Siri. I was honestly more worried about you.”

She glanced back down at little Fenlin and I saw her expression of anxiety before she could cover it.

“I will be alright. Worse things could have happened that night our children were taken. I will always be grateful that she was returned to me unharmed.”

Relief flooded me with her words as the door to my chamber opened. Turning towards the sounds of footsteps already aware that it was Solas and Felassan, Siri’s expression instantly cooled when she saw Felassan. I sighed with the way she instantly threw her guard up around him and plastered a smile on my face for Solas as he approached us.

“Have you spoken to Dorian yet?”

Solas bent to kiss me in our usual greeting before I answered him.

“Not yet. I’m not looking forward to that conversation any more than I was this one.”

Solas kissed me again before walking towards the desk in the corner.

“If Felassan was staying behind, we wouldn’t need to ask, but there must be a mage around Emithlen to help control his magic while we focus on Corypheus.”

I sighed.

“I know, I know, he is just going to be upset playing nursemaid and Bull won’t be happy that I’m not taking him and the Chargers with us.”

Solas picked up a letter from the surface of my desk, reading the message from the Empress and then glanced over the top of the paper at me.

“They will understand why it is important to leave a force to protect the keep and the people held within and I know Dorian will understand why we would ask him.”

Nodding in agreement with him, I glanced towards Felassan who was trying to keep his distance and you could see the struggle was real. His expression was devoid of any tell, but his lavender eyes
warmed at the sight of Siri. Siri, on the other hand, was completely blanketed in cool indifference and ignoring him entirely.

*These two are seriously not going to make this easy.* A little sigh escaped as I gestured for Felassan to take a seat.

“Felassan, would you like to sit down?”

He finally looked at me and only gave me a sharp nod before taking the chair closest to Siri and little Fenlin. Siri’s annoyance was instantaneous and she appeared to prepare to move when Felassan laid his hand on her arm, silently asking her to stay. As Siri opened her mouth to say something, that I could only imagine would be cutting, little Fenlin started clapping and the sound drew Felassan’s attention. It never ceased surprising me at really how handsome Felassan was when he let his guard down with only a smile at little Fenlin.

I glanced at Siri and even her expression changed, proving she was not unaffected by Felassan and a spark of hope filled me. I glanced at Solas and saw his own knowing smirk and I winked at him. He moved around the desk towards me and held his hand down for me to grab.

Getting up from the floor, I wrapped an arm around his waist and hugged him to me.

“Would you stay with bean while I go and talk to Dorian and Bull?”

“Of course, vhenan.”

I smiled up at him and he pressed a soft kiss to my lips and butterflies tickled my insides as I melted into him. *Maybe someday this reaction will calm down.* When he broke the kiss off, his eyes watched me mischievously and I knew instantly he was quite aware of what he did to me. Rolling my eyes at him, his husky laughter followed me down the stairs.

“Absolutely not!”

Dorian crossed his arms, his indignant expression flushed red with anger at me and I tried to appeal to his logical side.

“Dorian, please, just listen for a moment…”

“It is out of the question.”

His obstinace was one of the qualities I found most endearing and most frustrating about my friend. Just as I opened mouth to try again, Bull stepped in and put one of his big hands on Dorian’s shoulder.

“Kadan, even if you don’t let her speak, it is not going to change her decision.”

Dorian glared at him and then me.

“I need you guys to stay. Emithlen needs a skilled mage to control his magical outbursts and this next month will be crucial that they stay under control.” Dorian and I shared an understanding look since I knew Solas had already explained the growth patterns of an immortal child to him. “As to Bull and his Chargers staying, it’s simple. I need a strong military presence here to protect the keep and its
people inside its walls. Cullen has already chosen a group of his men to stay behind under Bull’s command.”

Bull groaned but I could tell he understood.

“You’re killing me, Boss.” I waited quietly as Bull rubbed his face and finally stared at me from his piercing grey eye. “But you’re right. We can’t leave the place unguarded—especially after that last attack.”

I smiled gratefully at him.

“You won’t be completely alone. Raj and his pack will be your eyes and ears outside of the gates.”

Bull nodded and I looked back to Dorian with a hopeful expression. Dorian’s exaggerated sigh filled the room.

“Fine, I’ll stay behind to make sure the little prince doesn’t set fire to the curtains.”

I moved towards him quickly and wrapped my arms around him, hugging him tightly.

“Thank you, so much Dorian. There really isn’t anyone else I would trust my son with than you and Bull.”

Dorian’s arms wrapped around me and I felt the rumble of his laughter beneath my cheek.

“Of course, my dear, but might I suggest you also request Cole to stay behind as well?”

I glanced up at him curiously.

“He is quite extraordinary at understanding what the children are thinking. My child gibberish is a bit unpracticed.”

I giggled and nodded my head in agreement as I stepped away and quickly pressed a kiss to his cheek and then Bull’s.

“I will ask him.”

Leaving the two on the bottom floor of the tavern, I climbed the steps to find Cole where he preferred to hang out on the second floor. His liquid blue eyes found me as I walked towards him.

“I do not mind,” he said.

I should have known he would already know and leaned against the railing overlooking the tavern floor.

“Thank you, Cole.”

We both just quietly observed the people down below us. Cole listened to the internal hurts he could help with and I just enjoyed people watching. The door to the tavern opened and Marian walked in and I caught Cole’s attention immediately focus on her. His eyes followed her and there was a soft lift at the corner of his mouth as he watched her.

“Have you told her who you are?”

Cole shook his head making the brim of his hat bounce and I smiled at him gently, placing my hand over his and squeezing it gently, silently giving him my support.
“You will when you’re ready.”

Letting him go, I left him at the railing and passed Marian on the stairs. She smiled at me timidly and I patted her shoulder.

“Enjoy your lunch, Marian.”

She nodded and continued up the stairs and I couldn’t stop the smile from forming when I thought about the possibilities of the two together.

When I returned to my room, the children were sleeping and Siri was sitting far away from Felassan, reading a book. Solas stood up as I walked towards him and I kissed him in greeting before sitting down next to Siri while Felassan and Solas continued their conversation.

“This Lady Morrigan is apparently going with the Inquisition to the Arbor Wilds. I do not trust her, the human is devious.”

Felassan took a drink of his wine as Solas silently agreed with him. Hearing her name, reminded me that I hadn’t told Solas about the eluvian she had and I cleared my throat to get their attention.

Felassan is not completely wrong. Morrigan has her own personal agenda first and foremost. She believes Corypheus is after an eluvian, which I am unsure if she knows more than she is letting on but her goal is to get this eluvian for herself. I am unsure why she wants it when she already has one.”

I had their complete attention and I felt Siri’s curiosity stir beside me.

“What is an eluvian?”

Felassan answered her as Solas and I held each other’s gaze. I already knew what he was thinking and I was in agreement with him. Morrigan did not need to have that kind of access to the ruins of Arlathan.

“It is a means for us to travel from one side of the world to another without being seen.”

Siri tapped her chin as she turned over his answer.

“Then what would she need it for if she doesn’t know where they lead?”

I sat back and looked at her.

“She said she used it at one time to hide from her enemies. But when she took me into what she called the crossroads, I found that most of the mirrors were either dark, corrupted, or broken.”

Solas and Felassan both nodded their heads in agreement with me and Solas leaned forward, tenting his fingers.

“Do you know where she is keeping this eluvian?”

I smiled at him.

“Yes, it is in the room next to hers. She has the door warded for intruders.”

Solas seemed unbothered by the warding as he fluttered his fingers in the air, uncaringly.

“The wards are insignificant.” He looked at Felassan, his expression serious. “What is important is
that we remove it from her dominion. I have no doubt that her purpose for assisting us in the Arbor Wilds is to obtain whatever Corypheus is after.”

I agreed with him and sighed with frustration.

“I wish we knew what it was.”

Siri snorted and picked her book back up.

“That would be too easy.”

I laughed and nodded my head.

“We will find out soon enough, in the meantime, we shall address the removal of the eluvian from her possession.”

I held Solas’ gaze as he looked at me.

“Do I even want to know how you are going to accomplish that?”

Solas only smiled at me mischievously and I groaned.

“Let’s just say that Lady Morrigan will be unable to access it again.”

I shook my head at him as he and Felassan shared a look and though I wanted to know, I was glad I didn’t. Morrigan would most definitely question me about it since I was the only one she had physically shown it to. Leaning back against the couch, I closed my eyes dreading that in only a few days I would be taken far from my son for an indescribable amount of time. I glanced over my shoulder to where the children slept, absorbing and memorizing the sight of their innocent faces embraced by their dreams.

The bond between Solas and me hummed with his love and understanding at my melancholy and I glanced at him as he looked at me tenderly. We can accomplish and overcome anything, as long as we are together, I reminded myself as I returned his gentle smile.
Walking beside Solas carrying bean, we crossed beneath the large gate for the bridge. As soon as we passed the unseen barrier around the grounds, the warmth in the air instantly fell away and rubbing my hands together at the sudden chill, we walked in silence. I knew Raj had gathered his own pack now, sharing the woods with the other pack that ran the woods around the castle. The men that practiced in the valley had seen him running the area. They all talked about the unnaturally large wolf that tackled the Commander when he wasn’t paying attention.

The thought that Raj would pull a prank on Cullen was entertaining and I knew that if it really upset him, he would tell me. Turning at the end of the bridge, we followed a well-used path that led into the woods. Reaching a small clearing in the thick forest, I licked my lips and whistled. We waited for only moments before we heard sticks breaking and turning towards the sound, I finally saw him.

His blue-green eyes held mine as I stepped forward. He was so large now. He paws moved over the ground with soft thumps and I rushed towards him, wrapping my arms around his large neck. Burying my face into his fur, the smell of snow and pine filling my senses.

“There’s my boy,” I whispered before stepping back to get a good look at him.

He was of my height now. His black fur thick and silky and his musculature was compact and strong. My little boy had definitely grown into the leader he was always destined to be. His forehead pressed against mine and I closed my eyes, smiling at the reassuring gesture as we greeted one another.

“I have missed you too.”

His nose nuzzled my cheek and I laughed, running my hands over his large face. The sounds of Emithlen clapping made me turn around to see what had him so excited. His blue-grey eyes stared intelligently at Raj and I knew then that our son remembered him. Patting Raj’s neck, I moved towards Solas.

“Come on, your little brother has missed you too.”

Solas snorted at my little joke since I had once teased him about taking care of our son. As soon as Raj was within touching distance, bean’s little hands grabbed his muzzle. Raj’s nose was busy sniffing beans face and neck, making our son giggle and it was moments like this that would be
etched into my mind forever. I gazed up at Solas and saw that he too was memorizing the moment and our bond hummed with a feeling of contentment that was so rare.

Smiling at the beautiful scene, I ran my fingers through Raj’s pelt.

“Solas and I are leaving with many of the other’s tomorrow.” Clearing my throat as it tended to want to close every time I thought about leaving our son, I pushed on. “Bull and Dorian, along with his chargers are staying behind to guard the castle and the children.” Raj’s head turned towards me, his intelligence staring back out at me as I continued. “I would like you to keep watch outside of the gates. If anything happens, you are to find Bull.”

Raj’s wolven face was always so expressive and he snorted and shook his large head at me and I knew it was because he wanted to go and I shook my head back at him.

“No, you can’t go Raj, not this time. We are going to the Arbor Wilds, after Corypheus. I don’t know what all he has planned, but I want Emithlen and little Fenlin protected since we won’t be here. Be Bull’s eyes and ears out here, please.”

Solas’ arm wrapped around my shoulders and pulled me into him. I knew he felt my sorrow with leaving and was trying to give me comfort. Emithlen patted Raj’s face and his blue-green eyes looked at him. It was like they were having a silent conversation that was not unlike the ones we would share and his eyes closed just before he bowed his head and I knew he had agreed.

“Thank you.”

There were sounds of twigs snapping behind us as the rest of Raj’s pack came closer. His ear’s moved at the sounds and he turned his large, regal head towards the path he had come, giving out two sharp barks. Solas smiled and squeezed me slightly just as Raj looked back towards me.

“Time to go,” I whispered.

His forehead met mine again in goodbye and my throat tightened as it always did when I had to leave him. Backing slowly away, I watched him turn and head back into the woods. As soon as he was out of sight, I rubbed my face, clearing my throat and the moisture that had gathered in my eyes away as I turned back towards the way we had come.

Returning to the castle, we walked into the main hall just as Morrigan walked towards us, her expression thunderous. I knew then that Felassan and Solas had effectively locked her out of her eluvian and felt a bit of relief. Morrigan was not a bad woman, or at least I didn’t think so, but she was a cunning one. Her passion for gather information about Elven lore was a curious one, especially when she talked about elven relics that held power. I had never thought of her as power hungry, but her goals to obtain such information or relics was not always honorable.

“It would appear you have been very busy, Inquisitor.”

I raised my eyebrow at her, ignoring the way Solas stiffened beside me.

“Well, we are preparing for a battle Morrigan, procrastination, and laziness will not do for times like these.”

Her humorless laugh made some of the nobles in the vicinity uncomfortable as I held her cat-like
yellow gaze.

“How did you accomplish it?”

Her biting tone was starting to get annoying.

“I have no idea what you are talking about Morrigan, accomplish what?”

“You somehow locked it, impossible as I would have thought it before as your magical abilities are not to that level of skill, but it has been done and you were the only one I showed it too, so again I will ask. How is it you were able to do that?”

The sarcasm, frustration and condescending tone were all I could take and I too laughed in a way that made other’s suddenly uncomfortable as my magical aura flickered around me in anger with her audacity.

“As always, Morrigan, your words inspire cooperation and complete obedience,” I snapped at her.

“As to your problem, I don’t know. I haven’t seen it since you showed it to me. Perhaps with all your knowledge and magical ability you imagined you had, it really wasn’t enough to open it any longer.”

Her face flushed angrily and I couldn’t stop the smirk that formed on my lips.

“I wanted you to know that a contingency of soldiers will be staying behind with Bull and his Chargers to guard the castle. Siri has already offered to care for Kieran while you are away if you would like, if not, I could have a small escort assembled and have them bring Kieran to his father’s in Denerim.”

Morrigan’s face flushed even more with her anger and I could visibly see her trying to calm herself. I knew that just the offer of escorting Kieran to stay with Alistair would piss her off, but her condescending attitude towards me had definitely pushed my buttons.

“Tis quite unnecessary, Inquisitor. I have already agreed to allow Siri to handle the care of my son.”

“Very well then, our business is concluded. Be ready to leave at dawn or you will be left behind.”

Solas’ hand pressed against my back as I turned away from her with obvious dismissal and walked away. Taking a calming breath, we headed back to our chamber to finish packing.

Solas carried our bags as we walked through the keep while I carried bean. Every little molecule in my body didn’t want to let go of my son, but I knew that in a few moments I was going to have to. Glancing down at his face, his eyes were drowsy as his head lay against me. Kissing his forehead, we followed the path towards the barn and all the activity with everyone rushing around, horses being led out of stalls, interested bean.

Dennet led Siugen and Inansha forward and Solas set our packs down. He bent and pressed a kiss to Emithlen’s head before resting his forehead against mine. We stood like that for a long moment before we both took a calming breath and held each other’s gaze. Our shared despondency with leaving our son vibrated between us.

I turned towards the doors of the barn and saw Siri standing with Felassan. Even from where I stood,
I could see that Siri was softening towards him. Especially when the man was busy holding little Fenlin and saying his own goodbye’s. Dorian appeared behind them with Bull and with a heavy heart, I walked towards them, each step felt like I was walking through mud.

I can’t hide my displeasure with leaving and his hazel eyes softened.

“Do try not to look so upset my dear, he will be quite alright.”

Sniffing a bit as I continued to try not to cry, I nodded my head, silently agreeing with him.

“I know he will be…”

My throat was quickly closing up and Bull’s deep voice broke my sudden urge to burst into tears.

“Focus on the fight Boss, we got this handled here. Got it?”

Sniffing again, I kissed beans cheek again and handed him over to Dorian before I couldn't. Squaring my shoulders, I looked up at Bull.

“Got it. Don’t burn down the castle while we’re gone.”

Bull patted my shoulder and nodded. Turning back around, Solas was waiting for me next to Inansha. Walking away from our son was the hardest thing I’d ever had to do in my life, but I did it. Reaching Solas, he pressed a kiss to my forehead before helping get on Inansha.

Squeezing my knees, Inansha slowly moved forward and the soft clopping sounds of hooves hitting the ground filled the air. Glancing around at my crew, they all seemed very focused and ready to get going.

“Well, let’s go see what a would-be God wants in the Arbor Wilds.”

We rode over the bridge and the crisp mountain air instantly pinked my cheeks as we left the comfort of Skyhold and the sound of Raj’s howl echoed through the forest. I smiled as the sounds of answering wolf calls filled the area. Scanning the tree line, shadows moved and I knew it was his pack, but it was one large shadow that I was searching for. When I found it, I quietly said goodbye. I will see you when I return, just keep them safe.

His loud howl filled the early morning air as we continued to ride away from Skyhold and I glanced at Solas who was riding beside me. He reached over and took my hand, offering a reassuring touch, soothing my tumultuous emotions. Squeezing his hand back, I nodded and let his hand go, staring straight ahead. Bean would be safe in Skyhold, I had no reason to believe otherwise. Now was the time for me to focus on Corypheus and what he wanted in the Arbor Wilds.

“This is foolish,” Xebenkeck whispered angrily.

His sister’s smoky voice came from behind him and he turned towards her warily. Hair the color of
fire floated around her tall, seductive form as she walked towards him, her black eyes coldly focused on him. Since her electing to become corporal, her ambition knew no bounds.

“It is time brother. We couldn’t allow it to be done when Andruil was alive, but with her death, they will want to seek vengeance. Once the Evanuris and the Forgotten are focused on fighting each other, their absence will seal their fates and give us the recognition we deserve as we take over.”

She turned towards Imshael and gestured towards the mirror, ignoring Xebenkeck and Gaxkang’s sour looks.

“Shall I open it or would you like the pleasure.”

Imshael smiled wickedly and bowed towards her.

“I will give you that honor, sister.”

Dark, black tendrils slipped from her fingertips, pulling apart the veil over the mirror. Stepping through, her brother’s followed behind her and she came face to face with Elgar’nan.

His cold blue eyes stared at her as he stood deceptively calm.

“Pardon our intrusion, I am Gelemah, Fen’Harel’s agent. I come with a message.”

Elgar’nan’s eyes narrowed as he continued to silently stare at them.

“Andruil is dead.”

Elgar’nan turned completely towards them with the news, radiating his anger in strong waves.

“Why would you bring me news of my daughter’s death? Is it his goal to mentally torment us?”

Gelemah gestured towards the way they had just come.

“Perhaps you would like the opportunity to ask him for yourself?”

Elgar’nan’s gaze strayed towards the mirror and then back to the creatures in front of him, his distrust clearly written on his features.

“I will not leave the other’s behind.”

Gelemah’s lips slipped into a large smile, revealing her pointed canines.

“I wouldn’t dare ask that of you, of course, they may escort you.”

Elgar’nan sharply nodded and left to gather the others, leaving the Forbidden in the small room.

“I hope you know what your doing sister,” Gaxkang whispered.

Gelemah gave no response but only smiled viciously at her brothers as she saw her plan coming to life.

Chapter End Notes
Gelemah - to be feared
Happy Mother's day to all of you mother's out there!
I especially want to call out my own mother, who I know is reading this. Thanks for always being there to push me, mom. I couldn't have asked for a better role model, a better friend, nor a better inspiration. This chapter is for you!

In the Emerald Graves, outside of the Arbor Wilds, we met up with Gaspard’s forces. Orlais’ military wore a set of elaborate armor made from gilded metal and royal blue silks, matched with golden leathers. Their chest plates bore a roaring lion emblazoned over the surface, boldly announcing that they were Orlais military if you hadn’t already known. Like their helmets weren’t enough for that.

Mythal’s mercy, those damn helmets were large metal masks, designed like frozen faces. They had creepy eye slits for the soldier to see out of but no mouths, just frozen faces permanently frowning at the world. The whole mask-like helmet encased the entire head and was proudly adorned with a large, red-feathered mohawk, resembling a cockscomb.

Just looking at them and remembering my experience with them in Val Royeaux did not make me feel at all easy. Glancing back over my shoulder at Solas, his calming eyes held mine and they conveyed assurance and love and I winked at him. It was exactly what I needed to bolster myself and faced forward, looking at the Chevaliers. All in all, it didn’t matter that the ensemble was hideous. Who cared, just as long as they had good sword arms and knew how to fight the enemy and not my elven mages within the Inquisition’s ranks.

Studying the wall of Chevalier’s that coolly stared back at us, they soon parted like the Red Sea to give way. Lo and behold, the Grand Duke, himself, with all his boundless arrogance, strode through the opened path and I felt the urge to laugh at his entrance. I glanced over at Cullen who’d road beside me as we’d approached the Orlesian camp just to see what he thought of the show. His expression was one of complete annoyance before he replaced it with his own expression of cool indifference.

Gaspard strode forward with a large smile splitting his face from beneath his golden mask as he approached. I slid off Inansha and refrained from showing my disgust as I walked with Cullen and Leliana towards Gaspard while the others dismounted.

“Inquisitor, it is to my extreme pleasure to meet with you again.”

Taking my hand and bowing over it, he pressed a kiss to my gloved knuckles and I gritted my teeth. Solas' disgust was vibrating our bond angrily and I barely waited for the appropriate amount of time for him to let my hand go before snatching it back.

“Thank you for coming, Grand Duke, I wished I could say the same.”

We stared at each other for a tense moment before he held his hand out to Cullen.

“Commander, I look forward to working with you on this campaign to remove this blighted creature from our world.”
I saw that Cullen only nodded his head sharply as he took Gaspard’s outstretched hand.

“Shall we get down to business, Grand Duke?”

Gaspard clapped his hands together and rubbed them briskly.

“Of course, please follow me. I have a table set up with all the intelligence we have gathered thus far.”

I walked between Cullen and Leliana as we made our way through the camp with Solas, Cassandra, and Varric following closely behind. After weaving through the makeshift camp, we finally came to the table Gaspard spoke of and laid out over its surface was a large map. Walking up to it, I studied where his markers were that said there were Red Templars and where there were Venatori. I internally smirked at the fact that Gaspard’s agents had not been as successful as Leliana’s.

Following the land markers that he did have on the map, my mind curiously looked at the mark for *elven ruin*. It was at the far end of the area. Something in my gut told me that was where Corypheus and Sampson were heading.

I glanced at Leliana and gave a small nod and she approached the map, quickly studying its surface. Pulling out her own smaller version, she started pointing to areas that had not yet been marked on Gaspard’s map.

“My agents found Venatori and Red Templars here, here, here, and here as well as the ones you have already found.”

Leliana’s fingers moved from one place to another on the map and one of Gaspard’s soldiers stepped quickly forward to mark the places Leliana pointed to. Gaspard tapped his chin, studying the map as even I saw that the most direct path was going to be guarded heavily by Corypheus’ forces. There was one spot on the map that followed a river where I thought we might not encounter as much resistance and pointed towards it.

“What if I take a team this way?” I said, looking up at Cullen.

He was studying the spot I pointed to and before I could continue my thought, Gaspard interrupted us.

“That would be suicide to go that way. Surely his forces will be there and outnumber your small group. You would be dead.”

His smug little smirk set my teeth on edge and I glared at him briefly before continuing as if he hadn’t spoken.

“I have no doubts we will encounter forces if we choose to go this way, but what if we sent out a small recon team to assess the path, it might be the shortest route to Corypheus who I think is heading for that elven ruin.”

Before Cullen could even answer me, Gaspard spoke up again.

“Your plan is naïve Inquisitor and will get good soldiers killed for your foolishness. Perhaps you should stay quiet while the men skilled in war, talk.”

I glared at Gaspard’s arrogant smirk and instantly clenched my fists, wanting to throw an ice ball into his arrogant face just to wipe it off. Cullen stood stiffly next to me and cleared his throat, staring coolly at Gaspard.
“I do not see her plan as naïve, Grand Duke, but brilliant.” Cullen stared defiantly at Gaspard with his own cocky smirk on his face and I stood silently watching the little battle of wills between them.

“The Inquisitor’s suggestion is not to walk through the middle of Corypheus’ forces but to go around them. I see nothing naïve about this idea.”

Gaspard crossed his arms and shook his head.

“It was my understanding that we were coming here to rid our world of this blighted creature, not try to evade it.”

Cullen's annoyance with Gaspard was starting to show as his lips made an angry slash on his face.

“This isn’t some Orlesian ball, Grand Duke. We bloody well don’t want to waltz through the middle of his forces either. We must make some tactical decisions on how to approach this so that we lessen the losses we surely are going to sustain.”

Gaspard guffawed at Cullen’s explanation and I sighed, already seeing where this was going.

“As the Grand Duke and the obvious leader on this field of battle, what I say is what we will do. Is that understood, Commander?”

Closing my eyes at what was surely going to be a cockfight, Cullen’s angry tone cut through the silence around the table.

“I will not relinquish my men to you, Grand Duke. Is that understood?”

My eyes bounced from Gaspard’s stiff posture to Cullen’s like I was watching a tennis match. The tension between the two was getting thick. I already knew this wasn’t going to end well if Gaspard continued to insult Cullen. Holding my hands up, Gaspard replied sarcastically.

“You expect me to relinquish my men over to you? Outrageous! You are nothing but a child when it comes to the strategies of war, you have no experience in such things, Commander.”

The sound of leather squelching reached my ears. Glancing down, I saw that Cullen’s grip around the hilt of his long sword was constricted. This doesn’t look good. Trying to inject before this got messy, Cullen’s cutting tone filled the air.

“I have much more experience than you assume, Grand Duke, and my suggestion would have been for us to coordinate our forces. Share in the leadership.”

Gaspard snorted and waved Cullen off as if he were a pesky bug.

“Pish, I will not coordinate with a child who does not know how to fight. I either have full command or me and my men are going back to Orlais.”

Before Cullen could reply, I spoke up quickly.

“Grand Duke! I can assure you that Commander Cullen has more battle experience than you are giving him credit for. Your remarks are not only very rude but you forget yourself. The Inquisitions forces are under Commander Cullen. I would never agree to allow you full autonomy over my people. Secondly, a joint collaboration is the only way this will work.”

Gaspard and I stared at each other angrily. His jaw twitched with his anger and annoyance.

“Your naïve ideals are not needed here, Inquisitor.”
I pressed my hands on the table to keep from reaching for his throat and laid my trump card down with a gloating smile.

“If you prefer to continue your little temper tantrum, Gaspard, I will have no choice but to inform Celine that you were too frightened to enter the field of battle and preferred to return to Orlais, where it was safer.”

His mouth opened and closed before anger really took him and he took a step towards me.

“That is a lie!”

I shrugged my shoulders at him and looked at his men that stood around the area.

“That would not be my problem. The burden of proof would be on you. I guess I’ve become more Orlesian than I thought.”

Sarcastically smirking at him, his expression grew livid before he looked at Cullen.

“I will not have my reputation sullied over such idiocracy. If you will not relinquish your command, then I have no other choice than to challenge you in a duel to first blood for it.”

Before I could say a word, Cullen’s face broke into a very scary smile.

“Accepted.”

Gaspard nodded his head sharply.

“You have one hour to prepare, Commander. Then we shall see who is the better man at fighting.”

Cullen said nothing and turned on his heel, leaving Gaspard at the table. I stared at Gaspard for only a moment before shaking my head, almost feeling sorry for him and followed after Cullen. Cullen is going to clean the forest floor with him.

The rumor spread like wildfire through the camps that the Grand Duke and Commander Cullen were going to duel to see who would lead the forces into battle. Cullen moved through the camp, ignoring the men’s questions as he conveyed his orders to secure the camp for the evening. Solas and I watched the men grow with excitement with the duel and I shook my head.

“It’s nothing but a pissing contest,” I mumbled.

Solas laughed and nodded his head in agreement.

“Perhaps, vhenan but a necessary one.”

I glanced up at him inquisitively with an eyebrow arched, waiting for him to continue.

“The Grand Duke has led his men to believe that the Commander of the Inquisition forces is weak and completely ill-equipped to lead the men into battle.”

Scowling, I glanced back towards Cullen who was busy talking with his men.

“So, it is a matter of honor.”

Solas nodded his head and wrapped his arm around my shoulders, pulling me into him for a side hug.
“Do not look so concerned, vhenan. I believe that the Commander will be quite efficient at squashing these disparaging remarks.”

I glanced up and caught a small, very pleased smile on Solas’ face and bumped into his side with my shoulder, causing him to look down at me.

“I can already tell what you're thinking, my love and you should be ashamed for having such thoughts.”

I couldn’t keep the impish smile from my lips even as he bent and softly kissed me.

“I will never apologize for wishing that human pain and humiliation. It is what he deserves and I will take great pleasure in watching what the Grand Duke calls a low born warrior, beat him.”

He pecked my lips again and the seriousness of his gaze held mine and I leaned up, pressing another kiss to his lips.

“Well, when you put it that way, I see your point.”

Solas left Fenlin with Leliana and Cassandra to find the Commander before they would make their way back to the Orlesian camp.

“If I may have a moment of your time, Commander.”

Cullen turned around and waited for Solas to proceed. There were not many times that Solas sought him out, so this made him curious.

“I have a small request of you before you engage in your duel with the Grand Duke, if I may?”

Cullen kept silent and nodded his head for Solas to continue.

Solas stepped closer, so the soldiers milling about could not overhear him.

“I request that you not make the Grand Duke bleed to quickly.”

Stepping back now, Solas waited for the Commander’s answer.

Cullen’s hand rested on the hilt of his sword and they shared an understanding smile.

“I would be glad to satisfy such a request, Solas,” he replied, holding his hand out to him.

Solas smiled at Cullen wickedly and grasped his hand tightly.

“I would be in your debt, Commander.”
A small group of us followed Cullen as he walked through the camp. Up ahead, Gaspard was also walking towards us with his own group. When we approached, one of the Chevaliers with Gaspard spoke up sarcastically.

“Do you need mages to care for you, Commander of the Inquisition?”

I glanced at the fully masked Chevalier that spoke up and stood next to Cullen wearing a cheeky smile as Cullen answered the fool.

“The Inquisitor cannot help being a mage any more than you can help speaking out of turn, soldier.”

Gaspard held out a hand, silencing his grumbling men and focused on Cullen.

“I believe we have unfinished business you and I, Commander.”

Cullen nodded and removed his cloak, showing Gaspard’s men that he wasn’t wearing any armor, unlike Gaspard and handed it to me.

“Would you mind holding this for me, Inquisitor.”

Winking at him teasingly, he smirked and turned back to face Gaspard.

Gaspard glared at Cullen and snorted disdainfully.

“Only a fool would remove his armor in a duel with me.”

Stepping away from Cullen to stand with Solas and the others, I watched Cullen roll his shoulders before pulling his long sword from his hip.

“You may leave yours on, Grand Duke. I would not want to hurt you on the eve before the battle.”

Gaspard snarled and yanked his Cuirass off angrily, throwing it to the ground.

“I do not need armor to protect me from the likes of you.”

Cullen only shrugged at Gaspard.

“As you wish.”

I was riveted to the spot as I waited with the others. Cullen was waiting for Gaspard to attack first and the quick sound of steel meeting steel rang through the silent forest as Gaspard lunged towards Cullen.

It was a wonderful dance that Cullen performed as he deflected and parried every attack. Cullen was smiling as Gaspard’s frustration with Cullen’s dexterity grew.

“Are you afraid to fight me, Commander?”

It didn’t even look like Cullen was breaking a sweat, unlike Gaspard. He had perspiration running down the sides of his neck. His hair was damp around the top and sides of his mask. It was then that Cullen finally showed Gaspard the speed he’d been keeping back and finally attacked Gaspard, shoving him back.
“On the contrary, Grand Duke. I was just warming up.”

His comment obviously angered Gaspard as he growled and lunged towards Cullen. We were all riveted with a growing sense of excitement as Cullen mercilessly attacked Gaspard over and over again. His strength and endurance clearly pushing Gaspard with each clash of metal. Each attack pushed Gaspard back. Gaspard raised his sword and the hilt of Cullen’s sword rammed into Gaspard’s stomach with a resounding thud, leaving Gaspard suddenly gasping for breath.

Everyone watching saw that Cullen was clearly playing with Gaspard, tiring him out. I glanced away from Cullen and Gaspard to watch the group of Chevaliers moving uncomfortably before focusing back on the fight. Clearly, the Chevaliers were going to honor the rules of this duel.

Cullen’s steps were elegant as he deflected all of Gaspard’s attempts to hurt him and Gaspard’s desperation was starting to show. He was out of breath and his sword arm was starting to shake with the many strong blows Cullen had dealt him.

“Yield, Commander,” Gaspard demanded angrily.

Cullen’s sword was lightning fast as he attacked and got really close to Gaspard.

“Your arrogance blinds you, Grand Duke. You couldn’t fight your way out of a grain bag, just as there was never a chance that you would best me.”

Cullen’s coldly snarled words came right before he headbutted Gaspard, knocking his mask off and bloodying his nose.

Gaspard’s hand came up to touch his exposed face. Pulling his hand away from his nose, he looked at the blood on his gloved hand. Cullen stepped away from Gaspard and sheathed his sword preparing to walk away from Gaspard since the criteria of the duel had been met.

“Don’t you dare walk away from me…” Gaspard snarled, lunging towards Cullen’s back.

Solas’ magic flared hotly from beside me and before Cullen could turn, Gaspard was thrown backward, into his men. Holding my breath, I waited to see what the Chevaliers would do now as Cullen turned around to see that Gaspard was laying in a heap on some of his soldiers.

“How very noble of you to attack when my back is turned, Grand Duke.”

Cullen’s tone was disgusted as he stared at the Chevaliers still standing.

“We will meet in two hours to discuss our plan for tomorrow’s assault.”

The Chevaliers around Gaspard spoke up respectfully.

“Oh your order, Commander.”

Cullen gave them a sharp nod and turned towards us. Holding out his cloak, he took it from me and glanced at Solas. Still reeling from what had just happened, the two seemed to be sharing some sort of silent conversation as they both only nodded at each other before Cullen walked away.

I glanced up at Solas and he gestured after Cullen.

“Come vhenan, we should have our meal before the meeting.”

“Uhu… you can explain what that was later then.”
Solas smiled at me, our bond humming with his happiness.

“Of course, vhenan.”

Following after the others, I glanced over my shoulder at Gaspard picking up his mask from the ground. *Sorry, Gaspard… but you definitely got what you deserved. I only hope you will remember this day.* Lacing my fingers with Solas’, we walked back into the Inquisition camp.
Chapter Summary

What a beautiful, sunny day outside.
Thank you, everyone, for your comments and continued support. I hope you enjoy the new chapter.

Standing next to Inansha, I rubbed the middle of his head and glanced around the camp. After the duel between Cullen and Gaspard yesterday, both the Chevaliers and Inquisition soldiers had grown friendlier towards each other and not so awkward. Gaspard had kept to his tent and refused to participate in the round table meeting we had to plan the assault but that didn’t seem to faze Cullen. He took command of Gaspard’s Captains rather quickly.

We were just starting to enter into the Emerald Graves and the place was jungle-like with all its overgrowth. The canopy overhead from all the trees kept the sun from filtering into the forest. Tomorrow, my team and I would leave the bulk of the military and head for the river. So far we had been pretty fortunate to not run into any Venatori or Red Templars, but I wasn’t counting on our luck lasting for too much longer.

My thoughts turned inward and I thought about Emithlen. My heart hurt to be so far away from our son and my eyes quickly grew damp. Shaking my head and mentally pushing the sorrowful thoughts away, I patted Inansha’s head one more time before I left him for the fire.

Focus on the goal woman… your son is safe and soon you will be back with him.

Leliana and Zevran were quietly sitting on a fallen log together by the fire, sharpening their blades in companionable silence while Cassandra was adding in what appeared to be vegetables to our dinner. Varric wasn’t sitting too far from Cassandra and was oiling his crossbow with meticulous care. I scanned the fire and found Morrigan sat a little away from everyone, reading from a book and appearing to be completely ignoring everyone, lost in her own world. Since her eluvian had gone dark, she hadn't talked very much to me and for some reason, it didn't really hurt my feelings any. I respected Morrigan in a way, but she made it very difficult to actually like her. Her attitude towards everyone exuded her own feelings of self-superiority over everyone around her. Frankly, it was downright annoying when she spoke condescendingly to everyone all the time.

Cassandra smiled at me as I sat down next to Varric just as Hawke and Fenris entered the camp carrying a small, dressed out ram to add to the meal and I waved at them. The night was full of silence as it appeared everyone was making their own preparations for battle. Everyone seemed to have their own reasons for being here. For Hawke, I knew it was because she had killed Corypheus once before and was not very happy that he’d survived the encounter. Cassandra, she wanted to get even for the destruction of the Conclave and the murder of the Devine, and Cullen, he wanted revenge for what Corypheus had turned the Templar order into.

And me… well, that was easy. I wanted Solas’ foci back. I knew it was diseased with the blight and that there wasn’t any way we could cleanse it, but I would die first before I let that Magister keep it. That fool had done enough damage with it and the idea of him achieving his goal only made the blood in my veins turn to ice. I could never endure that nightmare again. My thoughts were so preoccupied with what was going on, the touch of Solas’ hand on my shoulder made me jolt with
surprise. Glancing up at him, his expression was stern, surprising me.

“Come with me, vhenan.”

Not allowing me a chance to answer, he took my hand and led me away from the camp. Weaving through some of the thick brush, he pulled me along behind him until he stopped and turned on me, his voice angry.

“I believe you sometimes forget that I can feel what you feel. It was not hard to recognize what you were thinking since it is not your first time in doing so and I will not allow you to act on those thoughts ever again. You are my mate and the mother of our son. I cannot endure losing you again, vhenan. You made an unbreakable vow to me in the cave that you would always be with me.” He held up his wrist, showing me the small knotted lock of my hair that he wore before bending so that we were eye to eye and cupping my face in his hands. “You knew what this was and what it would mean giving it to me, vhenan. Do not cause me to use this token of your love for me against you and make you obey me.”

I held his stormy gaze and felt all his worry and his anger with where my thoughts had gone vibrating through our shared bond like the rumble of an incoming earthquake. Wrapping my hands around his wrists, I leaned my forehead against his, understanding why he feared my thoughts. He had every right to feel the way that he did when my past wasn’t all that encouraging.

“I’m sorry.”

The tension that had been flowing through him, making his aura lick against mine in distress began to slowly calm.

“I gave you that token because I wanted you to know that I trusted you so much, that I would willingly submit myself to you, Solas. My decision to place that around your wrist and trust you, the man I chose as my mate, with that kind of power over me has not changed.” Touching his jaw tenderly, I kissed him softly. “We both tend to think and do foolish things. Possibly, having each other as a check and balance is perhaps why we were created for each other.”

Solas softly snorted and pulled me into him, wrapping his arms around me tightly.

“You continue to humble me, vhenan, and perhaps there is a bit of wisdom with what you have said. You do have a way about you that makes me see reason.”

I smiled and snuggled into him.

“I do, don’t I?” I replied teasingly and felt his soft laughter rumble against my cheek.

“Then there are other moments when I realize that you were also created to vex me to the point of complete and absolute frustration.”

Giggling, I glanced up at him and winked, smiling like a Cheshire cat.

“Good thing you don’t have any hair or I would probably frustrate you to the point of pulling it out.”

His mouth descended on mine and I wrapped my arms around his neck, enjoying this moment of lightheartedness together. Tomorrow we would be focused on the assault.

“Why do you think I continue to use the spell to remove it?”

His cheeky teasing made me laugh and I nipped his chin playfully. There was nothing about him that
didn’t know how to make me smile.

Waving goodbye to Cullen, Leliana, Zevran, and Sera, we parted from them and the soldiers at first light, or what we believed was first light since the foliage was so dense here. I thought we were making good time through the jungle-like forest towards the river. Silence filled the group as we all kept to our own thoughts but overhead the birds sang, giving the forest a very old feeling.

There was something different about this place… ancient and unmolested by man.

“It tis said that the Arbor Wilds are not so kind to visitors. Old, elven magic lingers in these woods.”

I glanced back at Morrigan for a moment before turning back to watch where I was walking.

“I don’t know if I would agree about old, elven magic but I would agree that the forest itself does feel odd. Perhaps it is because it has not been ruined by man.”

Our group again fell silent until we came to a small group of Leliana’s agents waiting for us. I walked towards the woman dressed in all green leathers, including a rogue mask that only allowed for her dark eyes to be seen.

“Inquisitor,” she greeted quietly.

She moved closer so we could speak quietly, bending closer to me.

“Do you know how the fighting is going?”

She sharply nodded.

“The Red Templars fall beneath our blades. Commander Cullen reports that they are almost to the designated rendezvous location. Our agents have also spotted Corypheus traveling towards an elven ruin to the north. I will mark his path on your map.”

I pulled out the map and handed it to her as she made quick marks on it before handing it back to me.

“Andraste guide you, Inquisitor.”

She crossed her arm over her chest before turning and blending into the surrounding forest with her team. Morrigan came and stopped next to me, leaning on her staff as she watched the agent leave.

“I wonder, is it Andraste your soldiers invoke during a battle, or does a more immediate name come to their lips.”

I glared at Morrigan with her insinuation that the men and women think of me as some kind of prophet.

“Why is it so difficult for you to see that they are just showing me respect, Morrigan? No one has mistaken me for the Maker.”

Her yellow, cat-like eyes studied me for a moment before glancing back into the forest.

“True. You are far more likely to come to their aid then a Chantry fable… but I digress. If your agents have reported accurately, I believe these ruins to be the Temple of Mythal. It was once a place
of worship out of elven legend. If Corypheus seeks it, then the eluvian he covets lies within and we must obtain it before he does."

I couldn’t help but raise my eyebrow at her. From the moment Solas had taken away her ability to open the eluvian she had brought with her to Skyhold, she had clearly set her sights on obtaining the relic Corypheus wanted so desperately. I knew that Morrigan wasn’t sure if it was an eluvian or not, she was only going on speculation, Dalish tales, and a lot of folklore books on ancient elves.

“Corypheus will not lay his hands on anything that belongs to my people.”

My tone alone tolerated no argument and it seemed to pacify Morrigan for now because she only nodded and then turned away from me. She didn’t understand that I meant those words with every fiber of my being. If this was indeed the Temple that Assan visited often than I would protect it with everything I had and that included protecting it from her as well.

I glanced over my shoulder at Solas who had stood silently behind me listening and we shared an understanding look. We would protect it together. Waving my arm, I motioned for us to move out and we continued down the narrow path through the dense forest.

As we got closer to the area on the map that indicated the river, I heard the soft sounds of the water rushing over rocks. *Finally!* Pushing through the thick brush, I finally saw the water and smiled. We had not encountered any Venatori or Red Templars on our journey and that meant our plan was working. Cullen and Gaspard’s men were distracting Corypheus’ forces. Stepping through the brush and dusting my hands, I felt a tingling in the air… something very… familiar.

*Why do I know this feeling?* No more than a second after I had thought it, the flash of a dagger came out of nowhere towards my throat and instinctively I leaped backward, right into Solas.

His arms held me up as I stared at the now visible elf wielding the daggers with lightning speed towards me. Casting a quick barrier, Cassandra barged through the bushes and slammed the elf with her shield. The maneuver should have knocked him down, but it didn’t even seem to faze him as he flipped away from her.

Fenris jumped through the bushes with Hawke and soon we saw that this wasn’t the only elf but there was a small group of them that had suddenly appeared around us. Casting barriers and using fade magic, we all worked as a cohesive unit, making sure not to use fire so we didn’t reduce the whole forest to ash.

Using the fade, I gripped my right hand and called on the magic I felt flowing beneath my feet and through the sandy shoreline of the river. Using my fingers to guide the energy, I flicked them upward one at a time causing sharpened spears to push through the surface like nails. An elven rogue that had been solely focused on me was dodging my attacks and quickly making his way towards me. The amber of his eyes glowing eerily behind Mythal’s emerald green vallis’lin as he rushed towards me.

Throwing up a barrier, I twirled my staff gathering the electricity in the air before hammering the blade beneath the surface of the ground. Arcs of lightning ran over the ground like a wave over an ocean, paralyzing the elf long enough for Varric to finish him off with a bolt through the heart.

Glancing around at the others, it was then I realized the small group that had just attacked were now all dead. Walking towards the fallen elf, Cassandra spoke with complete confusion.

“None of the reports said that there were Dalish elves living in this forest.”
I knelt next to the elf that had been trying to get to me and pushed back the hood that had been covering his head, studying his features as I answered Cassandra.

“This is no Dalish, Cassandra.”

Solas knelt next to me and studied the fallen elf as I did. I pointed out the design of his leather armor and then to the sigil that was burned into the chest piece, just over where his heart would be. His stormy eyes came up and held mine as we shared in what we knew.

*This was a sentinel of Mythal. Some have survived.*

There was a shared joy between us as we stood and Cassandra still looked at me confused and waiting for me to explain.

“Yes, they are elven, but they are not following any Dalish traditions. They are following something different. Perhaps they are guarding the ruin.”

Morrigan glanced down at the elf and then gazed into the dense foliage.

“You mean like the sentinels of legend.”

I just shrugged my shoulders at her, unwilling to feed her any information.

“Perhaps. All I know is that if this small group could attack us unseen, then we best be on our guard for others.”

Everyone got my meaning and didn’t put their weapons away as we continued to follow the river north. *Sentinels… then this really is Mythal’s Temple.* I was worried and excited all at the same time. I knew now for a fact that the Temple still stood and would be well guarded by Assan’s former brothers and sisters. Our likelihood of running into more Sentinels as we got closer, multiplied and only Mythal's strongest would be within the Temples walls.

Trying to push down my unease, I glanced around at my curious crew and prayed that everyone who had come with me today, would survive.
“The men are ready for tomorrow, Commander. Though there has been—talk.”

Cullen looked at Rylen with annoyance as he handed off another missive to be delivered to Fenlin and her group.

“Talk?”

Rylen glanced around at soldiers moving through the camp.

“About the Grand Duke and his lack of cooperation with the Inquisition. It is affecting the morale of the men, on both sides. I’ve overheard some of the Chevaliers talk about their disappointment in their General and all our men understand is that you met the Grand Duke’s challenge and won.”

_I don’t have time for this._ Rubbing his face with an annoyance he was trying not to show, he looked at Rylen. One thing he knew for sure and that was if Rylen was concerned, then there was a reason for concern. The former Knight Captain did not listen to rumor if there was no basis for it.

“Where is the Grand Duke now?”

Rylen glanced towards the far back of the camp and gestured with his chin.

“It appears he is still licking his wounds, Commander and keeping his own counsel at the far back of the camp.”

Cullen’s eyes narrowed with the news and clenched his jaw. _Maker’s breath!_ Nodding his head sharply, he turned on his heel to head towards the far back of the camp and felt Rylen’s hand land on his shoulder before he could leave. Stopping, he looked at him and saw the small, teasing smile tilting the corners of his mouth.

“Try not to hand him his ass on a silver platter this time, Commander. I’m sure one humiliation for this month is good enough for him.”

Cullen rubbed his face with annoyance and grunted before leaving his Captain laughing at him. He weaved through the camp completely frustrated with the situation. Gaspard’s men had taken the change in command with honor and grace, however, the Grand Duke was sulking like a petulant child.

The further they pushed into the wilds, the more Venatori and Red Templars they were encountering. This was the second to last camp they would make before the big push to the rendezvous point where he prayed to the Maker, Fenlin and her team would be.

Cullen passed the healing tents as mages smiled at him and waved when he passed. Another change Fenlin had implemented into his military. He had stubbornly fought with her at the beginning about the idea. He still shook his head as his original thoughts slipped into his memories. _Who adds mages into the ranks of his military?_ He snorted. At the time, his thoughts were of former Knight
Commander and his distrust of mages ran deep. At least until they had come to an agreement about the mages. He would try it out and if it didn’t work, she would never interfere with his judgment about the military again. When the mages started blending into his military, filling roles that he had never thought were needed nor would they blend so well, he had been pleasantly proved wrong. Thankfully, Fenlin hadn’t gloated about how well it was working but had just smiled at him and said she was glad it was working out so well.

Even now as he made his way to the back of the area, he passed by one of the few fires and noticed Leliana and Zevran talking with some of the other men around the fire. Another change Fenlin had brought to their fight against Corypheus. If there was one thing he had grown to accept, it was the crazy, yet very methodical approach Fenlin showed towards everything she did. From the small changes she implemented into the Inquisitions military, to her own circle of friends. She had split up her group to guarantee optimal success for both groups. He still thought her crazy when she had told him to take all three rogues with him but again she had proved him wrong.

He had always known that Leliana could get information back and forth between the groups with ease; she was their spymaster after all and a very capable rogue. It had been Zevran and Sera that had surprised him. He found the Antivan philanderer was just as lethal when it came to stealth and rooting out spies as he was bedding women. So far, he had removed three Venatori who had tried to infiltrate their ranks to gather information on their troop movements. As for Sera… besides keeping morale at an all-time high with her hijinks, she was supremely adaptable to any given situation. Many times he had found her aloft in a tree keeping a lookout. She moved with ease through the canopy overhead and conveyed messages with a note and an arrow.

Shaking his head, he couldn’t believe how diverse Fenlin’s team had grown but he was starting to understand now how she was able to accomplish the unthinkable. He respected the fact that she looked at everything from all sides before making a decision. He had witnessed moments when she didn’t like her choices but knew it was the best for the Inquisition. She’d proven that she was willing to sacrifice her personal feelings for the betterment of their cause when she had allowed Madam Vivienne to join them.

Filing his thoughts to review for later, he finally reached Gaspard’s tent and found the noble sitting outside next to a small fire of his own. He glanced around, noticing that some of the Chevalier’s were watching them a bit uncomfortable from a distance and sighed. He’d never wanted to fight with the Grand Duke for the leadership of the men. He had honestly wanted to share the responsibility with the renowned Orlesian General but obviously, the Grand Duke didn’t know how to share. Shaking his head, he made his way to where the Duke sat sharpening his sword.

Gaspard glanced up at Cullen for a moment before returning his focus to sharpening his sword again. Cullen recognized the maneuver for what it was and he wasn’t going to let him ignore him any longer. Their success was riding on the fact that they would have to work together tomorrow seamlessly. For now, he would follow Fenlin's example and swallow his dislike for the noble.

“Do you mind if I sit with you a moment, Your Grace?”

Cullen waited for Gaspard to answer and took his grunt as an invitation and sat down across from him. The silence stretched on for a long while and Cullen grabbed a stick and poked at the fire before finding his words that would break the stalemate between them. Personally, he wanted to throttle the man for all his previous machinations with Fenlin. He still smiled and thought it funny that she had stabbed him with a fork. The noble tit didn't know how fortunate he really was that Fenlin hadn't used her knife. Cullen listened to the rhythmic sounds of the wet stone running over the blade and cleared his throat.
“Tomorrow we will be splitting our forces for a pincer attack. There are some details we should discuss before we split.”

The Duke's blue eyes scowled at him and Cullen felt his frustration grow a few more notches before he could push it back down while holding his gaze steadily. He noticed that Gaspard hadn’t put his Orlesian mask back on since the fight and saw the scar that ran high on his right cheekbone. The dark bruising under his eyes and the bump over the bridge of his nose exposed for all to see where he had headbutted him. Cullen wondered if his mask hurt to wear with his obviously broken nose. Cullen's face did not betray his enjoyment of the idea as he glanced at the General's appearance. The man clearly needed a shave if the three-day growth was any indication and a change of shirts if the stains were any indication. His Captain had been very correct in his observation. The Duke was clearly hiding back here to indulge his pride.

“What details would those be, Commander? Do you have orders for me as well?”

The sarcasm that dripped from the Grand Duke's words didn't escape Cullen and he took another calming breath before he yanked the man up and punched him for his childish behavior.

“We must be on the same page when we part in the morning or we will not only surely fail, but we will both sustain heavy casualties from our combined lack of understanding.”

Gaspard snorted and returned to running the stone down the edge of his blade, ignoring Cullen. Cullen growled, leaning forward, garnering the Grand Dukes attention again.

“For someone, so renown for his military expertise, you have so far only shown me and the men in our charge your pampered noble ass.” Pointing an angry finger at him, Cullen snarled. “You were the one that challenged me, General. It is not my concern if you were ill-prepared to fight me. If you want to salvage your dignity in front of your men, then prove yourself to be more than a coddled little prat and demonstrate to them the reason why they respected you, to begin with.”

Cullen held Gaspard’s glare for a moment before finally giving up and preparing to stand up and leave.

“What would you suggest I do, Commander?”

Cullen heard the frustration in Gaspard’s tone and stopped midway up and slowly sat back down.

“Lead the charge. You are no stranger to war and what it requires, Grand Duke, I would not insult you in thinking otherwise. I came over here because I wanted to inform you that the only change in the pincer attack is that I have implemented mages within the ranks of your men for added firepower and protection for the men.”

Gaspard’s eyebrow shot up and Cullen gave him a half-smile before leaning his elbows on his knees.

“It is one of the tactics that the Inquisitor started when we acquired the help of the mages. At first, I wasn’t to keen on the idea but then I witnessed first hand the military advantages to incorporating mages within the ranks when we laid siege to Adamant.”

Gaspard snorted and put his sword in the scabbard propped against the log he sat on.

“I shall look forward to witnessing how this will benefit my men while in battle. My question is how will we pull off this pincer attack without a third to close it in?”

Cullen nodded his head and picked up another stick before snapping it and throwing it into the fire.
“The Inquisitor and her team will meet up with us and close off the Venatori and Red Templar retreat.”

Gaspard snorted and stared at him, his expression unconvinced that their plan would work.

“She left with a handful of people and you believe they will be enough to hold the position?” Shaking his head at Cullen’s complete faith in the woman, he picked up a stick and snapped it before throwing it in the fire, mimicking Cullen’s actions.

Cullen laughed at Gaspard’s obvious disbelief and leaned forward with a knowing smile on his face because he had witnessed her in battle and she was more than capable of closing off the Venatori and Red Templar retreat with the handful of people she had traveling with her.

“I can understand your disbelief, Grand Duke. You have never had the pleasure of witnessing the Inquisitor in battle but I have. The woman is a beast,” he said with a small smile. He told him this even as a small, apprehensive shiver ran through him when he thought about her animal form before continuing his explanation. “She may be just a mage in your eyes but she is a small force on her own. Matching her with Solas, who also is a mage of no small talent along with Cassandra, makes them almost unstoppable. Putting two mages with a former Seeker that could take down a group of Venatori with one talent she keeps very well hidden… just those three alone could destroy a small army but then you must take into account the others that are in her group.”

Cullen saw that he had Gaspard’s attention and tented his fingers. “Varric Tethras is a very accomplished rogue with a unique weapon unlike any that are made and can shoot faster than the quickest archer with that crossbow of his, not to mention his uncanny ability to blend into his surroundings. Then there is the Champion of Kirkwall and Fenris. Those two are a small force on their own or have you forgotten that Hawke destroyed the Qunari Arishock in single combat and fought through the streets of Kirkwall against the Qunari invasion with only Fenris, Varric, and Aveline, the Guard Captain of Kirkwall.”

Gaspard nodded his head as Cullen continued, finally seeing where he was going with this. He had only ever thought of the Inquisitor as a status worthy of partnering himself with. She was an elf and elves were of little importance to him. He had believed she was only a figurehead for the Inquisition, nothing more. If what her Commander was telling him was true, she was not an empty-headed elf; she commanded thousands and they listened.

“Also, if we round out her small team, she has Lady Morrigan, who traveled with the hero of Ferelden during the fifth Blight, also a mage of many talents in her own right. As you are well aware of since she served the Empress as an arcane liaison to the court.”

Cullen was glad to see that Gaspard’s expression had grown curious with what he was saying halfway through and by the end, was nodding his head. He had hoped that he could reach the military leader in the man and not the noble prick he had come to loathe.

“Perhaps, I have misjudged the Inquisitor and her team. I shall look forward to witnessing for myself her abilities on the battlefield if what you say is true when we rendezvous with them tomorrow.”

Cullen stood up as Gaspard did. Preparing to leave him for the evening, he stopped as Gaspard held his hand out to him.

“I look forward to fighting alongside your forces, Commander.”

Cullen took his offered hand.
“Thank you, General,” he offered before taking his leave.

His burden not as heavy, Cullen walked back through the camp and almost to his tent he stopped abruptly when he saw Felassan standing there waiting for him. *Somethings wrong.* Quickening his steps, he took Felassan’s offered arm in greeting.

“Commander, I come with news from the Inquisitor.”

Cullen sighed and gestured towards the wooden logs he used for seats. He and Felassan sat down and he generally liked any man when he cut to the chase, explaining the situation and Felassan was a man he would like.

“Our team has encountered elven rogues, running in groups of five since arriving at the river’s edge three days ago.”

Cullen looked at Felassan slightly confused for a moment.

“We’ve had no reports of any Dalish elves in this area.”

Felassan nodded his head with the Commander’s comment.

“That would be because they are not Dalish, Commander. The Inquisitor believes they are protecting the ruin that we are heading towards. So far, in our travels towards the temple, our adversaries have grown more cunning in their attacks. The only good news in this is that they are fighting against Corypheus’ forces just as adamantly.”

Cullen held Felassan’s lavender gaze.

“Are you sure they are also engaging Corypheus’ forces and not working with them? We have not encountered any elves thus far, only Red Templars and Venatori.”

Felassan smiled and nodded at him. He could not tell him everything he knew, but he could reassure him that the Sentinel’s were most definitely not working with that blighted creature.

“We have found Venator and Red Templar bodies littering our path occasionally. So yes, Commander. We can safely believe they are also making our enemies travels just as perilous as our own.”

Cullen snorted and rubbed his neck. *Of course… why not. There can be no challenge if it is just one enemy we face.* Felassan’s deep voice broke him from his thoughts and he glanced at him again.

“I am also here to take any news back to her that you may wish she know.”

“I sent a raven just a while ago. But you may inform the Inquisitor that we now have Gaspard’s full cooperation in the assault and that our goal for a united assault has been established.”

Felassan nodded, standing up to leave now that the conversation was over and Cullen stopped him quickly.

“Are you sure you should have come alone, Felassan? The woods are dangerous at this time.”

As he offered him his concerns, he heard a familiar voice from behind him.

“He did not come alone, Commander. I accompanied him to gather a few supplies.”

Cullen turned towards Solas and stood up, taking his offered arm with a small grin, noticing the small
pack he carried.

“What could you have possibly forgotten that she would send you two out into a dangerous forest under the cover of night for?”

Solas chuckled and opened the pack, pulling out a small bag of coffee and honey.

Cullen snorted and shook his head.

“Maker’s breath, you can’t be serious.”

Solas chuckled and put the coffee back in the bag before hanging it over his shoulder.

“It was a united vote that everyone would like the extra energy for tomorrow’s push to our rendezvous. Also, she wished that I ask Leliana to send a raven back to Skyhold to Siri, inquiring about our son and to keep her informed of what was about to take place.”

Cullen and Solas shared an understanding look for a moment before Felassan moved to stand next to Solas, taking the pack from him. Holding his arm out to them, he held their steady gazes as he said his goodbyes to each of them.

“May your Gods and the Maker watch over you. Please inform the Inquisitor to be safe, Rayna would be very unhappy with me if she was to get hurt out here.”

Solas snorted and rested his hand on his shoulder, squeezing it before letting it go.

“Rayna would not be the only one very unhappy should that come to pass but rest assured, Commander. I will not allow her to come to any harm.”

Cullen nodded and watched the two of them head back into the forest before disappearing within the dense foliage in seconds. Turning back towards his tent, he went inside to get an early night for tomorrow it would not be a mere squirmish but an all-out attack on Corypheus’ forces.

Drawing by the fire, I waited for Solas and Felassan to return. I knew they would be okay, but there was always something about letting him out of my sight that didn’t sit right with me. Sighing softly to myself, I gazed up from my notebook when I heard Morrigan slap her book closed and saw that she was gazing at me through the fire with annoyance. Raising my eyebrow at her, I waited for whatever condescending or cutting remark she had in store for me. Sadly, I was growing accustomed to her mercurial moods and knew I wouldn’t have to wait long for her cutting tongue.

“You wait in vain if you think they will return before dawn. Tis easily four hours journey to the Commander’s camp.”

I held her yellow gaze and shrugged. Smiling at her, I refused to stew in her little viper’s nest of negativity. Especially when I knew that Solas was using his wolven form to travel through the thick terrain and that cut the time in half.

“That is one opinion,” I said before looking back at my notebook.
Ignoring Morrigan’s attitude seemed to piss her off even more because she didn’t wait one second before getting snarky with me again.

“Tis the only opinion that is based in reality it would seem.”

Sighing, I closed my book and set it down next to me. Clearly, Morrigan was brewing for a verbal battle and who was I to disappoint her. Folding my hands together in my lap, I gave her my undivided attention.

“Yes, of course, how could I have forgotten that you are the only one to see reason, Lady Morrigan.”

Morrigan’s mouth tightened into an angry slash across her exotic features with my sarcastic comment and I stared at her angrily.

“Who was it that hurt you so deeply that you just can’t stand seeing other people happy? Or is it that you just derive great pleasure from causing other peoples misery?”

Morrigan’s mouth twisted as she sat up straighter.

“I have no idea what you are implying, Inquisitor. Your comments are absurd.”

Her cool expression should have been enough to shut me up and just let it go but her traveling commentary was worse than Sera’s and I was tired of it.

“Of course you have no idea. Just like you have no way of explaining why your son believes his father to be dead because the truth is so much more difficult to admit to, wouldn’t you agree?”

Morrigan suddenly stood up, clenching her hands tightly as she stared at me from across the fire angrily. *Oops, I think I struck a nerve.*

“You know nothing about that and I warn you to be silent on the matter.”

I snorted and held her angry gaze, feeling completely uncaring for her discomfort.

“Believe what you will Morrigan but we both know you used Alistair’s love for Mahariel to get what you wanted, which was an old God’s magic. Knowing that one of them would die when they slew the Archdemon was a wonderful method to finding a means to meet your ends because we both know if it wasn’t for that, Alistair would never have slept with you as it was quite clear he could hardly stand being in the same room with you.”

Morrigan’s fingertips snapped with electricity warningly as her face turned red with anger.

“Why Morrigan, you look absolutely beside yourself with anger and surprise. Cat got your tongue?”

My own condescending tone seemed to make her take a step back as I finally stood up tired of the verbal battle with her.

“Remember this moment, Morrigan, because you are not the only one who can be cruel and belittling with her words. The difference is I choose to not be such a cold bitch.”

Picking up my notebook, I turned to go into my tent to leave Morrigan to her own devices and heard her angry voice from behind me.

“If you ever speak one word about Kiernan's father to anyone…”

I turned towards her with my eyebrow raised and saw her take a step back from me as my aura
flickered around me angrily, pushing the flames of the dancing fire even higher.

“You’ll what? Kill me, Morrigan?”

Morrigan’s mouth was tightly shut as she stared at me not with fear but with an expression of uneasiness. The air around us dropped several degrees as I held her gaze. Finally, shaking my head at her, I waved off her unspoken threat knowing already she wouldn’t follow through with it. Morrigan just didn’t want me to tell anyone her secrets and I calmed my anger with her. She should be grateful that it was a conversation between just the two of us or Solas wouldn’t have hesitated to remove her from existence for the implied threat, even if I tried to tell him that at the end of the day, Morrigan would be Morrigan and she was no threat to me.

“I didn’t think so. Your secrets are your own, Morrigan. I have no need to share them with anyone. But keep this night in mind the next time you want to talk to me as if I am as brainless and insignificant as an ant under your boot because I am not Morrigan, nor will I tolerate your verbal bullying or your bullshit.”

I noticed the relief flash in her gaze even as she continued to watch me warily before I entered my tent. The push for the temple was going to be a pain in the ass if she was going to continue to verbally bait me at every corner. Let’s hope that after tonight’s little communication, Morrigan would be a bit quieter.
I do apologize for the lateness of my update, my internet has been down all day. I hope everyone enjoys this update and thank you again for being such great readers. You guys are awesome!

The push to meet up at the rendezvous was getting a lot harder the closer we got to the temple, but it is what we had expected. Solas, Felassan, and I had prepared for what was to come and none of us enjoyed any of it. They were of our kind and wouldn’t listen to any of us as we tried to reason with them. It was as if the lot of them were deaf and mute… typical men!

The sounds of clashing steel and fighting echoed through the forest as we followed the river when Cassandra held up her hand, halting our progress.

“It sounds like we are getting closer.”

Nodding my agreement with her, Cassandra led with her shield up while I followed behind her. My staff was settled against my back as I chose to carry a couple of blades. I would not be taken by surprise again, that was for sure, I told myself. At first, it surprised Cassandra until I smiled at her and showed her the glowing edge of the steel. In my hands, my magic ran through the weapons just as easily as it did through my staff. If I was honest, I didn’t need anything to channel my magic but I couldn’t see that making anyone very comfortable when most mages required a focus to channel their magic through.

Though she had been skeptical about my skill, that quickly changed when we had gotten attacked again. Assan’s battle techniques overflowed my thoughts as muscle memory took over and I moved as silently as a shadow. When the rogue I had taken down with quick flashes of steel and barely two heartbeats passing, Varric stared at me and whistled. His expression impressed and confused, however, Solas’ expression was full of pleasure and our bond hummed with how proud he was of me.

Only Hawke had come up to me and patted my shoulder with a large smile gracing her beautiful face.

We came around the next corner and found the Red Templars and Venatori fighting against our forces in the river. Beyond their fighting, I could almost make out one of the spires to the temple. Almost there. The Red Templars and Venatori were unaware that we were coming up behind them and smiling at their lack of awareness, I gestured towards everyone to close in.

Glad that they were fighting in the water, I warped the fade and rained down on the enemy forces meteors, bathed in fade fire. The sudden screams from Venatori as they were the first to take the attack caused the Red Templars to finally glance behind them now that their protective barriers were falling as the Venatori mages scattered or tried to protect themselves.

Cassandra and Fenris were leading our charge and those that didn’t run began throwing balls of mage fire and ice to slow them down. Hawke following them closely, throwing out lightning that
raced over the water’s surface and those not in a barrier were instantly electrocuted. Those wearing barriers drew on their magic in desperation as Fenris’ broadsword cut down anyone in his path.

Linking my aura with Solas’, we combined our power, calling on the forest that surrounded the area itself and the ground rumbled beneath the Red Templars before thick vines shot out of the ground, wrapping around our enemies. Morrigan slipped around a tree and with a flick of her wrist, lightning raced along the ground, following the snaking vines that slithered over the surface of the ground to catch those wrapped in vines in her electrical grasp. Regardless of our differences, Morrigan was a skilled mage that demanded respect.

Felassan moved with Hawke, following after Fenris and Cassandra as Red Templars bore down on them, his chest illuminated with a rune and soon after, a magical arcane arsenal flew from the center of his chest, honing in on the group that was bearing down on them. The sound of Cassandra’s loud growl howled in the air as I witnessed they were about to be overrun with Red Templars and Venatori. Casting a fade fist in the direction of a hulking Red Templar rushing towards them, I overheard Cassandra’s warning.

“Barrier yourselves!”

Immediately doing as she said, I watched as she suddenly knelt with a loud shout just as her blade cut through the rocky dirt into the ground. Those that were not encased in protection suddenly froze in place. Glancing around at the group that was surrounding us, Cassandra kneeled and her lips moved as she said something I couldn’t hear but whatever she was doing, it clearly stopped the attacking force like frozen puppets. Cullen ran towards them, yelling at his men to hurry.

“She cannot hold them off for long.”

With a large sweep of his longsword along with his soldiers, he began cutting down the opposing force. Following Cullen’s example, Solas and I began casting and it did not take long before the force was destroyed with everyone’s combined efforts. As the last Venatori fell, Cassandra slumped forward, holding the hilt of her sword, panting for breath and Solas and I ran towards her.

“Seeker?” Solas questioned as he knelt next to her and Cassandra barely lifted her head.

“Water.”

Pulling off my canteen, I uncapped it quickly and noting how shaky her hands were, I held the canteen to her lips as she drank thirstily. Looking at Cullen questioningly, he watched Cassandra drink.

“All Seekers have different abilities, Fenlin. Cassandra’s is that she may use the lyrium in one’s blood against them. Paralyzing them for a time. However, a force this size takes a tremendous toll on the Seeker.”

I recalled that she had talked about her abilities to me a long time ago back in Haven, I had just never witnessed her using them before. When Cassandra had finished drinking, we helped her stand and moved her towards a large rock for her to sit on and catch her breath. Leliana walked up and held out a piece of jerked meat.

“Eat, Cassandra. We have much further to go.”

Cassandra took the offering and started chewing on the dried meat. I saw that her cheeks were reddening as she chewed and I turned towards Cullen, pleased that Cassandra would indeed be okay.

“All sightings of Corypheus?”
Cullen shook his head.

“No, but he can’t be far.”

Taking a drink of my canteen, a large man encased in metal with short dark hair and a scar over his right cheek with a week’s growth of stubble on his face, walked towards us with a few men following behind him. Watching the man curiously having never seen him before but something about him was familiar with the way he moved.

Cullen must have seen my curious look and glanced over his shoulder, giving the man a brief nod.

“General, it is good to see you had no difficulty making it.”

*That is Gaspard?*

Studying the cool blue eyes that glanced over the group, Gaspard laughed.

“By the Maker, Commander, that was some show.” Scratching his head, he looked almost giddy with excitement. “You were not wrong when you told me about having mages within my ranks. They are a tremendous boon to any military force and have cut our casualties considerably.”

Cullen nodded, resting his hand on the hilt of his longsword, looking very pleased with himself. I was still dazed over the fact that Gaspard was not wearing his mask. Gaspard finally looked at me and bowed.

“Inquisitor, I would request your forgiveness for my foolish ideas. I had not believed that you were such a worthy warrior on a battlefield, but to watch you is indeed a sight to behold. Your Commander called you a beast on the battlefield and he was not wrong. You and your group are quite formidable.”

My eyebrow rose as I glanced up at Cullen and saw his cheeky grin.

“A beast… well, I suppose that is a compliment of sorts.” Looking back at Gaspard, I nodded my head at him. “Thank you, Grand Duke. No one wins a ribbon for coming in second place in the race and I am only as good as the men and women around me, supporting me.”

Cassandra slid off the rock and adjusted her shield and I turned towards her.

“If you are ready, Fenlin. I am much better now.”

Nodding at her, not questioning her, I stood up and glanced at Cullen.

“Commander, we will continue towards the ruin. Stay safe.”

Cullen nodded and glanced around at all of us.

“Maker go with you.”

Letting Cassandra and Fenris lead the way, I walked with Solas, Felassan, and Hawke with Morrigan bringing up the rear.

We moved as silently as possible through fallen ruins until pushing through some of the thick
underbrush, we saw the opening to the Temple and a group of Red Templars entering.

“We are here,” Morrigan said from beside me.

I spared her not a glance as I scanned the large archway. The overgrowth hid most of the walls surrounding the opening but Assan’s memories triggered and I suddenly recalled the white of the marble walls and what they looked like in the sunshine. Statues of Mythal, covered in climbing ivy, flanked the sides of the opening. Tapping Cassandra’s shoulder, I gestured towards the opening with my chin. Cassandra nodded her understanding and made her way through the thick foliage with Fenris.

Following behind them, my aura linked with Solas’ as we approached the door and the tingle of magic swirled through the air, tingling my skin. Walking beneath the archway, the little hairs on my arms stood as if we had just crossed a barrier where the fade remained unremoved. The skin on the back of my hand softly glowed and I glanced at the former Inquisitor Ameridan’s staff that Solas carried. The large emerald at the top glowed brightly as the swirl of fade energy moved within.

Something inside of me breathed almost a small sigh of relief as an overwhelming feeling of coming home filled me. Blinking my eyes rapidly as emotions filled me, Solas’ fingers tightened around mine and I glanced up at him. His gentle smile and understanding gaze reassured me that he felt as I did and I squeezed his hand back. It was Assan’s feelings, her memories of what it felt like before that filled me and I now understood why Solas found the current world tranquil—disconnected to its real potential. If this powerful feeling is what a magical person felt every day than it was better than any drug.

“Is it me or does the air itself feel different.”

Cassandra glanced at me uncomfortably and before I could answer her, Morrigan spoke up quietly.

“Tis the magic that keeps this place intact that you feel.”

Barely refraining from rolling my eyes at her, I turned towards Fenris when he quietly growled.

“I don’t care what it is, can we just get a move on, this place makes my skin crawl.”

Hawke patted his arm and I noticed that even Fenris’ lyrium markings were softly glowing against his tan skin. I pointed towards the end of the corridor and adjusted the hold I had on my staff.

“The way into the temple is that way, come on.”

No one questioned me as we walked silently for only a few moments when Varric said quietly from behind me.

“We haven’t seen Corypheus yet. Bet that’s about to change.”

I glanced at him with a small smirk and winked at him.

“I sure hope so, Varric. All this searching for the jerk is getting on my last damn nerve.”

Varric chuckled as we all suddenly heard the sounds of clashing steel ringing in the air and we stopped.

“I hear fighting up ahead,” Cassandra whispered.

We moved quickly down the corridor towards the sunlight. Leaving the long, stone hallway, it
opened out onto a wide balcony where the sounds of fighting increased. Two large statues of Mythal flanked a long bridge and large trees shaded most of the courtyard. Dropping down quickly so as not to be seen, I scanned the courtyard below. Bodies of elven sentinels, Red Templars, and Venatori, littered the grounds. Just beyond the carnage of the courtyard, a wide bridge with twelve sentinels stood facing Corypheus and a small group of men, including Sampson.

Pointing towards the men with Corypheus, I whispered to Cassandra.

“Those look like Grey Wardens.”

Cassandra nodded her head in agreement just as a Sentinel walked forward, not passing the two statues. The old wards are still in place then. The Sentinel wore traditional armor with large shoulder pieces that slightly flared out like a birds wings. A thick, leather over metal chest piece and conforming leg armor that formed over the wearer’s legs like a pair of leggings. The Sentinel’s face was hidden from view by his large hood but the sound of his warning echoed through the courtyard.

“Na melana sur, benallen!”

I watched as Sampson stepped forward with a sneer on his face.

“It appears the wretch mocks you, Master.”

Corypheus waved his hand and the Sentinel flew backward into the middle of the bridge before he was able to scramble back to his feet, looking angry.

“These are but remnants. They will not keep us from the Well of Sorrows.”

Flashes of a large, silver pool deep within the temple, surrounded by lush plants, flowers, and gilded walls rushed through my mind as the memory of Assan watching an elven priest walk into the center of the pool. A soft glow emanated from the tall elf as he cast a spell that allowed the water to absorb all of his memories, wisdom, and knowledge before he would journey to the chambers of never-ending dreams—uthenera.

Glancing over at Morrigan, she appeared confused with what Corypheus had said. She looked at me and I just shrugged my shoulders at her before returning my focus to Corypheus, not wanting to expand her knowledge on Elven history.

As Corypheus approached the bridge, the large Mythal statues began to emit a hum. Glowing with an electrical current warningly, the Sentinels behind the statues glanced at the magical energy knowingly. Corypheus glanced at the statues before stepping towards the group of Sentinels without care.

“Be honored! Witness death at the hands of a new God!”

Watching him step between the two statues, electrical arcs suddenly speared the monster as everyone watched on in horror. The ward stopped him for only a moment before he ripped through it to grab the astonished Sentinel by the head. The electrical arcs continued to pierce through Corypheus, melting the red lyrium in his body even as he lifted the Sentinel, crushing his head.

Before my eyes, the small group of Sentinels stared in horror as Corypheus’ body started glowing eerily from the wards magic that coursed through him. In a spectacular display of blood and carnage, Corypheus’ body suddenly started to bubble just before it exploded, killing the Sentinels on the bridge and his own men while me and my group, ducked behind the corridor walls to escape the flying debris.
“Maker’s breath,” Cassandra softly uttered as we slowly left the cover of the corridor.

Silently walking down the stairs, I stepped over the dead trying to comprehend what I had just seen.

“Well—that is one way to find out you’re not a God.”

Varric snorted as we made our way to the bridge.

Stopping just at the statues as the smoke cleared, I saw at the other end of the bridge Samson and a group of his Red Templars entering the Temple. *Why would they continue if Corypheus is dead?* As I pondered Sampson’s goal a groaning sound came from behind us and I turned around looking for where it came from. Glancing around at the scattered corpses, one in Grey Warden armor started twitching.

The sound of bones rearranging as it crawled to its knees. Its eyes flashed open and stared at me out of blackened, emotionless eyes just before black blood spewed from its mouth as it hunched over and the man’s form began to change and the disjointed music of red lyrium sang in my ears as the figure began taking Corypheus’ form. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing just as Morrigan said what I was thinking.

“It cannot be.”

Shaking my head, Solas grabbed my arm and started dragging me across the bridge towards the temple.

“Across the bridge—now!”

Everyone began to run for the Temple. A loud screeching noise followed us and glancing up, I saw Corypheus’ corrupted dragon heading straight for us. Pushing my legs to move faster, we were almost to the door as the dragon blew fire behind us.

Diving through the doorway, everyone quickly began pushing on the double doors to close it as soon as we were within the chamber. The heat of the dragons fire could be felt through the door as suddenly the door closed with our combined effort and a ward fell in place, sealing the door.

Bending at the waist and trying to catch my breath, Felassan spoke angrily.

“Why won’t that creature just die?”

I shook my head as I stood back up and looked at him.

“I should have remembered that he didn’t die in the explosion at the Conclave, why should this explosion have been any different.”

Glancing around the grand hall we had run into that was overrun with jungle-like growth, Morrigan came to stand by me.

“It appears his life force passes onto any blighted creature, darkspawn or Grey Warden.”

Not thinking her wrong, I nodded my head in agreement.

“At last. Mythal’s sanctum. Let us proceed before Corypheus interferes.”

I stared at her for a moment before continuing my survey of the large room as Cassandra spoke up.

“You said Corypheus wanted an eluvian, but he mentioned a “Well of Sorrows.” Which is right?”
Casandra’s exasperated tone changed Morrigan’s confident expression to one of faked confusion.

“I… am uncertain of what he referred to.”

I narrowed my gaze at her as she scratched her head with convincing innocence. She was clearly hiding something from us but I couldn’t figure out why. *Alright, we can play the ignorance game then.* Sighing softly, I leaned on my staff.

“Perhaps they are the same thing.”

Morrigan’s gaze hardened as she shook her head at my innocent, wide-eyed gaze.

“No. It seems an eluvian is not the prize Corypheus seeks.”

I held her gaze silently as she huffed and crossed her arms at me.

“Yes, I was wrong! Does that please you? Whatever the Well of Sorrows might be, Corypheus seeks it, and thus you must keep it from his grasp.”

Turning away from her, I glanced back down the next corridor.

“Did you not hear me, Inquisitor?”

Morrigan’s tone was caustic. Taking a small breath for patience, I briefly glanced at Morrigan, over my shoulder, not answering her before looking at everyone else.

“Let’s get going guys. Something tells me this fight is only just beginning.”

Chapter End Notes

*Na melana sur, benallen! - Your time here is finished*

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